Course: POLSC317.27 Power & Democracy in the U.S.
Semester: Fall 2015
Instructor: Sanford Schram
Time: Monday and Thursday 1:10 – 2:25 pm
Room: 706HW
Office: 1721HW
Hours: MWTh 11:30 am – 12:30 pm
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Description: Is the U.S a democracy? Was it once and is now no more? Is political power widely distributed or concentrated at the top? Do ordinary people have much opportunity to influence politics and the public policymaking process? Do they get to have much of a say about what the government does and how our society operates? What is the relationship of our capitalistic economic system to our democratic political system? Do they work in tandem or at cross-purposes? What can be done to ensure that democracy thrives in the U.S.? Does it matter? These are perennial questions in the study of U.S. politics that have taken on increased urgency in recent years as commentators have noted that growing economic inequality has affected the distribution of political power and the making of public policy. Readings in this class will provide the basis for class discussion and written work which in both cases will focus on applying theory to issues of power and politics as reported in the mass media and detailed in empirical investigations by social scientists (political scientists in particular).

Required Texts:


Course Requirements:

First Mid-Term Exam 20%
Second Mid-term Exam: 20%
Final Exam: 40%
Overall Class Participation: 20%
Total: 100%

Mid-Term and Final Exams: The exams will ask students to apply ideas from the required texts to address specific issues raised in the articles assigned in the course outline. Class discussions will give students a chance to work on their applications of the required texts to the assigned additional readings. The exams will be take-home. Students will have two weeks to complete each exam after it is assigned. Exams should be typed, doubled-spaced, completed using Microsoft Word and submitted via email.

Overall Class Participation: Your participation grade will be determined in three ways: (1) attendance; (2) discussion of the assigned readings as related to the required books; and (3) reactions to points the instructor and others make in class.

Late Assignments and Make-Up Exams: The following are acceptable reasons for excused absences and late assignments: (1) serious illness; (2) illness or death of family member; (3) school trips; (4) major religious holidays, and (5) other circumstances found by the instructor to be “reasonable cause for nonattendance.” When there is an excused absence, students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work and/or exams. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of the absence, preferably in advance of the missed class. The burden of proof is on the student to provide sufficient documentation regarding the nature of the absence.
Academic Integrity, Cheating and Plagiarism: It is assumed that students in this course will work independently and that all work submitted for a grade is the work of that student. I consider the violation of this policy (including plagiarism) to be a very serious offense and will pursue any offense to the full extent permitted by the university.

Respect: Please do not talk to your neighbor during lectures or when one of the other members of the class is speaking. I realize you might occasionally miss a point in the lecture and might ask your neighbor what was said, and that is fine. But habitual gabbing while others are speaking is inappropriate.

Access:

Should you require use of accommodation or assistance from access services, please see: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/studentservices/access

Course Schedule:

Power and Democracy in the U.S.: Overview
8/27 Review of Syllabus.

Has the U.S. Become a Plutocracy? And If So Why and How?
8/31 “Corruption is Legal in America: A Graphic Presentation.”

The Young Turks, “Proof The US Is An Oligarchy, Not A Democracy.”


9/3 NO CLASS

9/7 NO CLASS

What is Power?

Lukes, Introduction.

9/14 NO CLASS

Levels of Power
9/17 Lukes, Chapter 1.

Two Dimensional View of Power: Decisions vs. Non-Decisions

The Third Level of Power: Power as Ideology

9/28 Lukes, Chapter 2.
Discourse as Power: Power as Faceless
10/1 Lukes, Chapter 3.

10/5 Schram, Chapter 4.
Lukes, Guide to Further Reading.

10/8 FIRST MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED

10/12 NO CLASS

Capitalism and Democracy: Then and Now
10/15 Fraser, Introduction

The Gilded Age: Economic Inequality Undermines Political Equality
10/19 Fraser, Chapters 1-2.

10/22 Fraser, Chapters 3-4.
10/22 FIRST MID-TERM EXAM DUE BY CLASS TIME

Class Conflict: Anti-Capitalism Ascends
10/26 Fraser, Chapters 5-6.

The New Deal as a New Social Compact: Democracy Civilizes Capitalism
10/29 Fraser, Chapter 7.

Back to the Future: The Second Gilded Age
11/2 Fraser, Chapters 8-9.

Consumerism in the Share Economy
11/5 Fraser, Chapters, 10-11.

The Collapse of Class Conflict
11/9 Fraser, Chapters 12-13.

11/9 SECOND MID-TERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED

Neoliberalism as the New Normal
11/12 Schram, Chapter 1.

The Role of Social Movements: Occupy vs. the Tea Party
11/16 Schram, Chapter 2.

Mobilizing the Precariat
11/19 Schram, Chapter 3.

Neoliberalism as Marketizing the State: The Effects on Public Policymaking and Implementation
11/23 Schram, Chapters 5-6.

11/23 SECOND MID-TERM DUE AT CLASS TIME

11/26 NO CLASS

Capitalism Now Trumps Democracy: Financializing the Welfare State
11/30 Schram, Chapter 7.

Is Change Possible? What is Radical Incrementalism?
12/3  Schram, Chapter 8.

**Power From Below: A Necessary Antidote**

12/7  Fraser, Chapter 14.

12/7  Final Exam Assigned

**Conclusion**

12/10  Class Discussion

12/21  Final Due No Later than 4 pm