

The Nature of Politics

POL 101
Fall 2020

Prof. Elena Gambino

T/F 9:15-10:35am

Teaching Assistants:

Haley Norris

Phillip Olson

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Virtual Office Hours: Tuesdays 11am-noon

Fridays 11am-noon

TA Office Hours: One TA will be available during each of our designated class sessions to assist you with any questions you may have about the logistics of assignments, etc.

Course Description

“The Nature of Politics” is a foundational course for political science majors as well as those interested in the study of politics more generally. It introduces students to fundamental issues in political theory as it has developed from ancient Greece to the present day; in other words, we’ll encounter questions that are both historical and conceptual. We will ask, for example, how concepts like “the market” or “the social contract” come to connote political freedoms in contemporary politics, whether and to what extent “politics” is separate from other social realms such as the family or the economy, and why so many contemporary social movements see anti-racism as a key political goal in the twenty-first century.

Because this is a course in political theory, we will be dealing primarily with *texts* – that is, *arguments* made by political writers that advocate for particular interpretations of political life – rather than objective facts, political strategies for winning elections or amplifying power, or even popular opinions. What this means is that each of the readings for this course is subject to interpretation, contestation, and criticism. Some of the readings we will encounter this semester will seem to contradict or challenge other readings, and other will challenge you to reconsider some of the basic assumptions about politics that you may already hold. You need not agree with all of the texts we read in order to succeed in this class. In fact, part of the goal of this course is to give you the tools to form your own evaluations of the major claims of these texts – and, of course, to make political arguments of your own!

At the same time, this course is not designed to suggest that *every* argument about politics is equally valid. In fact, you might imagine that this syllabus is its *own* kind of argument, one that I encourage you to engage in good faith. We will proceed from a few baseline commitments that will shape our evaluations of these texts over the course of the semester. These commitments include the idea that justice and equality have an important role to play in political life, that past injustices such as racism and other forms of structural inequality require acknowledgment and redress in the present, that political life can and should promote the well-being of those who are subjected to it, that institutions that benefit only a few require collective reconsideration, even when we don’t agree on the ultimate solution.

Learning Objectives

- Students will grapple with the fundamental questions of political theory – what is legitimate power? Who gets to be free? What recourse to political subjects have to remedy injustice? – through a mixture of informal and formal writing.
- Students will encounter how ideas about politics developed in the Western canon, as well as how ideas about race and racism challenge many of political theory’s core notions about freedom.
- Over the course of the semester, students will produce weekly response posts, five “elements of a paper” assignments, and one analytic paper on core themes of political theory. They will also share their work with their peers by creating a shared “poster” on *The New York Times’* 1619 Project.
- Students will come away with a better understanding of how different conceptions of politics and its aims have shaped many of the most important political debates – for example, debates over economics and race – of our time.

Course Readings and Materials

All course readings will be available on Canvas in PDF format. You are responsible for reading each week’s assigned readings on your own time – be sure to budget enough time to complete them before the start of class time on the assigned day! However, I would strongly advise you against reading too far ahead; this will only end up muddling the different themes, questions, and arguments of the texts.

Online lectures and related materials (PowerPoints, blog posts, etc.) will be made available at least 24 hours before the start of class time; in other words, they will be posted no later than 9am on Mondays and Thursdays. You will find links to the online lectures on Canvas, along with any associated materials such as PowerPoints and blog posts.

Assignments

Weekly Response Posts (20% of Total Grade, each response is worth ~1.6% of your total grade):

Blog posts are due by the START of designated class time (9:15am) on Fridays, and should respond to the “Informal Writing Prompt” for the week. You’ll find the Informal Writing Prompt at the top of the week’s Canvas forum, and you can post your responses directly below as forum posts.

Posts should be *a substantive paragraph, about 300-500 words*. The writing can be informal – you can ask questions, state personal opinions that are connected to the themes of the course, work through difficult problems that you don’t exactly know how to answer yet, etc. However, you should aim to have a coherent paragraph such that your reader knows what themes, concepts, and questions are interesting to you, *what* is interesting about them, and have some idea of how you would go about responding to or working through those questions.

You are expected to submit 12 response posts over the course of the semester to receive full credit for this assignments. This means you have two freebie weeks that you can skip with no questions asked; after that, you'll lose 2 percentage points from your grade for each response post that you miss. Your final grades for the weekly response posts will be based on 1) the total number of posts submitted over the course of the semester, and 2) the cumulative average of all graded blog posts over the course of the semester.

Each week you will receive a grade of Exceptional, Satisfactory, or Not Satisfactory on your response post. You will get substantive, written feedback on ONE week's response post from one of the TAs – we will randomize the class list so that a portion of the class (15 to 20 students) receives written feedback each week to provide more context for how your posts are being graded.

Each blog post will be graded according to the following rubric:

	Exceptional (2 pts)	Satisfactory (1.5 pts)	Not Satisfactory (1 pt)
Engagement with readings	- Poses questions about the week's readings that connect themes and concepts <i>across</i> modules. - Makes a clear, coherent	- Poses questions about the week's readings that connect to lectures, course materials for the assigned module.	- Does not engage meaningfully in the readings or course materials, raises only factual questions rather than interpretive ones, reads more like a stream of consciousness response than a considered question.
Use of Evidence	- Post includes <u>at least two</u> citations from the text and uses them to raise substantive, interpretive questions or connects these quotes to previous modules.	- Post includes <u>at least two</u> citations from the text, but may not clearly show how and why those quotes are important for the student's viewpoint, does not connect them to lectures or previous modules.	- Post includes <u>fewer than two</u> citations from the text. Alternatively, the post's engagement in the text suggests interpretive errors and/or does not connect them to the student's viewpoint in any meaningful way.
Voice and Style	- Student's own voice comes through in a carefully considered <i>argument</i> about the	- States a clear opinion about the text but struggles to connect that opinion	- Does not state an opinion or pose a strong question.

	text using evidence and interpretation. This argument could be used to pose a thoughtful question rather than state an opinion.	to textual evidence, lectures, or other course materials.	
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Modular “Elements of a Paper” Assignments (35% of total grade, i.e. each of these assignments is worth 7% of your total grade)

This class will be divided into five modules (roughly 2-3 weeks each). At the end of each module you will submit an “Elements of a Paper” assignment, designed to help you think through the process of writing a longer analytic paper over the course of the semester. Each of these assignments will have a more detailed instructions page and grading rubric posted in the corresponding module’s “Resources” page.

Module 1- “Three Claims:” In this assignment, you will pick one of the authors from Module 1 (Plato, Rousseau, Tocqueville) and identify three main claims that the author makes about “the nature of politics.” You may choose to delineate these three claims in a bullet-point list or in three short paragraphs, but whatever format you choose you should aim to show how each of the three claims about the nature of politics supports the author’s overall argument. Your “Three Claims” modular assignment should be about 500-600 words in length, and should cite the text using either direct quotes or paraphrases to show how and where the author makes each of their “main claims.”

Module 2 - Concept Paragraphs: Concepts are the most basic building blocks of political theory. The authors we will read build their arguments by exploring, interpreting, and debating the meanings of key concepts such as “property,” “knowledge/education,” “institutions,” and “citizenship.” In this assignment, your task is to choose ONE concept from the course readings for Module 2 and write a paragraph explaining how and why that concept is important for the author’s main claims. For example, you might choose to evaluate how the concept of “the market” helps Milton Friedman make the case that individuals are better equipped to make decisions than are states or governments.

In the paragraph, which should be about 300-400 words, I expect you to 1) Explain the importance of that concept for the author’s overall argument; and 2) Describe how the author(s) understand and/or evaluate that concept in our assigned readings.

Module 3 – Evidence: In this module, we will focus on the kinds of evidence that authors use to justify, support, and legitimize their claims. In this modular assignment, then, you will be asked to choose a reading from Module 3 and explore the kinds of evidence they use to make their case. How does the evidence used by authors in this module differ from the kinds of evidence used by Plato, Rousseau, and Tocqueville? What kinds of evidence are most persuasive and why? You may choose, for example, to think about how

historical evidence in Roediger or personal evidence in Harris is different from, more or less persuasive than, or otherwise distinct from the use of abstract knowledge in Plato.

This assignment may be submitted in the form of a bullet-pointed list, where each piece of evidence has an accompanying short paragraph of 75-100 words, or a more synthetic paragraph where you reflect on the uses of different types of evidence across texts. The assignment should be about 500-700 words.

Module 4 - My Three Claims: Similar to the “three claims” assignment from Module 1, this modular assignment asks you to make a list (bullet-pointed is fine) of the three major claims YOU want to make about your chosen reading from the module. You should include one of each of the following types of claims:

- ***Normative:*** A “normative” claim is one rooted in your own values, judgments, or ethics, and makes a case about how politics SHOULD be. All political texts have normative claims, even when they claim to be objective; however, good writing always makes its normative claims explicit. Therefore, one of your claims should make your own normative commitments explicit to your reader by directly stating the values or judgments that will inform your larger argument. Your normative claim should look something like this: “A just society must be premised on some form of equality; however, ‘formal,’ or legal, equality is often not enough to ensure that this requirement is met.”
- ***Interpretive:*** This claim should be rooted in the text, and should include a relevant citation. Here, your claim should help to make sense of one of the *author’s* arguments. For example, you may cite a passage in Malcolm X and make the following interpretive claim: “What X means in this passage is that white liberals make promises to Black citizens that are never intended to change the status quo. Thus, even though institutional changes like the Civil Rights Act promote formal equality, they have not helped to achieve material equality.”
- ***Argumentative:*** This kind of claim is NOT meant to be a mere statement of opinion, and it does NOT need to be a “winning” argument in the sense that it shuts down conversation. Rather, it is intended to help you establish your own voice as an author. Argumentative claims, like thesis statements, are claims that draw on your own commitments and interpretations to advance a viewpoint that you might use to try to persuade a skeptical interlocutor to see things your way. A good argumentative claim might look something like this: “Although Malcolm X and MLK are often seen as putting forth opposite views, their arguments are very similar in the sense that they critique superficial, formal equality and try to incite people to fight for more substantial changes.”

Module 5 - Thesis Statement: This modular assignment asks you to bring together all the elements of the paper by summarizing your argument in a thesis statement. Unlike most paper assignments where the thesis statement is the *first* thing you try to write, we are saving the thesis statement for the final module because it should **bring together all of**

the preparatory work you've done in previous assignments; in other words, it should be the *result* of your thinking through the author's main claims, conceptual framework, and evidence, as well as the work you've done to develop your own three claims.

Since this is our last module, you are encouraged to write your thesis statement with the final paper in mind – in other words, please use this module as an opportunity to sketch out the major elements of your paper and to develop your thesis statement in advance!

Your thesis statement does not need to be long, though it can certainly be more than a single sentence. It should tell your reader what concept you will use to explore the prompt, articulate how your chosen author(s) uses that concept, and directly state your three claims about the prompt.

Final “1619 Project” Paper (35% of your final grade)

This assignment will ask you to put ONE of our course readings into conversation with *The New York Times*' 1619 Project. Midway through the semester, we will ask you to choose an episode of the 1619 Podcast or an essay in the 1619 Magazine for the project, and you will submit your choice and preliminary reflections on the piece as one of your Weekly Response posts. Your final paper will then ask you to use that article or episode to critique, challenge, extend, or otherwise engage the arguments in our readings.

The relationship you explore between the 1619 Project and our course texts is up to you. For example, you may use your article/episode as an example of Mills' notion of “the racial contract.” But you may also use your article/episode to put Locke's notion of the “broken social contract” in conversation with contemporary protest movements, or to further explore the idea of whether and to what extent “market freedom” can address social or political inequalities.

This paper is the only “traditional” argumentative paper assigned for the class. However, you should aim to use the “elements of a paper” assignments to help you build it from the ground up over the course of the semester; in fact, you are welcome and encouraged to use one or more of your previous written assignments as a foundation of your 1619 Project paper.

Thesis Statement Peer Review (2% of your final grade):

At the end of Module 5, we will ask you to circulate your thesis statements to a small group of your peers so that you can respond to one another's arguments. Students will get credit for participating in peer review, but we will not be “grading” your responses. However, this is one of the best and most direct ways for you to receive substantive, written feedback before your final paper, so we encourage you to engage with this assignment. Plus, this 2% of your grade could be the difference between a B+ and an A-!

Participation and Improvement (8% of your final grade)

This class will ask you to engage in texts, ideas, and arguments that can feel unfamiliar and challenging for a variety of reasons. Especially in an online format, where we will not have the benefit of conversing face to face, these readings can feel alienating, confusing, or even destabilizing. Therefore, 10% of your grade will reflect your willingness to persist and engage in the course material. There are several ways to earn credit for this portion of your grade: you may choose to take advantage of my or the TAs' office hours to ask us questions about the readings or the assignments, you may post questions to the forum that bring together the course materials in engaging and unique ways, you may choose to form a "study pod" with fellow students in the course, and so on. There is no limit to what these kinds of engagements can look like, but they will all be rewarded in your final grade.

Similarly, we do not expect most students to come to college already knowing how to engage in, argue about, or even make sense of political theory. Therefore, this course will also reward students who show a marked improvement over the course of the semester; if you consistently engage with the material and your informal and formal writing reflects that work, you can expect your final grade to be higher than the "true" average of your graded work.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1

9/1 – Who Gets to be Free?

Read: Ursula LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Watch: Introductory Lecture

Assignments: None

9/4 - Is there a Just Power, or is there "Just" Power?

Read: Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue"

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

MODULE 1: POWER AND POLITICS IN THE WESTERN CANON

Week 2

9/8 – No class, Labor Day Schedule change

9/11 – "How Can Your Persuade Us If We Won't Listen?"

Read: Plato, *Republic*, Book I

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: None

Week 3

9/15 – Knowledge, Experts, and Power

Read: Plato, *Republic*, Book IV

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

9/18 - Is “Freedom” Good?

Read: Plato, *Republic*, Book VIII

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 4

9/22 – Thieves: Property and Protection

Read: Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, selections.

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

9/25 – Revolution and the Broken Social Contract

Read: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, selections

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 5

9/29 - Freedom as Participation: Liberal Institutions

Read: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Author’s Introduction – Book 1 Chapter 5

Book 1 Chapter 10 – Book 1 Chapter 15

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

10/2 - Who Participates in Freedom?

Read: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Book 2 Chapter 26 – Book 2 Chapter 29

Book 3 Chapter 35 – Book 3 Chapter 42

Book 3 Chapter 48

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Weekly Response Post AND “Three Claims” Module 1 Assignment

MODULE 2

Week 6

10/6 - Who Deserves Freedom?

Read: John Locke, “An Essay on the Poor Law”

Milton Friedman, “Introduction,” “Chapter 1,” and “Chapter 2” in *Capitalism and Freedom*.

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

10/9 - Perils of Market Freedom

Read: Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Listen: *More Perfect* Podcast, “One Nation Under Money” – listen here (transcript available)
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/radiolab-presents-more-perfect-one-nation-under-money>

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 7

10/13 – Beyond Market Freedom: “Five Faces of Oppression”

Read: Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Chapter 2 “Five Faces of Oppression”

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

10/16 – Beyond Market Freedom: Protests and Riots

Read: Frances Fox Piven, “Low Income People and the Political Process”

“Minneapolis Uprising in Context” - <http://bostonreview.net/race/elizabeth-hinton-minneapolis-uprising-context>

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Weekly Response Post AND Module 2 “Elements of a Paper” Assignment – Concept Paragraph

MODULE 3

Week 8

10/20 - The Freedoms of Whiteness

Read: David Roediger, “The Prehistory of the White Worker: Settler Colonialism, Race and Republicanism before 1800,” in *Wages of Whiteness*

Listen: *On Being* Podcast, “The Deep Stories of Our Time,” – listen here (transcript available)
<https://onbeing.org/programs/arlie-hochschild-the-deep-stories-of-our-time-oct2018/>

Assignments: None

10/23 - The Freedoms of Whiteness, cont.

Read: Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *The Harvard Law Review*

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 9

10/27 - The Racial Contract

Read: Charles Mills, “Chapter 1: The Racial Contract,” in *The Racial Contract*.

Listen: *Social Distance* Podcast, “The Racial Contract” – listen here (transcript available)
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/the-racial-contract/611614/>

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

10/30 – The Racial Contract, cont.

Read: Charles Mills, “Chapter 2: Details,” in *The Racial Contract*.

Watch: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* reading: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cnq71TIUvo>

Watch: Online Lecture
Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 10

11/3 (Election Day) The Racial Contract, cont.

Read: Charles Mills, “Chapter 3: ‘Naturalized’ Merits,” in *The Racial Contract*.

Listen: *Code Switch* Podcast, “Why Now, White People?” Listen here (transcript available) –
<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/16/878963732/why-now-white-people>

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Module 3 “Elements of a Paper” Assignment due – EVIDENCE assignment.

MODULE 4

11/6 - Freedom as Abolition

Read: David Walker, “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World”

William Lloyd Garrison, “Editorial Regarding Walker’s Appeal”

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 11

11/10 – “The Three Dawns of Freedom”

Read: W.E.B. DuBois, “Forethought,” “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” and “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

11/13 – Racial Myths and Truth-Telling

Read: Ida B. Wells, ‘Lynch Law in All its Phases’

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: Weekly Response Post

Week 12

11/17 - Freedom as Civil Rights?

Read: Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Malcom X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

11/20 - Black Feminism and Intersectional Freedom

Read: Combahee River Collective Statement

Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider*.

bell hooks, “Marginality as a Site of Resistance.”

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post AND Module 4 “Elements of a Paper” MY THREE CLAIMS assignment due.

MODULE 5

Week 13

11/24 - Citizenship and Sovereignty: Indigenous Perspectives, cont.

Read: Vine Deloria, Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins*

Selections: Preface

Chapter 1: "Indians Today, The Real and the Unreal"

Chapter 8: "The Red and the Black"

Explore: NoDAPL Archives: <https://www.nodaplarchive.com/>

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

11/27 – No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

12/1 – Freedom as Self-Determination

Read: Shiri Pasternak, "Jurisdiction from the Ground Up: A Legal Order of Care" and "Property as a Technique of Jurisdiction: Traplines and Tenure," in *Grounded Authority: The Algonquins of Barrière Lake Against the State*.

Watch: Online Lecture

Assignments: None

12/4 - Freedom as Self-Determination, cont.

Read: Vine Deloria, Jr. "The Redefinition of Indian Affairs," in *Custer Died for Your Sins*.

Nick Estes, "Prologue," "Siege," and "Red Power" *Our History is the Future*.

Watch: TA Book Club Discussion

Assignments: Weekly Response Post and Module 5 "Elements of a Paper" Assignment due – Send your THESIS STATEMENT to your group for peer review.

Week 15

12/8 – Final Day of Class

No readings or lecture

Assignments: Thesis statement peer review comments DUE to your groupmates.

12/15

Final 1619 Paper and Poster Template Due

Instructions: Submit your full paper on Canvas for grading AND post your poster template to the forum in Canvas.