

## **POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY SEMINAR: THE RISE AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN RIGHT**

### **Overview**

“The American conservative movement,” write sociologists Neil Gross, Thomas Medvetz, and Rupert Russell, “that began to gain steam in the post-World War II era had, by the 1980s, emerged as a transformative political force in the United States and the world.” Taking a historical, interdisciplinary, and theoretically oriented approach, this seminar examines competing explanations and changing interpretations of the rise of the right in US politics after the Second World War. The seminar focuses on four main questions:

- 1) What is American conservatism? What are its central concerns, elements, or themes? To what extent, in what ways, and why has it changed over time?
- 2) What explains the rise of the right to power in US politics? We will consider different kinds of explanations, including economic causes; cultural factors, including status, race, and gender; the role of institutions that have nurtured and promoted conservative ideas, including right-wing think tanks, legal foundations, and news media; and the role of what Gross, Medvetz, and Russell call “energetic and motivated actors who exercise creativity in envisioning an alternative social world and fashioning the political means to achieve it.” Closely connected to the question of causes are the *timing* of the right’s rise to power and the *social carriers* of conservative ideas.
- 3) Does Trumpism represent a historic break—which is to say, a novel development and significant transformation of the American right—or is it in essential respects continuous with the past history of the conservative movement?
- 4) What are the broader implications of the rise of the right for American political development? As historian Kim Phillips-Fein puts it, “Does recognizing the importance of conservatism throughout the twentieth century make us see the arc of American history in a new way?”

### **Course Requirements**

1. **Regular assigned readings.** You are expected to complete all required reading assignments before the seminar meeting in which we discuss them. If you are unable to read the entire assignment carefully, at least try to skim through it to get a sense of the main points.
2. **Attendance and active participation:** Please be prepared at class time to discuss all of the required readings for that week. You are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and be prepared to participate in an active, thoughtful, and informed way in class discussions. You are encouraged to raise questions during discussions, which counts as participation. To help foster a more coherent conversation, please try whenever possible to relate your contribution to previous remarks rather than offering something entirely disconnected.
3. **Class presentations.** Each student is required to make two seminar presentation on the required reading for two different weeks. Each presentation should be about 10 to 15 minutes and follow a brief (one-page) outline that you share with class members by Sunday preceding the class meeting. The purpose of the presentation is *not* to provide a summary of the reading—you should assume that everyone has carefully read the material in advance—but to open the discussion by (a) relating the assigned readings to each other and to texts we have previously discussed, e.g., by noting similarities and differences in the positions of different authors; (b) identifying what you see as the key issues raised by the assigned readings; and (c) raising questions/lines of discussion. Among the types of questions you may raise are *exploratory* questions that probe evidence; *challenge* questions that examine assumptions and conclusions; *relational* questions that ask for comparisons of themes, ideas, or issues; *interpretive* questions that probe motives or meanings of

social action; *cause-and-effect* questions that ask about causal relationships among ideas, actions, and events; *counterfactual* questions that pose a hypothetical change in the facts; *priority* questions that seek to identify the most important issue; and *summary* questions that elicit syntheses. The presenter for each week will help the instructor to facilitate the class discussion that follows. Students are allowed to “double up” on presentations only after all sessions are filled with at least one presenter. NB: The presenter for week 2 does not need to provide the discussion memo in advance; it’s an incentive!

4. A 1-2 page **prospectus** for a term paper is due no later than **November 24**. The paper should take on a particular issue, question, or controversy covered during the semester. It should build on the assigned readings and discussion while moving beyond what was covered in class, either by addressing the issue in more depth, broadening the focus to related concerns, or examining the implications of the issue for your own research project or agenda. The prospectus should indicate the question your paper will address, the thesis of your paper (your answer to the question), the sources of textual evidence you will likely use, and how you plan to organize your paper.
5. A **term paper** of approximately 20-25 pages, following the plan of an approved prospectus, is due no later than **December 15**. The *American Journal of Sociology* instructions for authors note that “many referees balk at reading papers larger than 10,000 words.” I will, too. Your paper should therefore not exceed 10,000 words maximum, including references and endnotes.

All written work must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and submitted online through Canvas.

Each student’s overall grade for the semester will be determined as follows:

- Attendance: 10% (to paraphrase Woody Allen, 10% of success is just showing up)
- Participation: 20%
- Presentation: 20% (10% for each presentation)
- Prospectus: 15%
- Written seminar paper: 35%

A = 93-100, AB = 88-92, B = 83-87, BC = 78-82, C = 70-77, D = 60-69, F = 59 or below.

## Reading Assignments

Three books are required for the course: Himmelstein, *To the Right*; Hacker and Pierson, *Let Them Eat Tweets*; and Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*. All other required reading is available through Canvas. If you experience any problems with the readings, please inform me as soon as possible.

## Week 2 | September 8 | Introduction and overview

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Julian E. Zelizer, “Rethinking the History of American Conservatism,” *Reviews in American History* 38, No. 2 (June 2010), pp. 367-92.

Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (Dec. 2011): 723-43.

Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1-27.

Kathleen M. Blee and Kimberly A. Creasap, “Conservative and Right-Wing Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 269-86.

Neil Gross, Thomas Medvetz, and Rupert Russell, “The Contemporary American Conservative Movement,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (2011) 37: 325–54.

Sociology 924-001  
Fall 2020  
Tu 11:00 AM - 1:30 PM (online)

Professor Chad Alan Goldberg  
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Office hours: Tuesdays online by appt.

Andrew J. Perrin, J. Micah Roos, Gordon W. Gauchat, "From Coalition to Constraint: Modes of Thought in Contemporary American Conservatism," *Sociological Forum* 29, No. 2 (June 2014): 285-300.  
Ben Merriman, "Establishing the Conservative Phenomenon," *Sociological Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2019): 354-70.

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### **Week 3 | September 15 | The growth of a movement**

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Himmelstein, *To the Right*, 28-94.

Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1-7, 221-66.

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### **Week 4 | September 22 | Electoral coalitions and realignment**

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Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1969] 2014), 2-22.

Himmelstein, "The New Republican Edge," in *To the Right*, 165-81.

Dov Grohsgal and Kevin M. Kruse, "[How the Republican Majority Emerged](#)," *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2019.

Michael W. Hughey, "The New Conservatism: Political Ideology and Class Structure in America," *Social Research* 49, No. 3 (Autumn 1982): 791-829.

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### **Week 5 | September 29 | Economic change and capitalist mobilization**

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Himmelstein, "The Mobilization of Corporate Conservatism," in *To the Right*, 129-64.

Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Let Them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020), 1-75.

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### **Week 6 | October 6 | Economic change and capitalist mobilization (cont'd)**

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Hacker and Pierson, *Let Them Eat Tweets*, 77-214.

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### **Week 7 | October 13 | Race and conservatism**

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Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), entire.

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### **Week 8 | October 20 | Status and conservatism**

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Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed," in *The Radical Right*, ed. Daniel Bell (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 1-38.

Richard Hofstadter, "[The Paranoid Style in American Politics](#)," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1964), pp. 77-86.

Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1963] 1986), 1-24.  
Recommended: 166-88.

Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: New Press, 2016), 3-23, 135-51.

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### **Week 9 | October 27 | Class and culture in Kansas**

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Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 1-10, 113-37, 179-214, 237-51.  
Larry M. Bartels, "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter with Kansas?*" *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 2 (2006): 201-26.  
Thomas Frank, "[How Conservative Are Some Democrats?](#)" *New York Review of Books*, May 14, 2009.

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### **Week 10 | November 3 | Religion and conservatism**

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#### **Today is Election Day. Don't forget to vote!**

Himmelstein, "The Rise of the New Religious Right," in *To the Right*, 97-128.  
Andrew M. Greeley and Michael Hout, *The Truth about Conservative Christians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 39-68.  
Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 15-20, 176-208.

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### **Week 11 | November 10 | Gender and conservatism**

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Leslie McCall and Ann Shola Orloff, "The Multidimensional Politics of Inequality," *British Journal of Sociology* 68, S1 (2017): S34-S56.  
Myra Marx Ferree, "The Crisis of Masculinity for Gendered Democracies: Before, During and After Trump," *Sociological Forum* (May 2020): 1-20.

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### **Week 12 | November 17 | The role of institutions: think tanks, law, media**

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Jason M. Stahl, *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 1-6, 47-95, 198-201.  
Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1-21, 265-81.  
Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers Of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), ix-xvi, 252-76.

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### **Week 13 | November 24 | Wisconsin: A case study**

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#### **Prospectus for term paper due**

Katherine J. Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1-25, 45-89, 164-67. Recommended: 184-206.  
Lewis A. Friedland, "Laboratory of Oligarchy," in *Education for Democracy: Renewing the Wisconsin Idea*, ed. Chad Alan Goldberg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 225-54.  
Chad Alan Goldberg, "The New Class, the Field of Social Classes, and Contemporary Populism," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (online), August 2020.

**\*\*\* Thanksgiving recess November 26–29, 2020 \*\*\***

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### **Week 14 | December 1 | The Tea Party and the alt-right**

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Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 1 (Mar. 2011): 25-43.  
Theda Skocpol, "[Why the Tea Party Isn't Going Anywhere](#)," *The Atlantic*, December 26, 2013.  
George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 1-9, 91-114.  
Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018), 3-10, 33-84.

### **Week 15 | December 8 | Trumpism**

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Peter Kivisto, *The Trump Phenomenon* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2017), 49-51.  
Nancy Fraser, "[From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump—and Beyond](#)," *American Affairs* 1, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 46-64.  
Dylan Riley, "What is Trump?" *New Left Review* 114 (November-December 2018): 5-31.  
Wendy Brown, *In The Ruins of Neoliberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 161-88.