

Disunited America! Political Science 549
Topics in Public Policy
Emeritus Professor Andrew McFarland
Spring 2017

Disunited America! brings to bear theoretical work and some autobiography to help understand the Donald Trump election and conservative neopopulism in today's American politics.

Economic Stagnation and the "American Dream."

The concern is that the American economy is no longer growing at the rate of 4 percent Gross Domestic Product per year as in 1945-1970, with fits and starts during the Reagan and Clinton years, but is now stagnated to about 2 percent increase GDP per year. Furthermore, since 2000 median real family income decreased during the Great Recession and only during the second Obama term has it nearly reached the 2000 level. In addition, we know that wealth has become increasingly concentrated since 1980, as capital gets 4 percent interest and wages do not increase significantly. This situation is illuminated by the famous *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty, a work based on the recent assimilation of historical economic statistics by about 30 economists in Europe and the U.S., assembling statistical data by machine methods, a technology unavailable to those tied to IBM punch cards. This is the best data we have about historical trends in wealth and income in the U.S. and Western Europe, and without complicated causal analysis, it implies that the U.S. economy is enduring a generation of unsatisfying, incremental growth, whose spare fruits are picked by the already wealthy. Piketty expects widespread political dissatisfaction due to economic stagnation and maldistribution of income and wealth.

Economist Robert Gordon puts forth a different perspective on American stagnation; to Gordon sheer individual wealth is a background factor, while individual experiences in a rising standard of living is a more important factor in understanding the quality of life (*The Rise and Fall of American Growth*). Positive life experiences resulting from the effects of inventions such as electricity, automobiles, piping water into homes, mass air travel, air conditioning, using the internet, are to some extent shared by both the rich and the middle class. Gordon argues that the benefits of invention have been widely shared in America, but after 1970 the introduction of life-changing new technology has slowed down, excepting the internet. He arrives at

pessimistic conclusions, similar to Piketty, about major enhancements of life style among median income persons. Unfortunately Gordon's book is long and there is not time to read it in this class, although the instructor will present material from Gordon.

January 11: introduction, introductory remarks

January 18: Piketty, 1-109; parallel noneconomic references

January 25: Piketty, 140-270

February 1 Piketty, 271-376; start reading *Civic Ideals*

The instructor will at the end of these classes, depart from economic abstraction to discuss specific events and policies, the economy under Trump, etc.

Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History: by Rogers M. Smith.

The graduate student may read this book to experience a type of scholarship, known as American Political Development, which combines the analysis of history with social science concepts to study change in the American political system. Rogers M. Smith and Stephen Skowronek may be regarded as the leading scholars in the APD area. This volume looks formidable, but 30 percent consists of footnotes and indices, and I do not assign all of the rest.

Smith presents American political history in terms of the interaction of three civic ideals: liberalism-individualism, civic republicanism (Founding Fathers classical education), and ascriptive politics (identity politics and status, ascribed by society). Smith's main goal is to demonstrate the role of ascriptive politics in America, 1750-1916. Ascriptive politics is linked to generations of court cases regarding citizenship (slavery, immigration, women, etc.). Methodologists may be impressed by the predictive value of *Civic Ideals*, as for generations it has been two steps forward, then one (or even two) steps back. This prediction clearly applies to civil rights and citizenship politics in 2016. Smith applies his discussions of ascriptive politics to the native white legal doctrines of citizenship towards African-Americans, women, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. Ending in 1916, he does not fully address Latino, gay, or disability issues, although Smith does reference Latino issues 1848-1916.

Dean Stanley Fish stated *Civic Ideals* was his favorite book in political science. Professor Filindra has referred to Rogers Smith as an important theorist for American immigration studies.

It is hard to disentangle ascriptive (i.e. white nationalist) motives from economic insecurity motives in support for Donald Trump and some conservative Republicans.

February 8: Civic Ideals, 1-16

February 15, Civic Ideals, 165-242; 347-506

February 22, Civic Ideals, catch-up reading

February 15: Four page paper prospectus is due

Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis, by J.D. Vance.

Vance grew up in the Appalachian section of Middletown, a small city in Southwestern, Ohio, abandoned by his parents and raised by his grandparents. Through self-discipline, he graduated from Ohio State and Yale Law School, thus the first in his family to go to college.

His autobiography was discovered in 1916 as a source for op-ed writers to understand the situation of the now famous non-college white working-class male. I have a personal background useful for discussing this book, having attended high school two counties away from Middletown, in an area having many internal migrants from down-home Kentucky.

J.D. Vance, March 1; and collateral lecture about “noncollege, working class, white males”

Agendas and Instability in American Politics, by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones.

This is a standard introduction to public policy theory at a moderately advanced level. As such it is useful for Ph.D. exams in Political Science as one of the most frequently cited works in the field. The instructor will incorporate previous reading and lectures to contemporary American public policy issues, probably including immigration, financial regulation, and urban issues. Students will write short response papers to this “theory of political attention.”

Baumgartner and Jones: March 8, 1-126

March 15, 1-149

Spring Break March 22

Student Presentations.

Students will present a draft of a 20 page research paper to the class for discussion. A final draft will be submitted during exam week.

Student presentations: March 29
April 5

Content open: April 12, 19

Concluding class: April 26

Schedule

This class meets Wednesday night, 6:00—8:30

Requirements

Students are asked to email the instructor beforehand if they cannot attend the class.

Students will write a 20 paper and present a draft in class.

A four page paper prospectus is due February 15.

The final version must be submitted during exam week. The topic of the paper will be set after discussion with the instructor. I have a special interest in surveys bearing on topics in the class, but this is not a requirement.

Books

All four books should be available at the student bookstore. If used copies are not provided, check with Amazon. Perhaps you may shop around to buy *Civic Ideals* which has an expensive list price.

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I am usually in the above office 130—500 Mon-Fri.

Office hours: to be announced.

Provisions of course can be made for religious holidays and disability issues.

