POLITICS AND CULTURE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A. Goals and Motives:
Although this course will study political culture, as conventionally defined within the discipline of political science, it will also go considerably further afield by considering different political realities and the definitions of the political arena which may flow from them. Does the study of the connections between the realm of politics and the realm of culture hold some hope for the development of mid-range theory, or is it yet another dead end? Does culture have a serious impact on politics and public policy, or is it merely another academic irrelevancy? This course will expose students to several of the major scholarly approaches and orientations which have attempted to link cultural phenomena to the study of politics. Broadly comparative in scope, we shall transcend narrow geographic concerns by attempting to incorporate theoretical patterns of politics and culture in several of the world’s major regions. Frankly exploratory and eclectic in design, the course will seek to discern patterns of systematic linkages between the realms of politics and culture, evaluate the best ways of studying them, and attempt to assess their importance in the contemporary world.

The various theoretical strands of political economy, social class analysis, ethnicity and cultural pluralism, and state-society relations have all contributed importantly to our understanding of political phenomena. Each has much to offer the serious student of politics. Nevertheless, in recent years I have become increasingly dissatisfied with these approaches because none of them addresses adequately certain fundamental questions. First, what constitutes a politically legitimate order? The question of political legitimacy should not be taken for granted. We should not facilely assume that the construction of democracy and the construction of political legitimacy are necessarily identical processes. Nor should we assume that we even know what factors are likely to contribute to the construction of political legitimacy in any given society. Moreover, we need to ask whether notions of political legitimacy are universal or if they may vary from culture to culture. Such questions are especially important and relevant in those parts of the globe undergoing rapid political change in the wake of the end of the Cold War.

Second, I have also become increasingly concerned about the validity of several of the usually unstated assumptions of the social sciences. For example, are the concepts we habitually employ (e.g., power, social class, gender, state, civil society, political causation) truly universal, or is there important cultural variation in their meanings? Do our cultural assumptions and implicit cultural models, usually unstated and often subjecant, structure our views of both political legitimacy and “the universal”? Finally, and perhaps even more fundamental, are our tacit understandings of what constitutes “the political” actually culturally specific? Answers to these questions have serious implications for the social sciences. For some time, therefore, I have been
exploring certain cultural pathways while trying to answer these questions, at least to my own satisfaction. This course thus constitutes an on-going attempt to examine some of the comparative and theoretical materials which might prove relevant and useful in this task. If, along the way, our weekly readings and discussions also contribute to the fund of knowledge on which students may draw when writing the preliminary examination in comparative politics, so much the better. And that is the third motive for offering this course.

In addition, the final goal of this course is to provide a transition from graduate-level courses to the normal rigors and demands of professional life. Since quality publications are a professional necessity, students should actively think of their completed and revised papers for this course as the first drafts of articles which, after suitable subsequent revision, they might well submit to relevant scholarly journals. Advanced graduate students must begin thinking seriously about publishing their better work because both the competitive nature of the job market and the always implacable tenure clock demand it. (Look at it this way. How many times have you read something and said to yourself, “Yech, that’s bad. I can do better than that”? Think of this as a challenge to “do better than that.”)

B. Requirements:
Since I do not dispense Truth, the course will be run as a seminar. Although I might occasionally have something to impart which will require a “mini-lecture,” these will be few and far between. This format obviously places a great burden on the students to attend regularly, read diligently, and participate actively in class discussions.

To facilitate this participation, each week one student will act as discussion leader. Discussion leaders will have two tasks. First, they will present a critical, theoretical analysis of the week’s major reading(s). These presentations should be delivered from an outline, not read verbatim, and ought to take from 10 to 15 minutes. Be prepared to field questions from both the instructor and the class after your talk. Under no circumstances, however, will any presentation be allotted more than 15 minutes. Second, discussion leaders should use their acquired expertise on the subject matter in question to enliven and stimulate our collective deliberations. (It may thus be incumbent upon them to go considerably beyond the required readings.) Part of this latter task will be to suggest questions, or avenues of inquiry, the readings raise which might be incorporated into original papers or even doctoral research. Indeed, all students should read with this in mind and come to each class armed with concrete suggestions.

In addition, and also with the aim of facilitating our collective deliberations, all students must submit one-page reaction papers throughout the semester. Reaction papers should be just that, and no more. They should indicate your reactions to, questions of, and observations about the week’s major required readings. In them you should feel free to raise points of agreement or disagreement you might have with the various authors. The key to this exercise is coming to class prepared with a reaction to some aspect of the week’s readings. These exercises are required, but will not be graded individually. Hard copy should appear in my North Hall mailbox no later than 9:00 a.m. each Wednesday. In addition, at the same time all students should post
their papers to the class list via email attachment (polisci855-1-s15@lists.wisc.edu) so that we all have access to them. Note that no reaction paper is required the first week, the week you are a discussion leader, the week when critical comments are due, or when your final papers are presented.

The only other requirement will be a 30 page seminar paper. Note that a complete draft of that paper will be due on Wednesday, 8 April 2015. This may be a rough draft, but it should be reasonably complete. Please post the paper to the classlist, but also have two hard copies when you come to class — one for the instructor and one for one of the other seminar participants. Each draft essay will thus receive at least two sets of critical, constructive comments before the submission of the final version. Comments will be due the following week, on Wednesday, 15 April 2015. The final paper is due on the last day of class, Wednesday, 6 May 2015 but will, of course, be welcomed earlier should inspiration strike you before then. The final class session will be devoted to a detailed presentation and discussion of your work. Students should determine the subject of their seminar paper in consultation with the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

C. Grading Criteria:
   Overall Class Participation
   (discussions, reaction papers, oral presentations) 30%
   Final Paper 70%

Incompletes are the bane of graduate students and will be granted only under the most exceptional circumstances.

D. Readings:
All of the books listed below are required will be used extensively. In theory, the University Book Store and the reserve reading room of the College Library in Helen C. White Hall should have copies available. Obviously, some may wish to purchase certain titles through the internet and, depending on the publisher, there may be relatively inexpensive e-editions available for some titles. Please note that in this context required means that you must read them; it does not mean that you must buy them. The list is lengthy (and expensive), so pick and choose; form anarcho-syndicalist book-buying communes; make use of the reserve reading room; scan and xerox.


In the course outline which follows, some readings are required (*); others are recommended (#) for those wishing to pursue a subject further. Required books readings should be on three-hour reserve in the College Library at Helen C. White Hall. In addition, some of the recommended articles may be accessed through the following web link: http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/schatzberg/ps855, henceforth abbreviated as [web]. Others may also be accessed directly through MadCat. You may need to access these from a UW email or web address, but the relevant journal articles should then be accessible. To facilitate easy access, I will send electronic copies of this syllabus (in WordPerfect, Word, and Adobe pdf) to the classlist. A copy of the syllabus will also be located at [web].

E. Course Outline:
Please note that the weekly headings, and occasional sub-headings, are not mutually exclusive topics. Perceptive students will find that there is much overlap among them, and that titles listed under one heading are almost certainly applicable to others. In addition, at the end of the syllabus students will find a bibliographic listing of relevant title broken down roughly by subject matter.

1–Organization and Introduction 21 January 2015

*Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America* (various editions).

## 2–Theoretical Baseline, 1: Webs of Significance 28 January 2015

*Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, chapters 1, 4-8, 11-12, 14-15.

#Stephen Chilton, “Defining Political Culture,” *Western Political Quarterly* 41:3 (September 1988): 419-45. [web]

## 3–Theoretical Baseline, 2: Constructed Reality 4 February 2015


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4–Different Realities, Different Assumptions? 11 February 2015


**Sorcery**


# Alan Kilpatrick, *The Night has a Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery among the Western Cherokee* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

5–Cultural Assumptions, 1: Statistics 18 February 2015


Language and Cognitive Models

# Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn, eds., *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

#Oyeronke Oyewumi, The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).


6–Cultural Assumptions, 2: Law 25 February 2015

*Lawrence Rosen, Law as Culture: An Introduction, entire.


7–Cultural Assumptions, 3: Economics 4 March 2015

*Stephen A. Marglin, The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community, entire.

8–Identity, 1: Economics


9–Identity, 2: Ethnicity

#Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Culture Troubles: Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning* (London: C. Hurst, 2005).

#Sheri Berman, “Ideas, Norms, and Culture in Political Analysis,” *Comparative Politics* 33:2 (January 2001): 231-250. [web]

10–Identity, 3: Race in the U.S.


**Spring Break**

**11–Identity, 4: Race in Ghana**

8 April 2015

***DRAFT ESSAYS DUE***


12–Critical Comments

***CRITICAL COMMENTS ON DRAFT ESSAYS DUE***

13–Sports, Culture, and Identity


#Ellyn Kestnbaum, *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating & Cultural Meaning* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

14–Final Thoughts

*Anne Norton, *95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method*, entire.

#Kirstie M. McClure, “Reading 95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4:2 (June 2006): 343-351. [web]


15–Research Results

6 May 2015

***FINAL PAPERS DUE:
PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION OF FINAL PAPERS***
SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS:

**Measured Realities**


**Children**

**Gender**


**Japan**


**Latin America**


### China


### Religion


### Aliens

Russia

Africa

Music
Film, Television, Fiction


#Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie; and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).


Symbols


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**Myths and Mythologies**


