**Political Science 275: Identity Politics in America**

**Fall Term 2010**

Tu Th, 10:10-11:55 AM, Willis 211

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Every day we hear about the growing divide between liberals and conservatives, differences between residents of cities, suburbs, and rural towns; between young and old, native-born and immigrant, gay and straight, and delineations based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, occupation, or other traits. Are Americans really so polarized into separate identity groups? If indeed there are some deep divisions, where and why do these exist, and how might a vision and narrative of an American identity highlight a common set of ideals so as to unify people in tackling the difficult problems the country faces?

This course starts with the premise that it is important to carry out systematic study of how people come to think about themselves as a member of “communities”, and typically as members of multiple overlapping “communities” , where these may be local, national, global-cosmopolitan, racial, religious, ideological, professional, or based on some other bond. How does the sense of obligation to a community affect identity group membership and politics? What do scholars propose as standards to evaluate whether identity groups promote goals that are just, or not? What rights would effectively protect individuals who are members of groups considered outside the mainstream?

The class then turns to the subject of how meaningful conversations take place about people’s political values and attachments to such communities or groups. We explore new scholarship that shows how ordinary people often develop their political values through everyday interactions, talking to one another outside formal political and public arenas. We consider the impact of elite message communicated through mass media. And we look at a new line of scholarship on cyber-communities as a space for transnational conversations about politics and culture.

Finally, we examine the characteristics of, and relationships between various identities, such as “youth”, “neighborhood”, “national”, “ethnic”, “gender”, “religious”, and “sexual-orientation”. When does one identity assume more salience than the other for an individual person? In addition to reading and discussing important scholarly texts, we will learn experientially and from guest speakers. For example, the class will hear from political practitioners in the Twin Cities, gain a bit of experience in using online statistical data for political analysis, practice interpreting the online conversations of cyber-communities, and analyze campaign messages of national leaders.

**Required Books**

Amy Gutmann. 2003. *Identity In Democracy.* Princeton, N.J. Princeton Univ. Press.

Melissa Harris-Lacewell. 2004. *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk* and *Black Political Thought*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

Rogers M. Smith. 2003. Stories *of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of* *Membership*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press

Kenji Yoshino. 2006. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. New York: Random House.

**Other required and optional readings**

Other than reading assignments from the four books listed above, all other required readings are on e-reserve at the Gould library site. The password to gain access is **“posc”**

For your convenience, I have also placed on e-reserves quite a few supplementary and *optional* readings on various topics. You may find that something in this collection of readings is useful for your research paper, but your search for literature on your topic should by no means be limited to this list.

**Preparation for Class Discussions**

You will learn the most from this class if you actively engage in the variety of class activities offered. The lecture format includes time for participation by all students in discussions. We will illustrate and probe into the content of the assigned readings in a variety of ways, i.e. through exploring voting and public opinion data in the computer lab, examining online cyber-communities, conducting class debates and simulations.

To benefit from whatever type of activity takes place in class, you should always prepare careful notes as you do the readings on *each* of the following questions for *every* assigned reading:

1. Identify the author’s argument, and try to summarize it in one or two sentences. What are the logical steps of the argument? Does the author propose a theory? An interpretation? Can you identify normative assumptions or philosophical foundations of the argument? What is the evidence?

2. Do you find the argument compelling? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

3. How does the analysis in this text stand up alongside the analysis offered by other authors we are reading in this class (or arguments made in other texts you have read)?

4. How well do the theory and/or findings “travel”? i.e. Are they helpful if we want to understand important questions or phenomena *not* directly addressed in this text?

***Be sure to be prepared to discuss each of the “discussion questions” as listed for most class sessions in the Schedule of Readings and Topics below.***

**Policy on academic honesty**

Each written assignment must be the product of your own independent work. You are encouraged to discuss ideas for your papers with classmates, but you must write your papers on your own. Be sure to consult the new College handbook (2007) on academic honesty for details on submission of written work.

**Writing requirements**

There is a mid-term assignment to write two short essays on the course readings assigned during the first four weeks. Each essay will be about two and a half pages in length, and so in total you will write five pages. I will distribute several essay prompts (i.e. questions to answer in the essays), and you can choose which two you wish to answer. The prompts and detailed guidelines will be distributed 10 days prior to the due date.

A longer writing assignment of eight to ten pages will be due during exam week. For this final assignment you will have two options:

Two short-essays option (A): You will write two four page essays synthesizing themes in the course readings and discussions. If you choose this option, I will distribute the prompts during the 9th week of class. These essays will demonstrate your understanding of the course readings, in-class lectures, and other class activities.

Research paper option (B): You can write a research paper, from eight to ten pages in length. I suggest that you choose one of the following three topics, or you can write on another topic of your own choosing (see note below about instructor’s approval of a different topic).

Research Topic 1: For an identity group (it may be unorganized, in Amy Gutmann’s terminology) or community (in Cara Wong’s terminology) you choose to study, is Yoshino’s concept of a new civil rights based on “uncovering” the authentic self a viable approach toward attaining equality for its members? First, provide background by describing the community’s characteristics. How do Cara Wong’s analytical framework and Amy Gutmann’s argument help illuminate the attachments members feel toward the group? Then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Yoshino’s argument concerning the political ethics and civil rights of the “uncovering” model to the identity group you have chosen to study. Examine at least one counter-argument in depth.

Research Topic 2: Provide an analysis of how group identities played a role in the campaign messages and mobilization strategies of candidates vying to win in an electoral contest. Your analysis should compare the campaigns of at least two candidates (who may have won or lost). By way of background, describe the political environment and demographic characteristics of the voters, including the nature of nested or overlapping “communities” among voters. Were there competing and/or complementary identity stories told by candidates during their campaigns? Do you have evidence for how the stories resonated among voters? What further data would be required to more conclusively confirm or refute your argument? What implications do you think your argument holds for study of identity politics, more generally?

Research Topic 3: Analyze one American story of “peoplehood” and how well it resonates among members of an identity group, using Roger Smith’s framework. Consider Smith’s framework: explain how the sense of “peoplehood” depicted by the story you are analyzing fits into Smith’s Table 1 on p. 21. Is the story constructed principally by elites? How do elites interact with ordinary people or their constituents in the construction of the story? Does Smith’s theory adequately capture the important features of peoplehood for the case you analyze?

If you want to write a research paper on another topic, submit your paper proposal by October 30th, and meet with the instructor on or *before* the end of the 5th week to discuss the feasibility of your idea.

To achieve a very good grade on any of these writing assignments, you must present a coherent argument, fully engage assigned readings, and provide some empirical support for your argument. Excellent papers will go beyond this standard to also demonstrate originality of thought, convincing argumentation, and a polished and effective writing style.

Submission: Send all papers to me by email as a Word or pdf attachment (to [cwong@carleton.edu](mailto:cwong@carleton.edu)) no later than the specified due date. Be sure tosend a copy to yourself as documentation that you submitted the paper on time. The page lengths specified above do not include bibliographies or appendices.

Paper format: Text should be double-spaced, one-inch margins all around. The topics will be distributed about one week before the due date.

Late papers: Unless you submit documentation of an emergency or illness that prevented you from completing an assignment on time, there is a one half- letter grade penalty for each day your paper is late. The first late day begins immediately after the paper is due (i.e. fifteen minutes after the due date and time).

**Grading**

Class participation 25%

Written exercises

Midterm essays 30%

Final essays or research paper 45%

**Class attendance**

Regular class attendance and punctuality on everybody’s part are important to build sense of collective participation and responsibility for learning. In exceptional situations, it may be necessary to miss class because of illness or emergency; in that even if you want an absence to be excused, bring written documentation of the reason

**Schedule of Readings and Topics**

**Week 1**: **Identity Groups and Demographic Change**

**Tuesday 9/14**

Portraits of Demographic Change in Metropolitan Areas: getting to know our home-towns and cities.

Consider how the following factors affect the sense of “community” and various group identities in American cities and towns: migration patterns, the “cultural generation gap”, poverty, education, and income levels.

We will look at the book *State of Metropolitan America: On the Front Lines of Demographic Transformation*. 2010. Washington D.C.: Brookings. Free copies will be distributed in class for your reference throughout the term. It is also available online <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica.aspx>

**Thursday 9/16**

Cara Wong. 2010. *Boundaries of Obligation in American Politics*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Preface: pp. xiii-xviii.

Amy Gutmann. *Identity in Democracy*, pp. 1-12.

Discussion questions:

Cara Wong reading: What is the puzzle presented by the story presented in the Preface to *Boundaries of Obligation*? Bring to class a guess at one or two possible explanations for the puzzling outcome of the story. Together, we will imagine or brainstorm several possible explanations and keep these in mind as “theories” about obligations people feel to “communities” as we explore the first couple weeks’ readings. Which theory ends up being supported by real evidence will take some investigating and thinking, so we will all stay tuned.

Amy Gutmann reading: What are identity groups? Why assess their merits?

Why are “social markers” important in defining identity groups, according to Gutmann. Is there good reason to worry that identity politics is splitting citizens and residents of the U.S. into isolated groups at odds with one another?

**Week 2**: **Identity Politics and Justice**

**Tuesday 9/21**

Amy Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy*, 13-37.

Discussion questions: What is the difference between an identity group and an interest group. What is the difference between identity group *politics* and interest group *politics*? In Gutmann’s view, what does it mean to assess the merits of an identity group by the democratic standard of “civic equality”? Is this a good standard in your view? Give an example of a justice-friendly identity group, and explain why you consider it so; then give an example of an identity group whose orientation toward justice is “suspect.” Why do you categorize them in this way? Finally, what are the four types of identity groups that Gutmann delineates? Gives examples of each.

**Thursday 9/23**

Cara Wong, *Boundaries of Obligation*, pp. 1-12.

Discussion questions: How are “communities” as defined by Cara Wong different from “organized identity groups” or “interest groups” as Gutmann defines the latter two concepts. What does it mean to be an “imagined” community?

Exercise: Think about how you (and perhaps your family, friends, teachers) have thought

about community boundaries in your home town or city. What communities did you

feel attached to, or not attached to? Were there overlaps between communities you felt part of? How porous were the boundaries, and how movable were the boundaries? Did these boundaries create a sense of obligation to others in the community? Did the sense of community ever lead people in your home town or city to engage in “identity group politics” or “interest group politics”, as Gutmann describes these forms of politics?

Look for demographic data on your home metro area on the website: <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica.aspx>

Click “Explore data for the nation’s 100 metro …” Scroll down to select the metro area you want to learn about.

**Week 3: Everyday Talk: Conversational Spaces in African American Communities**

**Tuesday 9/28**

Melissa Harris-Lacewell, *Bibles, Barbershops, and BET*, ch. 1: “African

American Counterpublic” and “Ideological Development Through Everyday Talk”;

pp. 11-13 (starting with section titled “Ideological Development Through Everyday Talk”); 19-20; 25-32 (starting with section titled “Contemporary Black Nationalism” on p. 25; all of chapter 5: 162-203

Discussion questions: What is Harris-Lacewell’s definition of ideology? What is a counter-public? What are the four dimensions of Black political ideology (or Black political thought) that are the subject of “everyday talk”. How do people express their views on each of these four dimensions in the barbershop? Is there any special value in thinking about ideology-construction in the way Harris-Lacewell does?

**Thursday 9/30**

Melissa Harris-Lacewell, *Bibles, Barbershops, and BET*, all of chapter 2: 36-78.

Discussion questions: How did Orange Grove church bring Black men and women in contact with political ideas that address four aspects of Black political ideology, as summarized on p. 46?

**Week 4: Identity Narratives: Counter Publics and Transnational Spaces**

**Tuesday 10/5**

Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff. 2009. *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*, New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 29-33 (through 1st full paragraph on p. 33); 21-24 (background information on Tibet only); 55-59 (not including section on My Coptic Church); 66-77(section on TibetBoard only).

Spend about 30 minutes looking at this website: <http://www.thecommentfactory.com/tibetan-blogosphere-is-vibrant-and-empowering-3478/> , or enough time to gather a couple examples to help answer the following questions.

Discussion questions: Do cyber-communities formed to build a diasporic Tibetan identity have any of the characteristics that Harris-Lacewell attributes to a “counter-public”? Do they develop political ideas through “everyday talk”? How might they be similar or different from the types of “everyday talk” studied by Harris-Lacewell in Black communities? How do the cyber-communities foster any of the 5 features of a diaspora, as defined by Brinkerhoff on p. 31 (in her adaptation of Cohen’s ideas)?

**Prompts for paper 1 will be distributed in class.**

**Thursday 10/7**

Rogers Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood*, pp. 19-37; and 198-212.

Discussion questions: Give examples of strong, moderate, and weak “peoples”, using Smith’s analytic framework as summarized in Table 1, p. 21.

What conversations – if any – address the construction of an ethically constitutive story on TibetBoard or other cyber-communities of the Tibetan diaspora, such as the Tibetan blogsphere referenced above?

Is Smith’s “pioneering story” of the American nation (see pp. 198-212 of Smith) likely to resonate within and across different “communities”, as defined by Cara Wong, in the U.S.? Which communities?

**Week 5: Case Study of an Electoral Campaign: Youth, Neighborhood, Ethnic, and Political Identities**

**Tuesday 10/12**

Russell Dalton. 2008. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics, Revised Edition*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, ch. 1: pp.1-19.

Katherine Tate. 2003. *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representation in the U.S. Congress*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, pp. 6-17.

Discussion of trustee and delegate models of representation; substantive, descriptive, and symbolic representation. Print your own copy of the following reading by Tate. You are not required to read this; rather, bring it to class for your reference. The instructor will explain key concepts.

Exercise: Examine the evidence the instructor will present that a younger generation of Americans has a somewhat different concept of what is a “good citizen” than their parents’ or grandparents’ concept of citizenship. Is the evidence convincing? If Dalton’s claim is accurate, what difference does it make? Are “youth” an identity group?

**Thursday 10/14** Guest speaker Chai Lee, Constituent representative for Mayor Chris Coleman, City of Saint Paul, Minnesota. A candidate in the Democratic Farm Labor primary for a seat in the Minnesota State Senate, summer 2010.

Readings from campaign websites. Information on links to be distributed.

**Paper 1 is due on Sunday, October 17, at noon.**

**Week 6: Women’s Identity, and Politics**

**Tuesday 10/19**

Lori Cox Han. 2010. *Women and U.S. Politics: The Spectrum of Political Leadership*.

Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Reinner, pp. 1-42.

Any Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy*, pp 38-47

Discussion questions: What are the stages of development of the women’s movement? What visions of women’s equality are under contestation today? What paths to political equality seem viable to you?

**Thursday 10/21**

Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes a Candidate*, *Revised Edition.* New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 112-135

We will meet in the computer lab for an exercise in analyzing voting and opinion data by gender criteria. Are there gender gaps in ideology, vote choice, and policy views?

**Paper 2 proposal is due on Saturday, October 30, at noon**

**Week 7: Gay and Racial Covering: Concepts of Civil Rights**

**Tuesday 10/26**

Kenji Yoshino, *Covering*, pp. 3-27; and 74-141.

Discussion questions: What is meant by the term “covering”? How is gay covering different from conversion and passing? What are the four axes of “covering”, according to Yoshino? Gives examples of how people mute or flaunt their identities (which may be sexual, racial, ethnic, religious, or other types of identity) on each axis.

**Thursday 10/28**

Kenji Yoshino, *Covering*, pp. 167-196

Shelby Steele. 1990. *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America,*

New York, St. Martin’s Press; pp. 1-35

Discussion questions: How is Yoshino’s model of a “new” civil rights different from the old? How is it different from Shelby Steele’s view? Can you find connections between Yoshino’s argument and Gutmann’s view of civic equality? Can you imagine how Yoshino’s model of civil rights might be woven into an ethically constitutive story of American “peoplehood” in the sense Smith conceives of such a story? How can Steele’s view be woven in such a story?

**Week 8: Racial and Cultural Identity**

**Tuesday 11/2**

Cristina Beltran. 2010. *The Trouble With Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, ch. 1: pp. 22-55.

Discussion questions: Is a coherent pan-ethnic Latino agenda viable? Is Beltran right in bringing up concern about the suppression of difference when Latino leaders have called for pan-ethnic unity? What evidence would show that a viable pan-ethnic Latino agenda has galvanized people of different Latino ethnic groups in politics? What implications would such an agenda have for democracy? Can you find connections between Beltran’s argument and the analytical frameworks proposed by Gutmann?

**Thursday 11/4**

Shanto Iyengar. 2010. "Race in the News: Stereotypes, Political Campaigns, and Market-based Journalism", in Doing Race, edited by Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. Moya. New York: W.W. Norton.  
  
Albert M. Camarillo. 2010. "Going Back to Compton: Real Estate, Racial Politics, and Black-Brown Relations," in Doing Race.**Week 9: Claims of Cultural Identity Groups**

**Tuesday 11/9**

Paula Moya and Hazel Markus, *Doing Race*, An Introduction (Norton, 2010); pp. 1-62  83-93.  
  
For the first half of the class, we will discuss Moya and Markus' chapter. Please be prepared to relate this reading to as many previous readings as you can, for e.g. Wong, Gutmann, Steele, Smith, Beltran, and even Fox and Lawless if you can find a connection.

In the last half of the class, we will turn to look at some data on Latino voting and public opinion. Please print your own copy of the following reading and bring it to class.  The instructor will describe the data analysis reported in the chapter.  You do not need to read it in advance; rather, we will use it as a reference: Marisa A. Abrajano and R. Michael Alvarez. 2010.  *New Faces, New Voices: The Hispanic Electorate in America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 18-34.     
  
Meet in computer lab.

**Thursday 11/11** **Religion and Identity**

Robert Booth Fowler et al. 2010. *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, and Strategic Choices, 4th Edition*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

“Voting and Religion in American Politics”, pp. 77-112.

Discussion questions: For each religious identity group described in this chapter, how do religious affiliation blend with other factors, such as intensity of religious practice, ethnicity or class, to shape the voting patterns of members? Why is there an increase in religious switching? Which groups can be considered swing voters, and why?

**Week 10: Religion and Identity** **(cont’d)**

**Tuesday 11/ 16**

“Running on Faith”, a study by The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

<http://pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Running-on-Faith.aspx>

Youtube of Saddleback Civil Forum on the Presidency, August 18, 2008. Pastor Rick Warren asks the candidates’ a question on Christianity, among many others:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIigo-FqTpI&feature=related> Obama’s comment

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bajCyiCVNIA&feature=related> McCain’s comment

*Prior* to the 2008 campaign, Obama delivered the keynote at Jim Walllis’ “Call To Renewal” conference, which was held on June 28, 2006, in Washington, D.C. The speech was on the role of faith in politics. Listen to the Youtube recording of the speech and/or read the transcript here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/28/us/politics/2006obamaspeech.html>

Finally, on September 12, 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy gave this speech on his religion:

http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600

Discussion questions: How have religious themes been part of “ethically constitutive stories” of American identity and values, as told by national political leaders? How does the nature of presidential campaigning shape the messages about religion? What issues arise concerning the separation of church and state?

**Thursday 11/18** – Reading day, no class.

**Final Exam Period**

**Paper 2 or take-home exam, is due on at noon on November 21st.**