

AMERICAN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS (PSC 401K)
Spring 2008

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Course Objectives

This course on American political movements is designed to explore how social movements in the United States come about, how they develop over time, what kinds of strategies and tactics are most conducive to success or failure, what sort of changes these movements are able to produce in society at large, and the future prospects for such movements.

Several themes will run throughout this course. First, we will pay close attention to the historical origins of mass political movements in the United States. What sort of conditions seem to favor the establishment of a viable social movement? Why, for example, did the civil rights movement come about in 1956, and not, let's say, 1926, or 1976? What sparked the so-called second wave of feminism in 1963? This is a subtle and complex question to ask, and we will do our best to come up with plausible arguments for what sort of conditions are most likely to give rise to social movements—this will be important for a solid understanding of American political movements, and it may help us make decent predictions about the future of such movements.

A second theme that we will pay close attention to throughout the semester will be the historical evolution of social movements—can we detect patterns that seem to characterize social movements in general by taking a close look at particular manifestations of mass movements in American history? Is there a cycle, for example, of the rise and decline of political movements? And, if so, what does this imply for the role of social movements on the broader stage of American politics? These sorts of questions will permit us to better understand the life cycle of social movements, and, perhaps, inculcate an appreciation for the potential, and potential limits, of such movements in the process of social change.

We will also pay close attention to an additional element of American political movements—how democratic are these movements? What role for leadership, and what role for rank-and-file participants? And what sort of implications does the mix of democracy and leadership have for the success, or lack thereof, of a social movement? Related to this issue, we will consider in some detail the extent to which mass political movements can play in enhancing, or not, the quality of democracy in the United States. Looking backward, can we come to any firm conclusions about the long-term impact of social movements on the practice of democracy in America? And what does this analysis suggest about the possible future of such movements?

Finally, we will consider the issue of what sort of strategies and tactics various movements have employed in particular cases to advance their causes. What approaches seem most advisable in the context of American politics? Which strategies and tactics seem to have produced the most success, and which the most abject failures? For example, we will consider the extent to which a particular movement might focus their energies on pursuing a court-based strategy of social change, versus a focus on taking their claims to the streets via mass demonstrations, in an attempt to shape the court of public opinion. This will also

implicate an earlier theme of the course: The extent to which a movement might rely more on elite leadership (lawyers taking cases to court) versus a reliance on the rank-and-file (mass demonstrations on public streets). Another angle that we will consider is the role of violence versus nonviolence as a tactic of social change. In this context we will discuss and debate at length the arguments of thinkers like Henry David Thoreau, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Malcolm X. More broadly, we will pay close attention to the ongoing debate over whether a movement should work within the system or whether it might make more sense to go outside the system in order to produce desired social, political and economic changes.

Required Books

Flora Davis. Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960. 1999.

Craig Rimmerman. From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States. 2001.

Harvard Sitkoff. The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992. 1993.

Gerald Rosenberg. The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change? 1993.

I will also be placing some additional readings on the course's WebCT site. These I will announce on a weekly basis. These WebCT readings will be especially important at the start of the course. The sooner you can access these materials the better.

Grading

Your grade in this course will be determined by your performance on four take-home essay examinations. Each exam will count for 25% of your grade in this course. I will also take into account participation. Those students who participate in classroom discussions on a regular and thoughtful basis will be given additional, positive consideration for their final grade in this course. Finally, I will be monitoring attendance on a weekly basis. I will be taking attendance both at the start of class and after the break (I will schedule a 5-10 minute break about halfway through each class). I will use the following formula regarding the link between attendance and grades: 4-5 absences will lower your final grade by 5% points. 6-7 absences will lower your final grade by 10% points. 8-9 absences, 15% points. More than nine absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

My grading scale is as follows: 90-100% = A; 80-89% = B; 70-79% = C; 60-69% = D; 0-59% = F.

Academic Integrity

“Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community; all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path.”—*Student Academic Misconduct Policy*.

For this course, any attempt to cheat on an examination will be met with strict enforcement of the university's policies on academic misconduct. Plagiarism is a disturbingly common manifestation of the phenomenon of cheating in academic institutions, and I will set aside some time prior to the due date for the first examination to explain in some detail just what plagiarism is and how it can be avoided. In brief, plagiarism occurs when one passes off as one's own ideas or words the ideas or words of someone else. This can be done by the perpetrator via either malice or ignorance. Plagiarism can be avoided simply by properly documenting the sources that one is drawing on to produce a take-home essay examination.

Classroom Behavior

I expect students to attend class on a regular basis, and I expect students to make every reasonable effort to get to class on time. I would ask that students who might arrive late try to make as little disturbance as possible when entering the classroom. I may well give such students dirty looks. Students who have arrived on time are encouraged to do likewise. I would also ask that students who have to leave class early for some compelling reason please let me know ahead of time, and try to sit near an exit so that you can leave without disrupting the class. We may well talk about you after you leave. I also expect that students will switch off cell phones when entering the classroom—just pretend the classroom is a jet that takes off when class begins, and lands at the end of class.

Religious Holidays and Official Extracurricular Activities

If the date of any examinations or quizzes conflicts with a religious holiday that you observe or an official extracurricular activity, you must notify the instructor at least one week prior to the exam or quiz so that alternative arrangements may be made. For extracurricular activities, documentation will be required.

Writing Center and Other Student Assistance

One-on-one or small group assistance with writing is available free of charge to students at the Writing Center, located in CDC-301. Although some drop-in times are sometimes available, students with appointments will receive priority assistance. Appointments may be made in person or by calling 702.895.3908. Another source of information on UNLV organizations whose purpose is to support students' academic activities can be found at http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm

Students with Disabilities

UNLV complies with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and offers reasonable accommodations to qualified students

with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are as follows: VOICE (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, FAX (702) 895-0651. For additional information, please visit <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>

Course Schedule

Topic One: American Political Movements: A Theoretical Overview

- Week 1 Readings: Martin Luther King's "Letter From Birmingham City Jail" (WebCT)
Henry David Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" and "A Plea for Captain John Brown" (WebCT)
Malcolm X, "Ballot or the Bullet" (WebCT)
Michael Walzer's "Obligation to Disobey" (WebCT)
- Week 2 Readings: M. Shepard, "Gandhi & His Myths" (WebCT)
John Rawls' "On Civil Disobedience" (a selection from A Theory of Justice) (WebCT)
V. Taylor, "Mobilizing for Change" (WebCT)
- Week 3 Readings: C. Bracey, "Of John Brown" (WebCT)
Rosenberg's Hollow Hope, Intro. and chptrs. 1 & 12
J. Goldstone, "More Social Movements?" WebCT

EXAMINATION ONE

Topic Two: The Civil Rights Movement

- Week 4 Readings: Rosenberg's The Hollow Hope, chptrs. 2-5.
Sitkoff's The Struggle, chptr. 1.
- Week 5 Readings: Sitkoff's The Struggle, chptrs. 2-4.
- Week 6 Readings: Sitkoff, chptrs. 5 & 6.
- Week 7 Readings: Sitkoff, chptrs. 7 & 8.

EXAMINATION TWO

Topic Three: The Women's Movement, 1960 to the Present

- Week 8 Readings: Davis' Moving the Mountain, chptrs. 1-4.
- Week 9 Readings: Davis, chptrs. 5-8.
- Week 10 Readings: Davis, chptrs. 9-18

Rosenberg, chptrs. 6-9

Week 11 Readings: Davis, chptrs. 19-23.

EXAMINATION THREE

Topic Four: The Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Movement

Week 12 Readings: Rimmerman, From Identity, chptrs. 1-2.

Week 13 Readings: Rimmerman, chptrs. 3-4

Week 14 Readings: Rimmerman, chptrs. 5-6.

Week 15 Readings: Rosenberg, chptr. 12.
Updates on recent gay/lesbian legal issues, on WebCT.
Readings to be assigned.

FINAL EXAMINATION