

**Political Science 407: The Demise of Liberalism?  
Spring 2005**

**Professor Paul Gronke  
205A Eliot Hall  
503-517-7393**

**Office Hours: Thursday, 9-11 am or by appointment**

**Course Summary:** This course addresses one of the most important questions in contemporary American (and worldwide) political debate: is post-war liberalism dead, to be replaced by free-market, small government, laissez faire conservatism? Since at least the beginning of the Eisenhower era, American commentators have predicted the end of liberalism. These voices reached their height during the Reagan administration, and while Clinton's presidency may seem to have indicated a resurgence of liberalism, in the eyes of many, the policies of Clinton only reinforced the political obituary and intellectual dead end of liberalism.

Have we truly witnessed the demise of liberalism? It is impossible to give this topic a sufficient treatment during a semester; instead, this course covers a few of the competing theories that purport to explain the demise of liberalism during the past quarter century. The focus, in social science parlance, is on causes of the decline. However, it's important that we also understand what we mean by liberalism. Therefore, the course starts historically, with a review of the term "liberalism", "libertarianism", and "conservatism." Then we turn briefly to historical descriptions of the rise of liberalism during the New Deal, and one political scientist's relatively early identification of liberalism's demise. Next, we survey a number of political and social changes--structural and institutional conditions--that undergird the collapse. These include party polarization, civic engagement, and suburbanization. Finally, we assess the suspects: trust in government, the Cold War, and a return to American exceptionalism and conservatism. We close with a few contrarian statements and forecasts for the future.

Because the course is a conference, class participation is essential and will be evaluated as part of the overall course grade. In addition, students will have to write two 3-5 page "think pieces" that summarize the week's readings and include a set of thoughts or questions to help guide classroom discussion. There is also a third required "think piece" for the whole class, on February 1. The rest of the course assessment is based on a 15-20 page research paper, due at the end of the semester, answering one simple question: is liberalism dead? More details as the course progresses.

The following books are available for purchase at the Reed bookstore.

Brands, H.W. *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*

Dionne, E.J. *Why Americans Hate Politics.*

Franks, Thomas. *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America.*

Hetherington, Marc. *Why Trust Matters: Declining Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism*.

Lowi, Theodore. *The End of Liberalism*.

Shafer, Byron. *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics*.

The reading also includes extensive selections from other books and articles. Most of these will be available on the “honor system.” In all cases, where available, I have placed multiple copies of the books on reserve.

### **Class requirements:**

- Three thought pieces (3-5 pages) with questions: 30% of course grade.
- Final research paper (15-20 pages): 40% of course grade.
- Class participation 10% of course grade.

### **Course Schedule**

#### **1. January 25-27. What does “liberalism” mean? An historical review.**

- a. Ross, Dorothy. “Liberalism.” In Fox and Kloppenberg, *A Companion to American Thought*
- b. Ryan, Alan. “Libertarianism”. In Fox and Kloppenberg, *A Companion to American Thought*.
- c. Siegel, Fred. "Liberalism" in Foner and Garray, *The Readers Companion to American history*.
- d. Kloppenberg, James T. "Liberalism." *The Encyclopedia of American History*.
- e. Ellis, Richard J. and Robert E. Hawkinson. “Liberalism.” In Cayton and Williams, *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*.
- f. Hoeveler, J. David. “Conservatism.” In Cayton and Williams, *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*. Photocopy.

#### **2. February 1. Liberalism in current American political debate**

- a. First think piece (for all students): what does liberalism and conservatism mean? Bring in articles, weblogs, or other materials, and be prepared to present and discuss these in class. All students should write a 2 page commentary, comparing their selection with the readings thus far.
- b. McGovern, George. 2002. “The Case for Liberalism: A Defense of the Future Against the Past.” *Harpers Magazine*. December, 2002. Available here:  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1111/is\\_1831\\_305/ai\\_98135974](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1111/is_1831_305/ai_98135974)
- c. Lukacs, John. 2004. “The Triumph and Collapse of Liberalism.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 51: 16. Available at Academic Search Elite.

3. **February 3. Louis Hartz and John Dewey. Classic Statements of American Liberalism**
  - a. Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in America*. Chs. 1, 8, and 9. (Reserve and photocopy)
  - b. Dewey, John. *Liberalism and Social Action*. Chs. 1-2 (Reserve).
  - c. Kloppenberg, James T. "From Hartz to Tocqueville: Shifting the focus from liberalism to democracy in America." In Jacobs, Novak, and Zelizer. *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*. (Photocopy).
  
4. **February 8-10. The Origins of Modern Liberalism: FDR, the Depression, WWII, and the New Deal**
  - a. Brinkley, Alan. "The New Deal and the Idea of the State."
  - b. Ferguson, Thomas. "Industrial Conflict and the Coming of the New Deal: The Triumph of Multinational Liberalism in America." Both from Fraser and Gerstle (eds), *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*. (Reserve)
  - c. Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, Chs. 7, 16. (Photocopy)
  - d. Hofstadter, Richard. "Franklin Roosevelt: The Patrician as Opportunist." Ch. XII in *The American Political Tradition*. (Photocopy and reserve).
  
5. **February 15-17. The Classic Take from Political Science: Lowi's End of Liberalism**
  - a. Lowi, *End of Liberalism* (selections).
  
6. **February 22-24. Partisan Conditions: the rise of conservatism, realignment of the South, and the collapse of the political center.**
  - a. Byron Shafer, *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics*. Part 1 (Chs. 1-5) and Chapter 6.
  - b. Lublin, David. *The Republican South*. Chs. 1, 2, 6, 7. (Photocopy and reserve)
  - c. EJ Dionne. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. Chs. 6-7.
  
7. **March 1-3. Participatory conditions: the decline of civic engagement.**
  - a. Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Chs. 1-4, 12, 21. (Photocopy and reserve)
  - b. EJ Dionne. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. Introduction and Chs. 1-5.
  
8. **March 8-10: Geographical conditions: the impact of suburbanization on American political and social life**
  - a. Oliver, J. Eric. *Democracy in Suburbia*. Chs. 1-4. (Photocopy and reserve)
  - b. McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Chs. 1-3. (Photocopy and reserve).
  
9. **March 22: Electoral conditions: the declining relevance of elections.**

- a. Ginsberg, Benjamin and Martin Shefter. *Politics by Other Means*. Selections. Chs. 1-2. (Photocopy and reserve).

**10. March 24-29: The end part 1: Blame public opinion. The end of liberalism was caused by the collapse of trust in government**

- a. Hetherington, Marc. *Why Trust Matters*.
- b. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy*. Selections. Chs. 5-6. (Photocopy and reserve).
- c. E.J. Dionne. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. Chs. 11-13 and Afterword.

**11. March 31-April 5: The end part 2: Blame history. The cold war caused liberalism, and the end of the cold war ended liberalism.**

- a. EJ Brands. *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*.

**12. April 7: The end part 3: Blame ourselves. After all, we're all really conservatives at heart**

- a. Micklethwaite, John and Adrian Woolridge. *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*. Chs. 1-4, 12, 13. (Photocopy and reserve).

**13. April 12. Contrarian arguments part 1: America is not polarized after all**

- a. Fiorina, Morris. *Culture Wars: The Myth of a Polarized America*.

**14. April 14: No class today, Midwest Political Science Association Meeting**

**15. April 19-21. Contrarian arguments part 2: it's all just smart Republican advertising. We're all liberals at heart.**

- a. Franks, Thomas. *What's The Matter with Kansas*.

**16. April 26-28. America's political future.**

- a. Shafer, Byron E. *The Two Majorities*. Chs. 7-10
- b. Judis and Texiera, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, chs. 1, 2, 5 (photocopy and reserve)
- c. Micklethwaite and Wooldridge. *The Right Nation*. Chs. 9-10. (photocopy and reserve)
- d. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Chs. 23-24. (photocopy and reserve)
- e. Putnam, *Better Together*, "Portland: A Positive Epidemic of Civic Engagement." (photocopy and reserve)

**17. Just couldn't make it into the list: Contrarian argument part 3: Government hasn't shrunk at all!**

- a. Light, Paul. *The True Size of Government*. Chs. 1-3.