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, EJ. Why Americans Hate Politics.
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**


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.
   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. 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
   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)

5. February 15-17. The Classic Take from Political Science: Lowi’s End of Liberalism
   a. Lowi, End of Liberalism (selections).

   b. Lublin, David. The Republican South. Chs. 1, 2, 6, 7. (Photocopy and reserve)
   c. EJ Dionne. Why Americans Hate Politics. Chs. 6-7.

   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

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

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.

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

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

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. Shafer, Byron E. *The Two Majorities.* Chs. 7-10
   b. Judis and Texiera, *The Emerging Democratic Majority,* chs. 1, 2, 5 (photocopy and reserve)

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