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. Our focus is, in social science parlance, 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.

This course relies on many books that have influenced recent public debates and which can be found on your local bookstore shelves. This is purposeful. While these books may lack the academic rigor we find in university press volumes and scholarly journals, they are widely read and discussed. Our job is to unpack the arguments in these texts and subject them to critical scrutiny, based on our years of academic training. That is why this course functions as a once a week seminar, and why it is limited to second semester juniors and seniors. While some of you may become academics, all of you, I hope, will be active political participants. I hope that the materials and arguments from this course will help you fulfill this important part of your duty as a citizen.

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*. The new or old edition is OK.
Fiorina, Morris. *Culture Wars?*
Hacker, Jacob and Paul Piersen. *Off Center.*
Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics.*
Mickelthwaite, John and Adrian Wooldridge. *The Right Nation.*

The reading also includes selections from other books and articles. Most of these will be available either in printed reserve or outside my office using 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. 40% of course grade. **These are due on Monday at five pm the day before class. Please prepare ahead.**
- Final research paper (15-20 pages): 40% of course grade.
- Class attendance and participation 20% of course grade.

**Course Schedule**

1. **January 24. What does “liberalism” mean? A historical review and a commentary on current times.**
2. **January 31. Hartz, Dewey, and commentaries**

3. **February 7. Liberalism, the seminal political science statement**

4. **February 14. Liberalism and Conservatism from the 1960s to the 1980s**

5. **February 21. Christian, Corporate, and Neo-Conservatives.**

6. **February 28: Causes 1: Geography. The suburbs, the West, and the South**

7. **March 7: Causes 2: The End of the Cold War.**

8. **March 21: Causes 3: The Emerging Politics of Values**


10. April 4: Contrarian Views: The Republicans are misleading the voters.

11. April 11: Contrarian Views 2: The myth (?) of party polarization
