



Spring 2017 Writing intensive
PolS 379 Power in America

MW 1130-1245

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This class examines political, economic, and social power in the U.S., and the institutions through which it is exercised. The ability to analyze power effectively, to ask critical questions about authority and legitimacy, are central to a robust understanding of politics. How power is exerted and influences the individual is often subtle, and becomes engrained in bodily practices and circumstances we take for granted. Other times, power is so overt that the question becomes why it is so difficult to resist it. In this class, we will unravel some of the processes, complexities and troubles of how political power structures in the United States affect different American citizens in their day-to-day lives. We will tag alongside the rich and privileged as well as the most disenfranchised, as we connect the dots between structures and individuals.

Readings ((W))

Because this is a writing intensive course, our discussions of texts for this class will focus not only on the content of the text, but also its form. For each

reading, you will be asked to pinpoint your “favorite sentence” and why this sentence speaks to you. Part of the aim of our reading is to be inspired in terms of how to craft powerful political text aimed at magazines and books, and part of our learning is to see how different genres of political writing gets messages across in different ways.

Writing Assignments (W)

We will have two writing assignments through the semester. The first is to write a letter to the president, and the second and final assignment is a political essay. These genres of political writing represent the art of writing political text that is persuasive, interesting, engaging, beautiful, and entertaining, while still being rigorously based on research and facts. This kind of political writing is what you see in magazines and books rather than in political science journals.

Letter to the President – 2000 words (W)

The first writing assignment is a letter to the sitting U.S. president. Here, you present your honest views on several topics you find to be of crucial importance. The task is to write sincerely and with indignation, but also to present your opinions in a way that encourages the president to pay attention to what you have to say. You will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit your letter based on written feedback from the instructor.

Political Essay – 2000 words (W)

The final exam for the class is a political essay about a topic within American Politics, in which your task is to present one point or argument in an engaging, stimulating, concise and interesting way. The goal of the essay is to grab your reader’s attention and keep him or her focused until the end, while also educating the reader on your topic. After turning in your essay, you will receive written feedback from the instructor, as well as oral feedback from fellow students during a peer-review writing workshop in class, before finally submitting it.

Peer-reviewed writing workshop (W)

At the end of the semester, we will have a peer-review writing workshop where groups of students read and provide feedback for one another’s essays.

Discussion Launch

Each week, a group of students will present the text and ask the rest of the class questions about it.

Wednesday reaction emails (W)

Prior to each Wednesday class, each student will submit a reaction email for that day's text. Please email your reaction to [gitte\[a\]hawaii.edu](mailto:gitte[a]hawaii.edu) by Tuesday night. It's up to you how long your reaction is. These emails are a means for you to practice writing fast and in the moment.

Grading

Letter to the President: 25% (W)

Political Essay: 25% (W)

Discussion Launch: 10%

Wednesday Reaction Emails: 40% (W)

You are allowed up to 3 unexcused absences in this class. Every absence thereafter lowers your overall grade by 3%.

Books

Please acquire the following books for this class:

Ta-Nehisi Coates: *Between the world and me*. 2015.

Michelle Alexander: *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2012.

Matthew Desmond: *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. 2015.

The rest of the texts will be made available through the class website.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a learning, physical, psychiatric or other documented disability, the KOKUA program on campus is available to help to facilitate equal access to educational opportunities at UH. I encourage you to seek assistance there if you need it! www.hawaii.edu/kokua/

Plagiarism

Plagiarism essentially entails presenting someone else's work as your own. The UH student conduct code states that "Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, submitting, to satisfy an academic requirement, any document that has been copied in whole or in part from another individual's work without identifying that individual; neglecting to identify as a quotation a documented idea that has not been assimilated into the student's language and style; and paraphrasing a passage so closely that the reader is misled as to the source." I uphold a zero-tolerance policy towards plagiarism. If I find that you have plagiarized any of your assignments, you fail the class.

Weekly Schedule

Introduction

Week 1: What is Power?

M Jan. 9: Introduction to the class

W Jan 11: Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, pp. 208-226. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Week 2: Separation of powers: The U.S. wasn't designed to be a democracy

M Jan 16: Martin Luther King Jr. Day, no class

W Jan 18: Federalist paper no. 1. Alexander Hamilton, "General Introduction," and the U.S. Constitution.

Political Economy

Week 3: Big Money in U.S. Politics

M Jan 23: Compare and contrast Benjamin R. Page, "How Money Corrupts American Politics"; Bernie Sanders "Getting Big Money Out of Politics and Restoring Democracy"; and Hans von Spakovsky "Too much money in U.S. politics? No."

W Jan 25: Russel Berman, "How Can the U.S. Shrink the Influence of Money in Politics?" *The Atlantic*, March 16, 2016.

Week 4: Neoliberalism and Inequality

M Jan 30: Watch Jacob Kornbluth, *Inequality for All*. Documentary, 2013 1h 50m.

W Feb 1: Finish *Inequality for All* and George Monbiot: "Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems." *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016.

Racism

Week 5: The War on Black Bodies

M Feb 6: Watch Ava DuVernay, *13th* Documentary, 2016 1h 40m

W Feb 8: Finish *13th*, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. 2015. 1st half.

Week 6: Between the World and Me

M Feb 13: *Between the World and Me* 2nd half.

W Feb 15: Alex Gourevitch: "Gun control's racist reality: The liberal argument against giving police more power," *Salon* June 23, 2015.

Week 7: Mass Incarceration

M Feb 20: Presidents Day, no class

W Feb 22: Michelle Alexander: *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. 2012. Chapters 1 + 2.

Week 8 Mass Incarceration

M Feb 27: *The New Jim Crow* chapters 3 + 4.

W March 1: Loïc Wacquant: *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. 2009. Chapter 2, "The Criminalization of Poverty in the Post-Civil Rights Era.

Poverty

Week 9: Poverty and Homelessness

M March 6: *Punishing the Poor* chapter 5, The Coming of Carceral "Big Government."

W March 8: Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Prologue + chapters 1-3

Week 10: Homelessness and Profit

M March 13: *Evicted* chapters 4-8

W March 15: *Evicted*, chapters 17-24

Letter to the President Due (W)

U.S. Imperialism in Hawai'i

Week 11: Hawai'i: State or Nation?

M March 20: David Keanu Sai, "Slippery Path towards Hawaiian Indigeneity: An Analysis and Comparison between Hawaiian State Sovereignty and Hawaiian Indigeneity and Its Use and Practice in Hawai'i Today" *JL & Soc. Challenges* 10 (2008): 68.

W March 22: Excerpts from Willy Kauai, *The Color of Nationality: Continuities and Discontinuities of Citizenship in Hawai'i*. Dissertation, 2014.

Week 12: Spring Break

Environmental Politics

Week 13: This doesn't change anything

M April 3: Excerpts from Naomi Klein: *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate Change*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

W April 5: Excerpts from Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*.

Week 14: Power in the Anthropocene

M April 10: Jedediah Purdy: "The New Nature." *Boston Review*, January 11, 2016.

W April 12: Jairus Grove: "Response to Jedediah Purdy." *Boston Review*.

Current Events

Week 15: Pertinent Matters in America

M April 17: This week is open to whatever the class as a collective finds urgent, pertinent and worthwhile to analyze in relation to power in America in mid-April 2017. Texts TBA.

W April 19: Texts TBA. **First drafts of Political Essays due (W)**

Week 16: The Power of Trump

M April 24: April 30 marks Trumps 100th day in office. We will review what he has accomplished, and what his presidency has meant and done thus far. Texts TBA.

W April 26: More on President Trump. Is America Great Again? Texts TBA.

Week 17: Writing

M May 1: Peer-review writing workshop **(W)**

W May 3: Last day of instruction. Wrap-up, Q&A and evaluation.

Week 18: Political Essays due Wednesday May 10th **(W)**