GENED 1092: AMERICAN SOCIETY AND PUBLIC POLICY

General Education category: Histories, Societies, Individuals

Instructors: Theda Skocpol (Government) and Mary Waters (Sociology)

Fall 2020, Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45pm

All course meetings to be held online via Zoom link from course website.

https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/77518

In a period of contentious politics, Americans are debating fundamental issues about economic wellbeing and social justice. How can the nation expand opportunity and security for workers and families following years of rising socioeconomic inequalities and shifts in the relationship of families to work? How do we regulate immigration and citizenship and cope with surges in refugees and asylum seekers? How have ongoing partisan polarization and rising economic inequalities influenced U.S. responses to the current COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying economic crisis? Controversies in these areas are bitter and persistent, and this course will introduce students to the ways the United States has dealt with each of set of challenges.

“American Society and Public Policy” starts with an overview of major societal trends in inequality in the United States and then explores transformations in electoral and party politics, civic participation, and social movements. With these contexts specified, subsequent course modules focus on U.S. social programs, responses to the COVID pandemic, and developments in U.S. immigration policies. Taught by an interdisciplinary team, the course synthesizes several kinds of data and features excellent scholarship using various research approaches – including demography, social surveys, interviews, organizational analyses, and ethnographic observations. Sociological approaches are enriched by evidence about institutional arrangements and organized groups in politics. The course shows how present-day policy dilemmas and choices are shaped by previous accomplishments and shortfalls and reveals the ways in which debates are skewed by power differentials in society and in the governing process.

Students who take this course will have more to say and think about when they read a news article or hear about a policy debate on television or on the internet. The course illuminates U.S. policies about social welfare, health care, citizenship, and immigration, linking past successes and failures to current controversies – including those playing out in the November 2020 election – offering a deep understanding of the issues and values at stake. In section discussions and written assignments, students will also have opportunities to make real-world arguments, along with demonstrating mastery of course materials.
TEACHING STAFF

Instructors:

Theda Skocpol  
Assistant: Mary Abigail Peck (Abby)  
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Office Hours: TBD and by appointment (email Waters or Viator).

Teaching Fellows:

Elizabeth Thom, Head Teaching Fellow  
ethom@g.harvard.edu  
Office Hours: Mondays 3:00-5:00pm (Zoom link) or by appointment.

Aaron Fernandez, Teaching Fellow  
aaronfernandez@g.harvard.edu  
Office Hours: Thursdays 12:45-2:45pm or by appointment. Sign up on canvas.

Tyler Woods, Teaching Fellow  
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00-5:00pm (Zoom link) or by appointment.

Brianna Castro, Remote Support Teaching Fellow (RSTF)  
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COURSE STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

Students must achieve passing grades in all components of the course to achieve a passing grade overall. Lectures, section discussions, and readings will ordinarily cover somewhat different themes and materials -- and students are responsible for completing and showing mastery in all phases of the course. In other words, skipping sections or omitting assignments is not an option; such omissions cannot be redeemed by high grades in other class components.

Course Meetings. GenEd 1092 includes two lectures per week on Mondays and Wednesdays at 1:30-2:45pm plus a weekly section discussion at a time to be scheduled on Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. Students are required to attend lectures and sections and participate actively, and 15% of the final grade is based on section participation. Although PowerPoint summaries of lectures, and various figures and tables will be available on the course website after the lectures, personal attendance at all lectures in real time is required. Some lectures will start with short quizzes about the previous week’s readings and section discussions. Quiz results will be graded and will count for 5% of the final grade.

Four Short Writing Assignments. Requirements include two short individual and two short collaborative writing assignments, to be submitted to the course website, each of which will count for 15% of the final grade (60% total). Detailed instructions for each assignment will be posted on the course website. Here is an overview.

- **Short Writing Assignment No. 1**, due by 5:00pm on Sunday, September 20 [new due date, was originally Fri 9/18]. This assignment has two parts, the first part is individual, and the second part is collaborative. First, analyze the socioeconomic characteristics of your neighborhood and how much opportunity it offers to children growing up there. Second, compare your neighborhood with others on your team. Full instructions on course website.

- **Short Writing Assignment No. 2** (two due dates). This assignment has two parts, a blog post due Tuesday, October 6, and comments on two classmates’ blog posts due Sunday, October 11. This assignment takes advantage of the 2020 Presidential election to relate course readings and lectures to debates in American politics. Full instructions on course website. [link updated 9/23]

- **Short Writing Assignment No. 3**, due NEW: Saturday, October 31, Wednesday, October 28. [updated 10/17, and again on 10/30] Contrasting COVID responses in your neighborhood. Similar to assignment 1 but focusing on COVID response and the difference that local, state, and national policies make. This will also include an individual and collaborative component. Full instructions on course website.

- **Short Writing Assignment No. 4**, due Monday, November 23. Memo on immigration policy (individual assignment). Full instructions on course website.

Late assignments. Ordinarily, tardy assignments will lose one grade level for each day or fraction of a day in their delayed arrival. In other words, a B-plus assignment handed in two days late will receive the grade of B-minus. New deadlines are possible if
a student misses a deadline due to properly documented illness or difficulties associated with the pandemic crisis.

**Course Final Assignment.** Sometime after the last class meeting but no later than Saturday, December 5, a final assignment will be posted on the course website. Course staff will notify students as soon as it has been posted. The completed final assignment must be submitted to the course website by 11:59pm on Friday, December 11. The final assignment will count for 20% of the final grade. *Late final assignments will not be accepted*, unless the student has a verified medical or emergency excuse.

**There is NO three-hour final examination for this course.** All coursework will be completed by Friday, December 11.

**Course Collaboration Policy.** Grades for the two collaborative short writing assignments will be assigned to all students in the group. For the two individual short writing assignments, the quizzes, and the course final assignment, each person is expected to present his or her own work. Discussion is always encouraged, but when doing individual work on writing assignments or exams, students should not exchange written outlines or texts. Work presented by an individual student must always properly cite quotations and indicate sources of evidence for each claim. Although materials beyond the course may be used, students are expected to master the course readings and cite parts of them where relevant.
ACCESS TO READINGS [UPDATED 9/21]

All readings for this course are available online either directly or via HOLLIS. Links are provided in the Course Outline and Reading List (next section).

Accessing books and some book chapters online via HOLLIS. To facilitate remote learning during the pandemic, the Harvard Library has arranged for the below books, not ordinarily available in digital format, to be fully accessible online via HOLLIS. For some books, students are assigned to read the entire book and for other books, selected chapters are assigned (listed below). Note, depending on the agreement Harvard has made with the publisher, not all books may be completely downloadable or there may be a limit to how many users can access a book online via HOLLIS at one time.

Purchasing or renting books from the Harvard COOP. To avoid any unexpected constraints resulting from possible and varying limits to online access to books via HOLLIS, students may want to purchase or rent their own copies of assigned books. Print-format books (and non-HOLLIS digital versions if available) for GenEd 1092 will be available for purchase, as well as semester rental (with option to buy at semester’s end), from the Harvard COOP Textbooks Department. For fall 2020, the COOP offers free UPS Ground shipping for orders over $49.00 to the continental U.S. Note, for Alaska, Hawaii, and international addresses, shipping fees apply. For rental returns at semester’s end, the COOP provides a pre-paid shipping label. COOP book rental FAQs.

Book chapters assigned for week of September 14:


Book and book chapters assigned for week of September 28:


Book assigned for week of October 5:


Book assigned for week of October 12:


9/21 update: Online access to $2.00 a Day via HOLLIS is limited to only 3 users at a time and no portion of the book is downloadable via HOLLIS. If you have not already obtained a print copy, links to purchase an e-book are at the authors’ book website: [http://www.twodollarsaday.com/](http://www.twodollarsaday.com/). Vendors: Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Books A Million, Kobo, Sony.
UNIT I. SHIFTING INEQUALITIES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Lecture 1 (Wed. 9/02): Introduction to the Course (Skocpol and Waters)
Demographic Changes in the United States (Waters)

Discussion Sections: *Introductions first, then discuss neighborhood data on segregation and social mobility.*

Readings:

From Prof. Waters, 09/01: “I am making a change in the readings for the class. There are four articles assigned for this week. They all might be useful for your papers in the future, but for now the only article that you should read before section is the one by Craig, Rucker and Richeson. The other material will be covered this week and next in lecture and can be considered optional reading.”


**OPTIONAL:** Bruce Western and Becky Pettit. “*Incarceration and Social Inequality.*” *Daedalus* 139(3) (Summer 2010): 8-19.

**OPTIONAL:** Douglas S. Massey. “*Residential Segregation is the Linchpin of Racial Stratification.*” *City and Community* 15(1) (March 2016): 4-7.

NO CLASS (Mon. 9/07): University Holiday: Labor Day.

Lecture 2 (Wed. 9/09): Income Inequality and Declining Social Mobility. Neighborhoods. (Waters)

Discussion Sections: Finding data on Social Explorer and understanding local social mobility.

Readings:


Lecture 3 (Mon. 9/14): Gender and Family Changes in the United States (Waters)

Lecture 4 (Wed. 9/16): Debates about the Causes and Consequences of Rising U.S. Economic Inequality (Skocpol)

Discussion Sections: Why have economic inequalities increased, and does it matter?

Readings:

9/15 update -- If you have trouble accessing online, here is a pdf of Chapters 1-7. ROSENFELD.what-unions-no-longer-do.Chapters1-7.pdf


9/21 update -- If you have trouble accessing online, here is a pdf of Chapters 1-2. Hacker-Pierson.Winner-Take-All Politics.Ch01-02.

DUE Sun. 9/20 by 5:00pm: Short Writing Assignment No. 1. Instructions on website.
UNIT II. CHANGES IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Lecture 5 (Mon. 9/21): From Membership to Management in American Civic Life (Skocpol)

Lecture 6 (Wed. 9/23): Voters, Movements, and Money in U.S. Elections (Skocpol)

Discussion Sections: How have U.S. civic life and electoral democracy recently changed?

Readings: [UPDATED 9/21]


Lecture 7 (Mon. 9/28): From the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance and the Black Lives Matter Protests (Skocpol)

Lecture 8 (Wed. 9/30): The Future of American Democracy (Guest Lecturer)

Discussion Sections: Why is U.S. politics so polarized and can that change?

Readings: [UPDATED 9/21]


9/21 update: Online access to How Democracies Die via HOLLIS is limited to only 3 users at a time and no portion of the book is downloadable via HOLLIS. If you have not already obtained a print copy, links to purchase an e-book are on the publisher’s book page at https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/562246/how-democracies-die-by-steven-levitsky-and-daniel-ziblatt/. (Vendors: Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Books A Million, Google Play Store, Kobo.)


ADDED 9/21 (recommended) -- Prof. Dionne’s latest opinion pieces in the Washington Post are at https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/ ej-dionne-jr/.


DUE TUE. 10/06 by 11:59pm: Part 1 of Short Writing Assignment No. 2. Instructions on website. [link updated 9/23]
UNIT III. U.S. SOCIAL POLICY: OPPORTUNITY, SECURITY, INEQUALITY

Lecture 9 (Mon. 10/05): The Development of U.S. Social Policies (Skocpol)

Lecture 10 (Wed. 10/07): Policy Responses to Poverty (Waters)

Discussion Sections: How and why is the U.S. welfare state distinctive?

Readings:


DUE SUN. 10/11 by 11:59pm: Part 2 of Short Writing Assignment No. 2. Instructions on website. [link updated 9/23]

NO CLASS (Mon. 10/12): University Holiday: Indigenous Peoples’ Day (City of Cambridge); Columbus Day (Federal).

Lecture 11 (Wed. 10/14): Conflicts about Health Reform and Supports for Working Families (Skocpol)

Discussion Sections: Can U.S. social policies meet the needs of today's working families?

Readings:


9/21 update: Online access to $2.00 a Day via HOLLIS is limited to only 3 users at a time and no portion of the book is downloadable via HOLLIS. If you have not already obtained a print copy, links to purchase an e-book are at the authors’ book website: http://www.twodollarsaday.com/. Vendors: Amazon, Apple Books, Barnes & Noble, Books A Million, Kobo, Sony.


UNIT IV. THE UNITED STATES AND THE COVID PANDEMIC CRISIS

Lecture 12 (Mon. 10/19): Introduction to COVID (Waters)

Lecture 13 (Wed. 10/21): The Covid-19 Pandemic in Perspective (Guest Lecturer)
ALLAN BRANDT. Professor of the History of Science and Amalie Moses Kass Professor of the History of Medicine at Harvard.

Discussion Sections: How is the current pandemic similar or different from previous pandemics?

Readings:


DUE WED. 10/28 SAT 10/31 (2nd new due date) by 11:59pm: Short Writing Assignment No. 3. Instructions on website. [updated 10/17 and again on 10/30]

Lecture 14 (Mon. 10/26): Making Sense of U.S. COVID Responses (Skocpol)

Lecture 15 (Wed. 10/28): The Pandemic and America’s Economic Future (Guest Lecturer) [new date, was originally on 11/02]
JASON FURMAN. Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy, Harvard Kennedy School.

Discussion Sections: Why has the United States (and particular parts of it) struggled to limit COVID cases and deaths?

Readings: [updated on 10/13]


*NO LECTURE* on Mon. 11/02 [updated on 9/02]

- Lecture cancelled to allow students to participate in election activities if they choose.
- Everyone should observe the election end-stages in their area to prepare for Wed. 11/04 class discussion and section discussions.

Lecture 17 (Wed. 11/04): November 3 Aftermath – What Next? (Skocpol and Waters)

Discussion Sections: Discuss the election process and outcomes so far in students’ home states or perspectives from their countries abroad.

Readings:

Watch and read coverage of the 2020 election. Everyone should observe the election end-stages in their area to prepare for Wed. 11/04 class discussion and section discussions.
UNIT V. IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Lecture 18 (Mon. 11/09): Regulating Immigration: Development of Policy and Laws (Waters)

Lecture 19 (Wed. 11/11): How Immigration Law Currently Works (or Does Not Work) (Waters). Classes held on Veterans Day holiday.

Discussion Sections: Can and should laws effectively limit immigration to the U.S.?

Readings:


Lecture 20 (Mon. 11/16): Undocumented Immigrants, Dreamers, Deportation (Waters)

Lecture 21 (Wed. 11/18): Race and Legal Status (Waters)

Discussion Sections: How do legal status and race affect the integration of immigrants and their children?

Readings:


Mary C. Waters and Philip Kasinitz. “Race and Legal Status and Immigrant Social Mobility.” Daedalus, forthcoming 2021. [Link added 10/14]


DUE MON. 11/23 by 11:59pm: Short Writing Assignment No. 4. Instructions on website.

MOVE OUT – Sun. 11/22 by 5:00pm. Students living on campus must vacate campus by 5:00pm on Sunday, November 22.
Lecture 22 (Mon. 11/23): Integration of Immigrants and Their Children (Waters)

NO CLASS (Wed. 11/25): Thanksgiving recess (Wed.-Sun., 11/25-29)

NO SECTIONS: Thanksgiving recess (Wed.-Sun., 11/25-29)

Readings:


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Lecture 23 (Mon. 11/30): Future of American Public Policy (Skocpol and Waters)

Lecture 24 (Wed. 12/02): Course Wrap-Up and Class Discussion (Skocpol and Waters)

Discussion Sections: Course review and discuss immigration readings.

Readings: Review immigration readings from previous week for section discussion.

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THE COURSE FINAL ASSIGNMENT IS DUE TO THE COURSE WEBSITE BY 11:59PM ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11.

By Saturday, December 5 (or as soon as possible after the last class meeting), the final assignment will be posted on the course website. Course staff will notify students as soon as it has been posted. The completed final assignment must be submitted to the course website by 11:59pm on Friday, December 11. The final assignment will count for 20% of the final grade.

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