Government 110
American Culture Wars
Professor Shields
Office Hours: By appointment
Office Location: Kravis 238

Americans are divided over such issues as marriage, gender, religion, and crime. This course will explore these divisions through the writings of some of the most thoughtful conservative and progressive intellectuals. My hope is that exposure to these competing views will help you think more deeply and critically about issues that are not only politically and philosophically significant, but also of great personal relevance to the way *YOU* live your life.

Books:
Allen, Danielle, *Cuz* (2017).
Demond, Matthew, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016).
Douthat, Ross, *Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class* (2006).
Last, Jonathan, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting* (2013).
Mangual, Rafael, *Criminal (In)Justice* (2022).
Perry, Louise, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* (Polity, 2022).
Pinker, Steven, *Enlightenment Now* (2019).
Roose, Kevin, *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University* (2010).
Rosin, Hana, *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women* (2013).
Sandler, Lauren, *One and Only* (2013).
Vance, J.D., *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016).
Waite, Linda and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (2001).
Readings marked with an "" can be found on Sakai*.

Films:
Funny People (2009)
The Social Network (2010)
Mud (2012)
Knocked Up (2007)
Coda (2021), Apple TV only
Gran Torino (2008)
It's a Wonderful Life (1946)

Grades:
3 Essays: 35%
Weekly Quizzes: 35%
Participation: 30%

Essay Topics and Instructions:
Films are American cultural artifacts. And since this is a class on the American cultural wars, you must write essays on films that explore the themes of this class. Each course topic has been assigned a film as follows:

Marriage: *Funny People* (Due February 2)
Education: *The Social Network* (Due February 16)
Inequality: *Mud* (Due March 1)
Gender: *Knocked Up* (Due March 22)
Children: *Coda* (Due April 5)
Crime: *Gran Torino* (Due April 19)
Progress: *It's a Wonderful Life* (Due April 26)

*You must write **three** essays* on any of the seven course topics (listed above). For each, discuss the ways in which the film captures and/or obscures truths about that week's topic. Think of yourself as a cultural critic. Use the social scientific knowledge and theory you have learned to make an argument about social reality. *Don't tell me what the authors would think of the film – tell me what YOU think*.

Each essay should run about 5-8 pages. To get an "A" your papers must include the following:

- A concise thesis
- Clear prose. I will grade down writing that is disorganized or otherwise hard to follow.
- Wide and deep use of evidence from the class books that supports your thesis, with citations (e.g., Rosin, pp. 33-35)
- An engagement with evidence and/or interpretations that complicate your thesis. Always consider: How might a critic of your thesis respond?

Since you have so much flexibility, *late papers will generally not be accepted*. *Papers that use AI will receive a failing grade*.

Weekly Quizzes:
There will be a reading quiz every week. They will take place at the beginning of class and include a few questions. The form of the questions will vary some – so, they might include short-answer, fill in the blank, multiple choice, and true-false formats. At the end of the semester, I will calculate your grade as a simple percentage. I will drop your two lowest exam scores, including zeros resulting from *any* absences.

Discussions:
To get an "A" for participation you should do the following:

- NO laptops in class.
- Phones silenced in backpacks.
- Have an agenda. That is, come to class with concrete things you want to discuss.
- Regularly respond in thoughtful ways to other students' questions and arguments. That means that your participation grade depends on how well you listen and engage. Students who only show an interest in their intellectual agenda will be downgraded.
- Be intellectually humble and playful. Try out different ideas even if you think they might be wrong.
- Be kind to one another.
- Observe the Vegas Rule: What happens in GOV 110, stays in GOV 110. While it's great for class conversations to spill outside of the classroom, one should never publicly shame another student for their in-class comments, especially on social media.

Course Schedule:

Introduction and Overview
(January 17)

Part 1. Marriage

Waite and Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*, chapters 1-5, 8-10.
(January 24)

Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History*, intro, chapters 1, 2, 16, 17.*
Eric Klinenberg, *Going Solo*, introduction (pp. 1-23) and chapter 2.*
(January 31)

Part 2. Education

Douthat, *Privilege,* prologue and chapters 1-6.
(February 7)

Roose, *The Unlikely Disciple*, entire
(February 14)

Part 3. Inequality

Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, entire.
(February 21)

Desmond, *Evicted*, prologue, chapters 1-12, and epilogue.
(February 28)

Part 4. Sex and Gender

Perry, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, chapters 1, 3, 4, 7 and conclusion.
Mona Charen, *Sex Matters*, pp. 161-73, 207-33.*
(March 6)

SPRING BREAK
(March 13)

Rosin, *The End of Men*, introduction, chapters 1-7 and conclusion.
(March 20)

Part 5. Children

Last, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting,* entire.
(March 27)

Sandler, *One and Only*, entire.
(April 3)

Part 6. Crime and Punishment

Mangual, *Criminal Injustice*, introduction, chapters 1, 2, 5-7, and conclusion.
(April 10)

Allen, *Cuz*, entire, ***except*** for chapters 16-18, and 23. (In chapter 20, you can skim Michael's fire narrative.)
(April 17)

Part 7. Progress

Sohrab Ahmari, *The Unbroken Thread*, excerpts.*
Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, excerpts.*
Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 15, 17, and 18.
(April 24)

Class Wrap Up and Party
(May 1)