

“We the People”: How We Imagine Collectives in America

Instructors:

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Course Description: The U.S. was founded on the idea of individual rights, but politics also require a vision of collectivity. In this class we will explore four ways that collectivity is imagined and enacted: the world, the public, the nation, and the common. We will study these different visions of collective life by examining the assumptions they make about what that “collective” is. What is necessary for political action within each of these forms, and who are the ideal people that act within them? How do people’s vision of the collective they are part of shape their actions? To try to answer these questions, we will look at examples of groups in the U.S. that utilized visions of a powerful collective.

Objectives: Together we will build a community of learners, supporting and challenging each other in critical engagement with texts and ideas. Members of this community will be expected to participate fully through careful listening, speaking, reading, reflecting and writing. This class is also intended to develop skills in critical thinking, nuanced analysis and writing in a way that demonstrates comprehension, creativity, courageous interrogation and the strength of each participant’s particular voice.

Specifically, students will be expected to develop working definitions of the world, publics, the nation and the commons. A working definition should include perspective on the political and historical significance of these concepts.

Requirements & Grading

Reading: You are expected to come to class having carefully and thoughtfully read all assigned texts by the day for which they are assigned. You should understand what the author is saying (or know what parts confuse you) and be prepared to critically engage the ideas presented. We encourage you to follow lines of inquiry that excite your passions. *You will be given reading questions in advance and will be called on in class to read your answers to those questions as part of class discussion; this will count toward your participation grade.*

Required Texts: All required readings for this course will be available as PDFs on Blackboard.

Speaking & Listening: As a learning community, discussion will be a central part of our time together. To this end, you must read carefully and come prepared to talk about what you read. Questions (to the texts and to each other) are welcome! We will use language with attention to justice (e.g. if you mean humanity, do not say “mankind”).

Lead Discussion: You and a classmate will be responsible for co-leading one class

discussion during the semester. This will involve doing the reading ahead of time and meeting with an instructor during office hours before the class you are leading. You and your partner will also need to write at least three reading questions for each reading assigned to the class on the day you are leading discussion. You and your partner will email these questions to an instructor to get them approved and then post them on Blackboard at least ONE WEEK before the day you lead the discussion. In addition you and your partner will also need to prepare brief comments on the readings in which you summarize key concepts and arguments and relate the readings to each other and previous course material. What you will NOT do is simply summarize the readings. If there are things in the reading that you do not understand or that you feel need to be clarified, feel free to bring these up as questions for the class to address.

Short Writing Assignments: You are required to write four short (4-6 pages) papers, one for each unit. These short papers will be written in response to question prompts given by the instructors and will not require outside research. All papers must be typed and submitted on time to be accepted. **RESPECT YOUR OWN WORK--EDIT WITH CARE.** Use 1” margins, double spacing and Times New Roman 12 pt font. You must refer to the readings and closely analyze them. Cite all paraphrases and quotations using MLA style.

Presentations: To ensure that we learn from each other and to develop the ability to have productive dialogues about texts, we will spend the last two weeks on group presentations. This presentation will count as your **final exam**. Each group will be made up of 5 people and will have 30 minutes with 15 minutes for questions from the class. Further directions will be provided closer to the end of the semester but please keep your eye out for topics that interest you and people with whom you might like to work.

Grading:

- Leading Discussion (20%)
 - Unit Papers (40%)
 - Final group presentation (30%)
 - Class participation, which includes **speaking and listening**. (10%)
- In general, we will be looking for demonstration of growth and a close and inquisitive engagement with the texts. **Please note: After two unexcused absences, your grade will be reduced one full step (i.e. A to A-) for each day you miss.**

Course Schedule

1/11: Introductions and Expectations

Critical Reading Skills I: Discussion and practice of strategies for critical reading of popular ideas—classroom activity on “*e pluribus unum*”

UNIT ONE: The World

1/13: Mapping project assignment: Draw a map of a collective of which you are part: Church, Family, Community, University, Team, Class, Political Party, City, Neighborhood

1/18: Critical Reading Skills II: Discussion and practice of strategies for critical reading of academic texts.

Thomas Friedman, "While I Was Sleeping," *The World is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the 21st Century*.

1/20: Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries" *Public Culture*. 14.1(Winter 2002): 91-124.

1/25: Dilip Paremshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture*. 14.1(Winter 2002): 1-19

1/25: Denis Cosgrove, "Contested Global Visions: One-World, Whole-Earth, and the Apollo Space Photographs," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (Jun., 1994), pp.270-294.

2/1: First paper due.

Campus tours based on locations developed in the previous class. Each group will be required to collectively answer a worksheet.

UNIT TWO: The Nation

2/3: Ernest Gellner, "Definitions," and "What is a Nation?" *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, 1-7, 53-62.

Anthony D. Smith, "The Concept and Its Varieties," *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2008, 12-27.

2/8: Joanne H. Wright, "The Origins Imperative in Political Theory: An Introduction," *Origins Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 3-23.

2/10: Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96.1 (Winter 1967), 1-21.

Benedict Anderson, "The Origins of National Consciousness," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed., New York: Verso, 2006, 37-46.

2/15: Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, New York: Verso, 2011, 86-106.

2/17: Native American Nation

Circe Sturm, "Race as Nation, Race as Blood Quantum: The Racial Politics of Cherokee Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century," *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002, 52-81.

Montserrat Guibernau, "Nations and Nationalism in Native America," *Nations Without States: Political Communities in a Global Age*, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1999, 76-82.

3/1: Black Nationalism

Jeffrey Stout, "Theses on Black Nationalism," *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 234-56.

3/3: Frances E. White, "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse, and African American Nationalism," *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 130-55.

3/4-3/14: SPRING BREAK

UNIT THREE: The Public

3/15: Second paper due.

Immanuel Kant, Immanuel. "What is Enlightenment?" *Berlin Monthly*, 1784 (pp. 1-6).
(Contemporary public example from popular journalism, e.g. Tea Party)

3/17: John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1946 [1927].

(Contemporary public example from popular journalism, e.g. Tea Party)

3/22: Jurgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. Thomas Burger, with Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991 (pp. 14-42).

(Contemporary public example from popular journalism, e.g. Tea Party)

3/24: Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2002, 65-124.

(Contemporary public example from popular journalism, e.g. Tea Party)

3/29: Christian Lundberg, "Enjoying God's Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95: 4 (2009): 387 — 411.

(Contemporary public example from popular journalism, e.g. Tea Party)

Unit Four: The Common

3/31: Massimo De Angelis, "Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital's 'Enclosures.'" *Subverting the Present, Imagining the Future: Insurrection, Movement, Commons*. Werner Bonefeld, Ed., New York: Autonomedia, 2009. (p. 27-50)

4/5: Third paper due.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. "Introduction: The Becoming-Prince of the Multitude," *Commonwealth*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. vii-xiv.

Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Common," *Turbulence*, 2009. (1000 word essay)
<http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/commonism/>

4/07: Black Radicalism

Huey Newton, "Intercommunalism," *The Huey Newton Reader*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002 [1979]. (pp.181-195)

Elaine Brown, "Living for the People," *A Taste of Power: a Black Woman's Story*. New York: Doubleday, 1993. (132-152)

4/12: The Knowledge Commons: the university?

Caffentzis, George. "Autonomous Universities and the making of the Knowledge Commons," *Russel Scholar Lecture*, 2009. Lecture Transcript, pages 1-12.

Also browse blogs: Beneath the university: the commons. <http://beneaththeu.org>
Edu-factory http://www.edu-factory.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=116&Itemid=1

4/14: The Knowledge Commons: the internet

Lawrence Lessig, Introduction and Chapters 1-2, *Free Culture*, New York: Penguin, 2005. (pp. 1-31)

4/19 McKenzie Wark, "Abstraction," "Property." and "World", *A Hacker Manifesto*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. (sections 1-23 8 pages; sections 176-206, 8 pages; sections 346-389-12 pages;

4/21: Group Presentations

4/26: Group Presentations

Plagiarism

Please be sure that you have read and understand the Writing Center's handout on plagiarism. If you have any questions concerning this document or plagiarism in general, be certain that you get them answered.

Please note that plagiarism is grounds for automatic failure of this course.

Email

Please email instructors only with questions that cannot wait until office hours or the next class. We will respond to emails within 24 hours, but we will not answer emails regarding information that can be found on the syllabus or regarding what you missed

when you missed class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to contact a fellow class member to figure out what you missed.

Cell phones

YOU MUST TURN YOUR CELL PHONE OFF DURING CLASS. Not “vibrate,” but OFF. NO TEXT MESSAGING IN CLASS. If your phone rings during class, it will be confiscated.

Laptops

You may bring your laptop to class and use it for taking notes during class. Please print all readings and notes. Please refrain from using your laptop for non-course purposes during class. If we have any reason to suspect that you are using your laptop for non-course related purposes during class, we will ask you to close it.

Disclaimer

The readings and screenings have been selected, in line with the course objectives, to help foster challenging discussions in the class and hopefully beyond. These works have been chosen assuming that you are not only legally adults, but that you understand higher education to involve encounters with ideas and arguments that may question your own beliefs and assumptions. Some of our readings or screenings may startle you or challenge you. Some of the material might be considered controversial or even offensive. Such reactions will be welcomed in class and respected, but they will be received in the spirit of extending discussion rather than forestalling it.