

ANTH 225: Political Anthropology (Syllabus is subject to change)

Mon / Wed 10:10a-11:30a
OLIN 305

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-4:30p in Hopson 303 or by appointment
Signup at: www.jonahrubin.com/office-hours or email jrubin@bard.edu

Moodle2 Enrollment Key: resistF16

Course Overview: How do anthropologists approach the study of politics? What sorts of methods are appropriate to understanding the actions of institutions, states, and individuals? And just what do we mean when we talk about “politics” in the first place? This course explores the ways social groups enact, resist, and transform power relations in various times and places. Through an analysis of the 2016 elections in the United States and other contemporary case studies, we look at how anthropological theory and ethnographic practices can illuminate political phenomena, from the dynamics of small social groups to large-scale electoral politics and including the micropolitics of race, gender, and social identity. Subjects explored in this class will include classic anthropological analyses of small-scale societies, the formation of the modern nation-state, civil society organizations, post-colonial forms of resistance, and identity politics. While the course focuses primarily on understanding various political forms, students will also be encouraged to apply readings to theorize modes of inhabiting and transforming power relations they encounter in their everyday life. Assignments will provide students the opportunity to apply these readings to examine political processes on campus, in the United States, and around the world.

Note: Although many political anthropologists (myself included) are involved in various political movements, our goal is not, in the first instance, to try to resolve these debates. Instead, we focus on why debates play out in the ways they do, how certain issues become salient in particular times and places, the assumptions that underlie our ideas and beliefs, and the workings of power in society. That said, by its very nature, any course on political anthropology must discuss difficult and often-uncomfortable topics. This will especially be the case this semester, as we will be using the ongoing U.S. quadrennial elections as a natural case study through which to consider the ideas and themes we encounter in this class. It is very likely that you will disagree – perhaps even passionately – with things your classmates say at some point in the semester. You may even disagree with things that the professor says. This is highly encouraged. In order to facilitate a productive discussion, I urge you to embrace the principle of generosity, assuming the very best interpretation possible of your classmates’ comments. At the same time, I also urge you all to adopt a position of humility, assuming that if someone objects to a point we make, there may be a valid reason for it.

Assignments

- **Participation (10%)**
- **Online Reading Responses (10%)**
- **Journal (15%)**
- **Debate Analysis Paper (15%)**
- **Question Response Essay (20%)**
- **Final Paper (30%)**

Class participation (10% of final grade) will include attendance of classes, active participation in classroom discussions, and attendance at the instructors' office hours. Attending all classes is mandatory, unless the student makes arrangements with me prior to her absence. Students are expected to read all required readings carefully and to come to class prepared to discuss them. And although there exists a wide range of ways to participate in the course (including in class, office hours, and online), active participation is a requirement for this course, not extra credit.

Moodle Responses (10% of final grade): Over the course of the semester, students will post ten (10) short reactions to the readings on the Moodle discussion board. Posts should not exceed one paragraph in length. Your posts should highlight one aspect of the text you would like to discuss further in class. Please cite a specific page or passage in your post. This might be something you found provocative, problematic, or even perplexing. You may wish to draw on your journal for inspiration. We will begin each class with at least one of these posts, so please come to class prepared to present your thoughts to the class. Please post your responses no later than 10 p.m. on the night before class.

Journal (15% of final grade): Throughout the semester, students will keep an ethnographic journal in which you document observations related to class materials. This could include news articles you read that relate to our class readings, new questions prompted by the readings in your daily interactions, or even things you don't (yet) have a good explanation for that you think further reading in political anthropology may help you to better understand. In addition to developing your own ethnographic sensibilities, this journal should help you develop ideas for your longer essays. Your journal can be a physical notebook or an electronic word document. Over the course of the semester, you should acquire at least 10 pages of notes. You will turn in a selection of your notes for review at two points in the semester.

Debate Analysis Paper (15% of final grade): You will watch at least one of the U.S. Presidential debates. (We will gather as a class for at least one debate and will hold a brief discussion on it afterwards, to focus on the assignment. Attendance is optional.) Using the class readings, you will write a 1-2 page analysis of some aspect of the debate. This may be an analysis of one or both candidates' overall performance, an interrogation of a single moment in the debate, or even an analysis of the premises that underlie the debate questions. This paper will be due one week after the final debate, though you may hand it in at any time after the first debate.

Question Response Paper (20% of final grade): Approximately half way through the semester, you will write a 4-5 page paper in response to questions distributed by the professor.

Final Paper (30% of final grade): Consult your previous papers as well as your journal. Choose a previous work of yours and develop it into an 8-10 page paper. Your paper should engage the readings we have done in class in order to analyze a case study of contemporary politics. You are allowed – in fact, you are encouraged – to re-use elements from the previous work in your final paper. However, you are expected to respond to the feedback you have received earlier in the semester.

Students who have already matriculated may alternatively use this course to undertake a short-term ethnographic research project into a topic related to the political anthropology (min. 25 pages). This may include alternative final projects, such as photography essays, documentary films, or artistic productions, so long as they are accompanied by a written explication. Students choosing this option will not have to write a journal, debate analysis paper, or question response essay. Instead, the final project will count as 65% of your grade. If you are choosing this option, you must inform me and receive approval for your project by the end of the 3rd week of the semester.

Policies

Screens Policy: My preference is that no electronic devices be used in class. However, since many of our readings are articles and book chapters and, recognizing the high costs of printing, I will permit you to have laptops or tablets with the readings pulled up on two conditions. First, you must take notes on the reading, using a program like Skim or in a separate Word document. Second, that you continue to take classroom notes on a paper notebook. Phones are not permitted under any circumstances. If you need an exemption to this policy, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Policy: This class has a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. As per Bard College's Academic Regulations (<http://www.bard.edu/undergraduate/requirements/>): "The Bard faculty regards acts of plagiarism very seriously...Students who are found to have plagiarized or engaged in academic dishonesty will be placed on academic probation." Plagiarism will also result in an automatic failure in the course.

Disability Policy: If you require any accommodation for this course, please present the instructor with a copy of your Accommodation Verification Letter as soon as possible. Bard College's Disability Support Coordinator can be contacted at: disabilityservices@bard.edu or 845.758.7532.

Absence Policy: You are expected to attend all classes, arriving on time and remaining for the duration of the class. After more than two unexcused absences, I reserve the right to lower your final grade. After more than 6 unexcused absences, I reserve the right to withhold a passing grade. I will count two late-arrivals as equivalent to one absence.

Required Texts: Most readings will be available electronically through Moodle. The following exceptions will be available for purchase at the campus Barnes and Noble:

- Hetherington, Kregg. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Silverstein, Michael. 2003. *Talking Politics: The Substance of Style from Abe to "W."* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

Session 1.1 (29 Aug 16): Introduction

- What is your first political memory?
- What is politics?

Unit 1: Foundations of Political Anthropology

Session 1.2 (31 Aug 16): Fortes, M. and E. E. Evans-Pritchard. 1940 *African Political Systems*. Oxford University Press, London. [Preface and Introduction]. Xi-xxiii; 1-23

Session 2.1 (5 Sep 16): Gluckman, M. 1963. "Ritual Rebellion in South-East Africa." *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*. Free Press, Glencoe, New York, pp. 110-136

Comaroff, J. L. 1978 Rules and Rulers: Political Processes in a Tswana Chiefdom. *Man* (NS), 13(1): 1-20.

Session 2.2 (7 Sep 16): McKinnon, Susan. 2000. "Domestic Exceptions: Evans-Pritchard and the Creation of Nuer Patrilineality and Equality." *Cultural Anthropology* 15(1): 35-83.

Session 3.1 (12 Sep 16): Crenshaw, Kimberle 1993. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43:1241-1299.

Puar, Jasbir K. "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory." *philoSOPHIA* 49-66.

Unit 2: What is a Nation? What is a State?

Session 3.2 (14 Sep 16): Anderson, Benedict 1983. "Introduction" and "Memory and Forgetting." In, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, pp. 1-9, 187-211.

Weber, Max. 1946. "The Nation." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 171-179.

Session 4.1 (19 Sep 16): Abrams, P. 1988 Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State

(1977). *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1): 58-89.

Mitchell, T. P. 1991 The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics. *The American Political Science Review* 85(1): 77-96

Session 4.2 (21 Sep 16): Scott, J. C. 1998 *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition*, New Haven: Yale University Press. 11-52

Session 5.1 (26 Sep 16): Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 1988. "The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship" *Critical Inquiry* 24 (2): 575-610.

Scott, Joan W. 2005. "Symptomatic Politics: The Banning of Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 23(3): 106-127.

☞ **30 Sep 16: Journal Review Exercise:**

Hand in a selection of 1 page from your field notes journal. Write one additional paragraph on why you have selected this portion of your field notes and how it exemplifies, complicates, differs from, or otherwise relates to one author we have read so far. Submit via Moodle.

Unit 3: Globalization and Neoliberalism

Session 5.2 (28 Sep 16): Trouillot, Michel-Rolph 2001. "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization," *Current Anthropology*, 42(1): 125-138.

Ho, Karen. 2005. "Situating Global Capitalisms: A View from Wall Street Investment Banks." *Cultural Anthropology* 20(1): 68-96.

Session 6.1 (3 Oct 16): Comaroff and Comaroff 2012. "Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-ology: Thoughts on Citizenship and Difference" and "Nations With/Out Borders: The Politics of Being and the Problem of Belonging." In *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Towards Africa*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, pp. 65-108.

Session 6.2 (5 Oct 16): Mbembé, J. A. 1992 The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony. *Public Culture* 4(2):1-30.

Maldonado Aranda, S. 2013. "Stories of Drug Trafficking in Rural Mexico: Territories, Drugs and Cartels in Michoacán." *ERLACS*. 94: 43-66.
doi:<http://doi.org/10.18352/erlacs.8393>

10 October 2016: Fall Break. No class. Enjoy!

Session 7.1 (12 Oct 16): Ferguson, James 1994. "The Anti-Politics Machine." In *The Anti-politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 251-277.

Writing Workshop #1: What is a Thesis?

☞ **14 Oct 2016: Question Response Paper Due via Moodle**

Question: So far, we have encountered numerous different understandings of what constitutes politics. Choose one example from your field notes journal. Drawing on at least one author we have read so far, explain how the subjects of your journal understand politics. Then, explain how their perspective would differ if they understood politics in a way developed by a second author (or group of authors).

Unit 4: Bureaucracy and Transparency

Session 8.1 (17 Oct 16): Weber, Max. 1946. "Bureaucracy." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 196-244.

Session 8.2 (19 Oct 16): Hetherington, Kregg. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 1-23.

Session 9.1 (24 Oct 16): Hetherington, Kregg. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 143-183.

Session 9.2 (26 Oct 16): Hetherington, Kregg. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 184-222.

☞ **28 Oct 16: Last day to hand in your debate analysis paper**

Unit 5: Authority

Session 10.1 (31 Oct 16): Arendt, Hannah. 1954. What Is Authority? In, *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin.

Session 10.2 (2 Nov 16): Silverstein, Michael. 2003. *Talking Politics: The Substance of Style from Abe to "W."* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, pp. 1-32.

Silverstein, Michael and Michael Lempert. 2016. "Unusual Politics as Usual?" *Anthropology News*. Available at: <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2016/10/12/unusual-politics-as-usual/>

Session 11.1 (7 Nov 16): Silverstein, Michael. 2003. *Talking Politics: The Substance of Style from Abe to "W."* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, pp. 68-116, 128-132.

Session 11.2 (9 Nov 16): Election Day Analysis Discussion

Session 12.1 (12 Nov 16) Coles, Kimberley A. 2004. "Election Day: The Construction of Democracy through Technique." *Cultural Anthropology* 19 (4): 551–80.

Unit 6: Grassroots Politics and Policing

Session 12.2 (14 Nov 16) Foucault, Michel. 1997. "Lecture 11: 17 March 1976." *Society Must Be Defended*. New York: Picador, pp. 239 – 263.

Session 13.1 (21 Nov 16): Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics." *Public Culture* 14(1): 21-47.

Session 13.2 (23 Nov 16): Nelson, Dianne M. 1996. "Maya Hackers and the Cyberspatialized Nation-State: Modernity, Ethnostalgia, and a Lizard Queen in Guatemala." *Cultural Anthropology* 11(3): 287-308.

Session 14.1 (28 Nov 16): Graeber, David. 2007. "On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological role of the Police in American Culture." In *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, pp. 375-410

Session 14.2 (30 Nov 16): Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. 2015. "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42 (1): 4–17. doi:10.1111/amet.12112.

Selections from Burton, Orisanmi. "Black Lives Matter: A Critique of Anthropology." Hot Spots, Cultural Anthropology website, June 29, 2015.

<https://culanth.org/fieldsights/691-black-lives-matter-a-critique-of-anthropology>

Session 15.1 (5 Dec 16): Benjamin, Walter 1986. "Critique of Violence." In *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, pp. 277-300.

7 Dec 16: Advising Day: No Class

☞ 7 Dec 2016 Journal Review Exercise

Send one page from your journal to your randomly assigned partner by 2 Dec 2016. Accompany your journal with a 2-page proposal and/or outline for your final paper. Your proposal should have a tentative thesis statement, an explanation of how it relates to the literature we have encountered in class, and an explanation of how your journal relates to the literature. You do not have to have a fully developed thesis yet, but the topical links between your journal and the cited literature should be clear. Email your partner one to two paragraphs of feedback on their journal and cc jrubin@bard.edu. In your feedback, you may wish to point towards other ways of approaching their problem, ways of refining their thesis statement, or suggestions for different ways of approaching the literature. For this

exercise, you are being graded *both* on your papers *and* on the feedback you provide to your partner feedback.

Session 16.1 (12 Dec 16): Completion Days

Session 16.2 (14 Dec 16): Completion Days

☞ **FINAL PAPERS DUE 23 December 2016**