Identity Politics  
Politics 240  
Spring 2013

Professor: Dane Imerman  
Office: Rice 213  
Office Hours: Wed and Thurs, 10:30-12:00  
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Course Overview

Politics can be broadly defined as the process of determining who gets what, when, and how. It is motivated by purposive actors pursuing their interests in a social arena through a variety of possible actions (force, coercion, persuasion, compromise, etc.). Therefore, determining interests is paramount to understanding, predicting, and shaping political outcomes. Social identity shapes how actors perceive themselves and others. Thus, identity can tell us how interests are constructed, and how actors respond to others’ actions. It exerts a powerful influence over virtually all social interaction, and is so embedded in our social experience that many take identity’s existence and effects for granted in the everyday choices we make.

This course moves the study of identity from intuition to systematic investigation. It explores the origins, reproduction, and effects of social identity from a variety of perspectives – including theories of the self, the group, and society, and issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nationality. This entails two primary goals. First, an introduction to the literature should demonstrate how research on identity is conducted by social scientists, and should equip you with the basic tools necessary to engage the field in your own research. This aspect of the class will be the focus of the formal course assignments. Second, and more broadly, I hope both the theoretical and substantive issues we examine in class will lead to a greater appreciation for the importance of identity in how we construct the reality around us. The ability to recognize the social forces at work in identity formation and reproduction, and an awareness and understanding of identity’s effects, are deeply empowering and enduring skills that will help you fruitfully understand and influence your social environment now and in the future.

Expectations

Class will be conducted as a hybrid of lecture and seminar. The balance between them will be determined by the relative difficulty of a given day’s material, your level of preparation, and your active participation in discussions. Regular attendance and a high level of participation are expected. This obviously entails preparing the course readings before the class for which they are assigned. [Hint: I strongly encourage reading with a highlighter, pen, and paper. Quickly summarizing the authors’ arguments (in paragraph or bulleted format) will greatly increase your retention of the material and will certainly help you in class discussions and on assignments – which will, in turn, make the entire experience more enjoyable.]
Assignments and Grading

The course grade is broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;L Questions</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm #2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anderson Questions</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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*** Late Assignments will only be accepted with a formal excused absence (see below) ***

**B&L Questions** – To begin your introduction to identity politics, we will be reading *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (B&L), a foundational text on the subject of socialization. In order to ensure your understanding of the material, I have developed a number of questions to be answered about the text as you read. Your answers will be due at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 19.

**Midterm #1** – Scheduled for Tuesday, March 12, Midterm #1 will cover everything read and discussed up to that point in the course. It will be a mixture of multiple choice, matching, short answer, and/or essay. A study sheet distributed the week before the exam will include key terms and the specific structure of the exam.

**Midterm #2** – Scheduled for Thursday, April 11, Midterm #2 will cover the material covered in the 3 weeks after Midterm #1. Though not substantively comprehensive, you will be expected to know and apply the general theories and concepts from earlier in the course. The structure of the exam will be similar to Midterm #1, and a study guide will be distributed prior to the exam.

**Anderson Questions** – After Midterm #2 we will be reading *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by Benedict Anderson, an important work on the issue of national identity. As with B&L, I have developed a number of questions to be answered about the text as you read. Question handouts will be distributed in class prior to the assignment, and answers will be due in class on Thursday, April 18.

**Final Paper** – Your final paper will be a 10-12 page research paper on the topic of nationality. Later in the quarter you will each be asked to choose a topic in international politics to address through the lens of nationalism for a particular country/nation. While more specific guidelines will be distributed in class, you are encouraged to choose a topic and country of particular interest to you. A hard copy of your paper should be placed in my department mailbox (Rice 216) no later than 4pm on Monday, May 13.
Participation – Regular participation in class discussions is expected. Identity politics is not black and white, and uncovering the shades of gray requires thoughtful discussion. Note that participation is more than just attendance, and more than just asking questions about readings or lecture material. Participation involves adding something new to the discussion, such as sharing a particular interpretation of the material or expressing reasons for your opinions on the material.

Attendance – Regular attendance is required and will be taken daily. The lectures and class discussions are critical for developing an understanding of the broader themes we address, so missing class will leave you with an incomplete understanding of course materials. Therefore, each absence beyond the first will result in a 3% reduction of your final grade. Note that attendance is taken at the beginning of class: 2 tardies = 1 absence. Extreme circumstances will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis (usually through make-up assignments), but the following should be kept in mind:

- Non-emergency doctor and dentist appointments are not valid excuses; these should be made around your class schedule.
- Jobs, clubs, and other organizations do not take precedence over your class schedule.
- In order to request a make-up for an absence, notification of the absence must have been given beforehand with a valid excuse (when possible).

Required Texts

* All 3 can be purchased new on Amazon for $37 w/ free shipping, and maybe cheaper used.
* All other course readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Disability Services

If you have a documented disability that needs academic accommodation, please speak with Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (G-27 Peters Hall) and with me as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Academic Misconduct

It is your responsibility to have a clear understanding of the Honor Code and what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, and all other aspects of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure about the boundaries of fair use, citation, etc, please do not hesitate to contact me. Additionally, you will be required to write out and sign the Honor Pledge (“I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment”) on each assignment in the course.
**Class Schedule**

**Week 1 – Introduction to Identity**

**Tues, Feb 5 – Course Introduction**

**Thur, Feb 7 – The Basics of Identity**

**Week 2 – Individual and Group Dynamics of Identity**

**Tues, Feb 12 – Identity and the Self**


**Thur, Feb 14 – Inter-Group Difference**


**Week 3 – The Social Construction of Reality**

**Tues, Feb 19 – B&L**


*** B&L Questions due at the beginning of class ***

**Thur, Feb 21 – B&L Continued**

**Week 4 – Constructing Gender and Race in America**

**Tues, Feb 26 – Gender Socialization**


**Thur, Feb 28 – Racial Socialization**

Week 5 – Race, Gender, and Affirmative Action

Tues, Mar 5 – Literature in Race and Gender: The Bluest Eye
- Morrison, Toni, The Bluest Eye, ALL.

Thur, Mar 7 – Debate on Affirmative Action

Week 6 – (Midterm and) Power and Identity

Tues, Mar 12 – Midterm #1

Thur, Mar 14 – Four Faces of Power
- Gaventa, John, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley, pp. 3-32.

Week 7 – Contesting Meanings, Shaping Identities

Tues, Mar 19 – Identity Entrepreneurs
- Hitler, Adolf, Mein Kampf, pp. 308-29.

Thur, Mar 21 – Defining Ethnicity
- Eller, Jack David, From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict, pp. 7-48.

Week 8 – Spring Break

Week 9 – Government and Media Narratives in the US’s Middle Eastern Foreign Policy

Tues, Apr 2 – The Iran Hostage Narrative

Thur, Apr 4 – The Iraq War Narrative

Week 10 – Mobilizing Class (and Midterm)

Tues, Apr 9 – Mobilizing Class Identity
Thur, Apr 11 – Midterm #2

Week 11 – Nationalism as Imagined Communities

Tues, Apr 16 – Nationalism

Thur, Apr 18 – Seminar on *Imagined Communities*

*** Anderson Questions due at the beginning of class ***

Week 12-13: Problematizing Nationalism

Tues, Apr 23 – Internationalizing National Norms?

Thur, Apr 25 – Failed States?
- Jackson, Robert, “Juridical Statehood in Sub-Saharan Africa,” pp. 1-16
- Luttwak, Edward, “Give War a Chance”

Tues, Apr 30 – Civilizationalism?
- Barber, Benjamin, “Jihad vs. McWorld,” pp. 1-5.

Thur, May 2 – Cosmopolitanism?

Week 14 – The Importance of Identity and Socialization

Tues, May 7 – Choose Your Own Adventure

Thur, May 9 – Feral Children, Iron Cages, and the Last Man

Final Paper – Due Monday, May 13 at 4pm
- Place a hardcopy in my department mailbox (Rice 216) no later than 4pm.
- Late Penalty: 20% per day late