AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

SPRING 2017

AFRAMER 123Z

HDS – 2733

LAW - 2955

THURSDAY 1 TO 3PM

Cornel West

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Democracy, inequality, and nationalism in America. The white working class and American politics. Class and race. Identities and interests. Conditions for socially inclusive economic growth. Alternative directions of institutional change, viewed in light of American history. Democratizing the market and deepening democracy. Self-reliance and solidarity.

Readings from classic and contemporary works on the United States. Take-home examination.

Jointly offered by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Divinity School, and the Law School.

CLASS SEQUENCE

January 26. Introduction to the themes and agenda of the course.

February 2. America today viewed in light of the 2016 election.

The progressive and conservative projects in the United States now. Their relation to American nationalism.

The white and the non-white working class: their circumstance and their engagement with American politics.

What should progressives propose?

Febuary 9. Race and class. The class structure and the racial divisions of the country. Ways to think about the relation between race and class.

Different responses to racial injustice: their political context and consequences.

The class structure of the United States: in reality and in denial. The reproduction and the overcoming of the class system: economic, educational, and political conditions.

February 16: The historical antecedents to the present situation of the progressives. The major traditions of progressive reform in America: the defense of small-scale enterprise and property (property-owning democracy) and the regulatory containment of corporate power. Shared assumptions and limits of these reform traditions.

The New Deal as the last major episode of democratizing institutional innovation in the United States: its trajectory, character, achievements, and limits.

Relation of the contemporary progressives to the legacy of the New Deal. Lessons of the New Deal.

The importance and the difficulty of institutional reconstruction.

February 23. The political economy of the American circumstance.

Economic slowdown and the argument about secular stagnation. The enigma of productivity. The most advanced, knowledge-intensive practice of production and its confinement to vanguards of the economy (e.g., high-tech industry). Expansionary monetary policy as a surrogate for the missing strategy of economic growth.

The aggravation of inequality. Its dimensions and its causes.

The reconcliation of increasing inequality with mass consumption: credit instead of property.

Progressive taxation and redistributive social entitlements as necessary but insufficient antidotes to inequality.

Requirements of socially inclusive economic growth.

March 2: Democracy, corporate power, high finance, and the Constitution in America today.

The character and limitations of American democracy. Proto-democratic liberalism: the logic of its constitutional arrangements.

Corporate power, high finance, and popular self-rule. Money and democracy.

Until institutional change comes: the practice of progressive politics under the established institutions.

March 9: American ideals. Do they exist (as distinguished from the ideals of individual Americans)? What are they? What is their relation to the real structure of the country, to its institutions, and to its economic and political life?

Self-reliance and solidarity. The limitations of the American dream.

Tocqueville's account of Americans and their democracy. The message of the American prophets (e.g., Emerson, Lincoln, Whitman) reconsidered.

American exceptionalism revisited.

What is distinctive about American society, culture, and democracy? The programmatic significance of the critique of American exceptionalism. American nationalism: its history, nature, and reshaping.

The United States and the world. The domestic agenda and foreign policy. Republic and Empire.

March 16: SPRING RECESS

March 23: The direction, aims, and methods of a progressive alternative in the United States today.

The composition and development of a majoritarian progressive coalition in American society and politics.

March 30: Democratizing the market and transforming education.

The democratized market economy and its institutional form.

The task of education under democracy. Practical requirements for executing this task.

April 6: Deepening democracy. Can the people rule? A high-energy democratic politics, capable of dispensing with crisis as the condition of change and of mastering the structure of society and of the economy. Its institutional form.

April 13: The argument about a progressive alternative continued.

Where to begin? From the setting of a direction to the selection of initial steps.

The nature and sources of the needed ideas. The relation of these ideas to the high academic culture and to the prevailing policy discourse.

April 20: Conclusion.

ASSIGNED BOOKS

The assigned readings equip students to engage the argument of the course. They also help provide common ground for discussion in class and in section.

Five books are assigned. The assigned books are available at the central Harvard Coop, as well as on Amazon:

American Democracy

Cornel West

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*

Paperback

Penguin Classics

Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation*

Paperback

Free Press

Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2000*

Paperback

Crown Forum

Cornel West, *Democracy Matters*

Paperback

Penguin

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Left Alternative*

Paperback

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West, *The Future of American Progressivism*

Paperback

Beacon

READING ASSIGNMENTS

The main reading assignments are drawn from the assigned books. We may supplement these readings from time to time with additional materials placed on the course website. You should consult the website regularly.

By the class of February 9, you should have read:

Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2000,* chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 13, 16.

Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth America Revolution,* Introduction, chapters 1, 2, 3, 6.

By the class of March 2, you sould have read Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

vol. 1, part 1, chapters 2, 3, 4

vol. 1, part 2, chapters 6, 9, 10

vol. 2, part 1, chapters 1, 2, 8, 12

vol. 2, part 2, chapters 1, 2, 8, 11, 20

vol. 2, part 3, chapters 2, 5, 17, 19

vol. 2, part 4. chapters 1, 2, 6

By the class of March 23, you should have read:

Cornel West, *Democracy Matters*

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Left Alternative*

Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West, *The Future of American Progressivism*

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

During the semester undergraduates will write two brief papers. The first paper will be due in class on February 23. The second paper will be due electronically by March 23, 12 noon.

Each of these papers, on topics to be set, will respond to a major problem or idea discussed in the course up to that time. Each will be between 6 and 10 double-spaced pages long. Each will count for 20% of the final grade.

In lieu of a final examination, all students will write an extended take-home examination. This final paper or examination will provide them with an occasion to respond to a central aspect of the argument of the course. It should have a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 double-spaced pages. The topic or topics will be described in class on April 6. The final examination paper will be due by 4 p.m. on April 27 (no extensions). It will count for 50% of the final grade for undergraduates. 10% of the final grade for undergraduates will be attributed to participation in section.

The grade for all graduate students, including law students, will be based entirely on their final take-home examination, which will be for them the only writing requirement in the course.