

DRAFT / CERTAIN TO CHANGE

HIST 231

History Behind the Headlines

Contemporary U.S. Politics and Policy Debates in Historical Perspective

Prof. Brent Cebul

Th., 1:30-4:30

Location TBD

History Behind the Headlines is designed to offer students the opportunity to explore the historical roots and development of current, pressing questions of U.S. politics and public policy. Drawing upon historical methodologies and scholarship as well recent work in political science and sociology, this reading seminar offers deep context for understanding some of the most important contemporary issues in American public life. Topics will include political polarization, the incarceration crisis, immigration, lobbying (that is, the role of money in democracy), and impeachment. In addition to a number of short response and op-ed style writing assignments, students write and present a final project on a contemporary political or policy issue of their choosing. These final projects might take a variety of forms, including traditional historical research essays, policy white papers, long form investigative journalism, or projects using digital media. Where possible, we will invite to class experts on our topics from the broader Penn and Philadelphia communities to discuss their work.

\*a note on the readings below: these are meant to be suggestive of the types of reading we will do. Reading load will average between 150 and 250 words per week, and each unit will be between 2 and 3 weeks. While the list below includes only book titles, I will endeavor to keep the number of books to buy for the class to about four, and those will be supplemented by articles and chapters as well as new media such as podcasts, documentaries, and online sources.

UNIT 1: POLARIZATION

Potential Readings:

Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago 2015)

Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era* (Chicago 2017)

Paul Pierson & Theda Skocpol, *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism* (Princeton 2007)

## UNIT 2: THE INCARCERATION CRISIS

Potential Readings:

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-Blindness* (New Press, 2010)

Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard 2017)

## UNIT 3: IMMIGRATION

Potential Readings:

Filiz Garip, *On the Move: Changing Mechanisms of Mexico-US Migration* (Princeton 2016)

Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton 2004)

Margaret E. Peters, *Trading Barriers: Immigration and the Remaking of Globalization* (Princeton 2017)

## UNIT 4: MONEY & DEMOCRACY

Potential Readings:

Benjamin Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton 2014)

Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (PenguinRandomHouse 2017)

## UNIT 5: IMPEACHMENT

Potential Readings TBD