

Columbia University
Department of Political Science

Political Science W4226
American Politics and Social Welfare Policy

Professor Robert Lieberman
1428 IAB
4-4725

RCL15@COLUMBIA.EDU

Office hours: Wednesday 10:30-12:00 and by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

Seung Jin Jang
sj2033@COLUMBIA.EDU
Office hours: TBA

Tom Ogorzalek
TKO2103@COLUMBIA.EDU
Office hours: TBA

Discussion Sections:

TBA

The American welfare state is often described as a “weakling” and a “laggard” compared to other developed countries. The United States was among the last countries to adopt national policies to protect its citizens against many of the risks of modern life such as poverty, unemployment, old age, sickness, and disability. American policies in these areas remain less comprehensive in the United States than elsewhere. Economic inequality in the United States, moreover, is rising and is now greater than at any point in more than a century. Far greater economic inequality exists in the United States today than in other industrialized countries.

From minimal beginnings, the American welfare state went through a period of explosive growth in the middle of the twentieth century, from the New Deal of the 1930s to the War on Poverty of the 1960s and beyond. The last thirty years, however, have been a period of retrenchment and reform as the economic and political foundations of American social policy have been unsettled.

This course will examine the politics of American social policy, with particular emphasis on explaining *why* the American welfare state is the way it is, *how* it got that way, and *what* its implications are for inequality in the United States. We will explore the history and development of welfare policy in the United States as well as contemporary dilemmas and debates, including the issues surrounding the passage of the 1996 welfare reform act as well as more recent debates over Social Security, Medicare, and other issues.

There are no prerequisites for this course, although basic familiarity with American government and American history since the Civil War will help.

Books and Readings

The following five books have been ordered at Book Culture (formerly Labyrinth Books), 536 West 112th Street:

Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*
Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States*
Christopher Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows: Debunking Myths About U.S. Social Policy*
Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, eds., *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics*
Theda Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective*

Some readings are available online; where this is so, the URL is listed and links are provided. The readings that are neither on the Web nor in the available books are collected in a course reader, which is available at the Village Copier, 1181 Amsterdam Avenue (at 118th Street). All reading is on reserve at Lehman Library, on the third floor of the International Affairs Building.

In addition to the reading on the syllabus, students should read a major daily newspaper that covers national politics extensively — preferably the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post*.

Writing

A further aim of this course is to encourage clear and concise writing about politics, free of cant, obfuscation, and other nonsense. Bad writing, in fact, usually reveals muddled thinking. Conversely, clear thinking produces good writing — lucid, fluent prose that clearly conveys the writer's ideas and argument to the reader. Written work, consequently, will be evaluated not only for quality of ideas but also for clarity and economy of expression. Flawless grammar and correct spelling are *minimum* requirements for acceptable writing.

The standard for matters of grammar and style in this course is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. Everyone who writes in English should be familiar with this book. Copies are available at Labyrinth Books and elsewhere. If you do not already own this book, you should buy it. Read it. Read it again. Put it under your pillow at night. If you use it wisely your writing will almost certainly improve (for which your teachers will thank you).

You should also consider reading some nonfiction essays by masters of the genre. Some authors to consider are George Orwell, E. B. White, Joseph Mitchell, John McPhee, David Remnick, and Philip Gourevitch. Above all, read Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language," which is both a beautifully written model of tight construction and sound argumentation and a caution against the common pitfalls of writing about politics. You will find this and other essays by these writers entertaining as well as instructive.

Course Requirements

Attendance and reading

Participation in four discussion sections (out of six to be offered) or four short (2 pp. maximum) papers on course readings (10% of final grade; NB: the paper option is available only for those students who absolutely cannot attend any sections due to unavoidable conflicts)
Take-home midterm examination, passed out in class 20 October; due in class 29 October (20%)
Paper, 6-8 pp., due in class 8 December (30%)
Final examination (as scheduled by the Registrar) (40%)

Graduate students may choose to write a single original research paper of at least 25-30 pp. (equivalent to a graduate seminar paper) in lieu of these requirements. Those interested in this option should discuss it with me in the first two weeks of the semester. Those choosing this option will be subject to a series of intermediate deadlines before the final paper is due.

NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO CLASS ON 1 OCTOBER, 15 OCTOBER, OR 22 OCTOBER. THERE WILL BE CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER.

Course Outline and Required Readings (dates are approximate)

Introduction (3 September)

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," (available on many sites on the Web, including <http://www.k-1.com/Orwell/site/work/essays/language.html>)

Inequality and the Welfare State: Definitions and Dilemmas (8-15 September)

Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern, *One Nation Divisible: What America Was and What It Is Becoming*, chapter 2

Gary Burtless, "Growing American Inequality: Sources and Remedies," in Henry J. Aaron and Robert D. Reischauer, eds., *Setting National Priorities: The 2000 Election and Beyond*

Christopher Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*, chapter 1

Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*, Introduction to Part I and chapter 1

Origins of the Welfare State (17-24 September)

European Roots

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, chapters 6-9 (available as an e-book through CLIO)

T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*

American Patterns

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, chapter 1

Theda Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapter 1

Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapter 1

The Development of American Social Policy (29 September-10 November)

Beginnings to the Progressive Era

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapters 2-3
Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 3-4, 7-16

The New Deal and its Aftermath

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapters 4-5
Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 18-21, 28, 31, 37, 42, 48, 52-53
Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*, chapter 2 and
pp. 91-117
Virginia Sapiro, "The Gender Basis of American Social Policy," in Linda Gordon, ed.,
Women, the State, and Welfare
Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*, chapter 2

The Great Society and the War on Poverty

Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States*, chapter 6
Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 55, 57, 60, 66, 72
Piven and Cloward, *Regulating the Poor*, chapter 9
Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*, chapter 3

From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 75, 82, 86-87, 109-11, 129
Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*

Race, Poverty, and the Politics of Welfare Reform (12-26 November)

Mink and Solinger, eds., *Welfare*, chapters 56, 69-70, 106-107, 115-16, 139-41, 160, 172-74
Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, chapter 4
R. Kent Weaver, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," in Margaret Weir, ed., *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government* (available as an e-book through CLIO)
Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*, Parts III and IV (skim Part II)

Reconsidering Inequality in the Contemporary American Welfare State (1-8 December)

Christopher Howard, *The Welfare State Nobody Knows*, chapters 4-10
Timothy M. Smeeding, Lee Rainwater, and Gary Burtless, "U.S. Poverty in a Cross-National Context," in Sheldon Danziger and Robert H. Haveman, eds., *Understanding Poverty*
Janet M. Currie, *The Invisible Safety Net: Protecting the Nation's Poor Children and Families*, chapters 1 and 6
The Century Foundation, *Public Policy in an Older America*
(<http://www.tcf.org/Publications/RetirementSecurity/AgingBasics.pdf>)
The Century Foundation, *The Century Forum: Universal Health Insurance and the States*
(<http://www.tcf.org/Publications/HealthCare/qauniversal.pdf>)