




Soc 201/SPI 339
American Society and Politics

Syllabus
Fall 2024
Tuesdays, 1:30 to 4:20

Prof. Paul Starr

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Part I. The American Formation


Week One. September 3. America's founding and the formation of the racial order in the United States


Part I. Founding principles? Founding contradiction? How to think about American society and politics?

 Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (Routledge, 1990), xiii, 1-4, 7-11.

 Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Democracy," in Nikole Hannah-Jones et al., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, 7-36. [Hypothesis assignment]


Part II. Formation of the racial order


 Dorothy Roberts, "Race," in *The 1619 Project*, 45-61.

 F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 1-16, 51-63, 77-80. [Hypothesis assignment]

Week Two. September 10. Immigration: Still an Assimilating Nation?

 Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan, *Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success* (New York: Public Affairs, 2022), Chs. 2, 6, and 6.


 Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990). 1-36, 147-69.


 Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2015), 1-9. [*Hypothesis assignment*]

 Tomás R. Jiménez, [*Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*](#). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), Ch 1.


Part II. Diverging Fortunes: Roots of the Contemporary Crisis

Week Three. September 17. Economic change and the declining condition of American workers


 Anne Case and Angus Deaton, [*Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*](#) (Princeton University Press, 2017), Chs 1-5 (19-70) [*Hypothesis assignment*] and Chs. 14-15 (212-244).

 David Weil, *The Fissured Workplace: Why Work Became So Bad for So Many and What Can Be Done to Improve It* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 1-5, 28-42, 43-44, 76-92.

Week Four. September 24. Elites and politics in America

 Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics* (2014), 12(3): 564-81. [*Hypothesis assignment*]


Paul Starr, “Back to Class,” chapter 8 of *The American Contradiction* (forthcoming). [Handout]

 Thomas Piketty, ["Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the Changing Structure of Political Conflict. Evidence from France, Britain and the US 1948-2017,"](#) 2018.

Part III. The Political Crisis of Our Time

Week Five. October 1. American divisions

Part I: Partisanship as a mega-identity

 Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 1-44 (Chs. 1-3). [*Hypothesis assignment*]

★ Pew Research Center, "[Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal](#)," October 10, 2019.

Paul Starr, "Americans as Enemies," chapter 5 of *The American Contradiction* (forthcoming). [Handout]

Part II: Urban versus rural America

● Jonathan Rodden, *Why Cities Lose* (Basic Books, 2019), Introduction (1-13), Ch 3 (71-97).

Week Six. October 8. Dimensions of polarization: religion, gender, sexuality

● Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* (Winter 1967): 1-21. [hypothesis assignment]

● Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (Simon & Schuster, 2010), 1-17.

● Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne* (New York: Liveright, 2020), Introduction.

★ Pew Research Center, "[Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe](#)," January 24, 2024.

● Jeremiah J. Garretson, *The Path to Gay Rights: How Coming Out and Activism Changed Public Opinion* (NYU Press, 2018), Ch. 1.

FALL SEMESTER BREAK

Week Seven. October 22. Media, tech platforms, and politics

★ ● Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, [Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics](#) (Oxford University Press, 2018), Chs. 1-3.

● Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (Yale University Press, 2018), Ch. 2 ("The Myth of Platform Neutrality"). [Hypothesis assignment. Note year of publication.]

Updates on free speech, misinformation, and social media platforms:

★ Abbie VanSickle, David McCabe, and Adam Liptak, “[Supreme Court Declines to Rule on Tech Platforms’ Free Speech Rights](#),” *New York Times*, July 1, 2024.

★ Ann E. Marimow and Carl Zakrzewski, “[Supreme Court Allows White House Contacts with Social Media Firms](#),” *Washington Post*, June 26, 2024.;

★ Carl Zakrzewski and Naomi Nix, “[Trump Allies Crush Misinformation Research Despite Supreme Court Loss](#),” *Washington Post*, July 14, 2024.

Week Eight. October 29. Politics, law, and social policy

Part I: Poverty

◆ Matthew Desmond, *Poverty, By America* (Crown, 2023), 3-102 (Prologue through Ch. 5).

Part II: Health Policy

● Paul Starr, *Remedy and Reaction: The Peculiar American Struggle Over Health Care Reform*, rev. ed. (Yale University Press, 2013), Introduction.

Week 9. November 5 (Election Day). Gender and politics

● Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Chs. 1 and 3. [*Hypothesis assignment*]

Recent socioeconomic trends in gender equality

★ Richard Reeves, [video summary of his book *Of Boys and Men*](#), Big Think.

● Paula England, Andrew Levine, and Emily Mishel, “Progress Toward Gender Equality in the United States Has Slowed or Stalled,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (March 31, 2020), 117 (13): 6990-6997.

Recent trends in gender differences in public opinion and voting preferences

★ Celinda Lake and Amanda Iovino, “[A Democratic and a Republican Pollster Agree: This Is the Fault Line That Decides the Election](#),” *New York Times*, October 30, 2024.

★ Claire Cain Miller, “[Many Gen Z Men Feel Left Behind. Some See Trump as an Answer](#),” *New York Times*, August 24, 2024.

★ Claire Cain Miller, “[How the Last Eight Years Made Young Women More Liberal](#),” *New York Times*, September 15, 2024.

Masculinity and gender politics in the 2024 election

★ Ezra Klein, “[Manliness, Cat Ladies, Fertility Panic and the 2024 Election](#),” New York Times. August 16, 2024. [Podcast: Read or listen.]

★ Ross Douthat, “[Masculinity Is On the Ballot](#),” *New York Times*, August 17, 2024.

Part IV. The American Future

Week 10. November 12. The future American people

● Ron Lesthaeghe, “The second demographic transition: A concise overview of its development,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* (2014) 111: 18112–18115.

Update: ★ Sabrina Malhi, “[Birthrates in the U.S. hit historic low, CDC data show](#),” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2024.

★ ● Richard Alba, [The Great Demographic Illusion: Majority, Minority, and the Expanding American Mainstream](#). (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), Chs. 1, 4-5. [*Hypothesis assignment*]

★ Paul Starr and Edward Freeland, “[‘People of Color’ as a Category and Identity in the United States](#),” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2023).

Week 11. November 19. American democracy, now and tomorrow

● Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *Tyranny of the Minority: Why American Democracy Reached the Breaking Point* (Penguin Random House, October 2023), Introduction, Chs. 6 and 8.

[*More to come on American democracy in the wake of the election*]

Week 12. December 3. Presentation of papers in progress.

[*last revised: October 31, 2024*]