

**Contemporary U.S. Politics:  
An Introduction to American Studies  
AMST 179**

Syllabus subject to change.

Meeting Times: Winter Session 2024

Location: zoom

Instructor: Laura Grappo

Email address: lgrappo@wesleyan.edu

Office Hours: email for an appointment

**Overview**

This course will focus on contemporary politics in the United States. We will cover topics such as populism and the Trump presidency, current political narratives concerning immigration, the rise of the "alt-right," debates over free speech, race and civil rights, state violence and mass incarceration, militarism, reproductive rights, as well as climate change and the possibilities of environmental justice. This course functions as an introduction to the American Studies major and will familiarize students with central methodologies and issues within the field.

**Class Texts**

All course texts will be posted to the class Moodle, with the exception of one documentary, which is available through Netflix or library DVD.

**Assignments:**

All students of Wesleyan University are responsible for knowing and adhering to [the Honor Code](#) of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council–Office of Student Affairs. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). The [Office of Student Affairs](#) has more information.

**Participation:** You should come to each class having read the assigned materials and ready to discuss them in thoughtful ways. Asking for clarification, debating different perspectives, and questioning the ideas developed in class texts are all welcome contributions. Regular, clear, and informed participation are required. Habitual silence or lack of quality participation will greatly detract from your final grade.

### **Moodle Response Papers:**

Each student will be asked to contribute reading responses to a class forum. Reading response posts are an opportunity to discuss topics or ideas that interest you and to introduce concepts you would like to discuss during class. You are also encouraged to ask questions, post relevant media, and interact with the posts of other classmates. You can write these as classic film and text reviews, informal blog posts, or use more creative approaches. Responses should be developed primarily from the day's assigned texts but may also speak to previous class discussions and other pertinent information. These postings can be informal in tone and should be fairly brief. **Each response should be somewhere around 300-500 words in length.**

**Final Research Paper:** (approx. 10-12 pages) The final essay will be an individual research paper on a topic of your choice. Topics will expand upon an issue, idea, or question central to core class concepts. You should select a topic that you find particularly engaging, either expanding upon an idea covered in class or researching your own related topic. Essays should be well researched, clearly written, and demonstrate good understanding of the major course ideas and themes.

### **Grading Breakdown:**

Moodle Reading Responses:	30%
Participation:	30%
Final Essay:	40%

### **General Policies**

Following the general guidelines below will allow class to run smoothly. Disregard for these policies will affect your grade:

- **Attendance is mandatory** Barring illness or serious family/ personal emergency, you are required to attend all class sessions. Unexcused absences from class will affect your final grade. Please plan your holiday travel, vacations, and other obligations with this policy in mind. Class will be held on all scheduled class dates, as listed on the Wesleyan University Academic Calendar, which can be accessed online at: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/acaf/calendars/>.

If illness or serious emergency will require you to miss a class session, you will be expected to email me at [lgrappo@wesleyan.edu](mailto:lgrappo@wesleyan.edu) prior the start of class.

- Come to class on time and stay for the duration. Persistent and habitual lateness will affect your grade.

- Be sure to cite your sources in your writing. If you feel unsure how to do so, feel free to come see me. I am happy to help explain the citation process and to direct you to the many excellent resources here at Wesleyan that can further provide assistance.

Intentional plagiarism (i.e. lifting text from the internet, copying another person's work, buying papers online, using old, already submitted work from another course, turning in the same work for more than one class, using AI programs to generate text, etc.) will result in both in automatic failure in the course as well as a summons before the Wesleyan University Honor Board.

- Please turn in assignments on time. Learning to manage your time and your workload is both a crucial skill and an essential aspect of your college experience. Accepting late work unfairly penalizes students who work hard to turn their assignments in on time, and, as such, there are only three possible exceptions to this rule: 1) serious illness or personal emergency; 2) serious family emergency; 3) documented disability status that entitles a student to extended deadlines.
- Students are expected to check email on a regular, daily schedule. All important class news and instruction (changes to readings, amendments to the class schedule, or, in the case of inclement weather or severe illness, cancellation or rescheduling of class) will occur via email. Similarly, the best way to contact me is by email. I will check email regularly Monday-Friday.

### **Students with Disabilities**

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html>.

### **Course Schedule**

**Class One – readings to be completed prior to the first day of class.**

Tues 1/9:

- excerpt from Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*

- Aoife Gallagher, Jacob Davey, and Mackenzie Hart, “The Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key trends in QAnon activity since 2017”
- Jeff Sharlet, “Darkness Visible” *Vanity Fair* (November 2020)
- Owen Magnusson, “From 4chan to Instagram: How QAnon Became Mainstream”
- Reed Berkowitz/ Rabbit Rabbit, “A Game Designer’s Analysis of QAnon”

### **Class Two**

Wed 1/10:

- Olga Khazan, “Inside the Mind of an Anti-vaxxer” *The Atlantic* (October 16, 2020)
- Matthew Browne et.al, “Going against the Herd: Psychological and Cultural Factors Underlying the ‘Vaccination Confidence Gap,’”
- Zachary Goldberg and Sean Richey, “Anti-vaccination Beliefs and Unrelated Conspiracy Theories”
- excerpt from Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*

### **Class Three**

Thurs 1/11:

- George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness”
- Brent Staples, “How the Italians Became White” *The New York Times* (Oct. 12, 2019)
- Cristina Beltran, “The Politics of Multiracial Whiteness” *The Washington Post* (January 2021)
- Geraldo Cadava, “The Rise of Latino White Supremacy” *The New Yorker* (May 30, 2023)
- excerpt from Talia Lavin, *Culture Warlords: My Journey Into the Dark Web of White Supremacy*

### **Class Four**

Fri 1/12:

- excerpt from Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*
- William Connolly, “The Rhetorical Strategies of Hitler and Trump”

### **Class Five**

Mon 1/15:

- excerpt from Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*
- “America’s Failed Criminal Justice Experiment with Rafael Mangual”  
from podcast *Conversations with Coleman* (season 2022, #28)

## **Class Six**

Tues 1/16:

- excerpt from Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*
- Episode 1 and episode 2 from *Immigration Nation* (2020) (available on Netflix)

## **Class Seven**

Wed 1/17:

- Jia Tolentino, "The Rage of the Incel"
- Debbie Ging, "Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere"
- Dabney P. Evans & Subasri Narasimhan "A narrative analysis of anti-abortion testimony and legislative debate related to Georgia's fetal "heartbeat" abortion ban"
- Caitlin Flanagan, "The Dishonesty of the Abortion Debate"

## **Class Eight**

Thurs 1/18:

- *Zero Dark Thirty* (2010, dir. Kathryn Bigelow)  
<https://digitalcampus-swankmp-net.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/wesleyan280505/play/b9afb525d2233201?referrer=marc>
- excerpt from Mark Bray, *ANTIFA: The Anti-fascist Handbook*

## **Class Nine**

Fri 1/19:

- excerpt from Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*
- excerpt from Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President*

## **Class Ten**

Mon 1/22:

- Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies"
- excerpt from Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*