

## **English 2534 and 4534 – American politics, introduction to the course**

The course was designed to critically examine contemporary political ideologies and electoral strategies, with special attention to the fall of majoritarian politics and the rise of special interest identity politics. There was little attention to political institutions, though there was a background reader on political parties and elections and some attention was paid to electoral strategies in lectures. The major theme was the fall of class-oriented policies and politics based on appeal to the interest of the national political community placed in the context of left-liberal commitments to rights-based policies and right-conservative commitments to neo-liberal market oriented policies.

In effect the course was designed call into question the idea of continuing liberal consensus in the U.S. Necessarily then, the course considered the historical trajectory of American politics from the end of the war to the present, with particularly attention to the postwar era (1945-1974). The difficulty experienced by political leaders in maintaining a coherent foreign policy and representing the interests of all major groups of society was stressed. The importance of localizing ideas and efforts in more successful periods was contrasted to the failures of cosmopolitan and globalizing narratives in the present.

### **ENG 2534 – EVALUATING THE EXAM (two hour classroom type)**

**The examination below should be judged primarily on the students' knowledge of and ability to discern patterns in historical events in the time period specified by the question. Some exceptional students should be able to apply the thematic material (summarized below) in the course to the relevant essay questions, but it certainly not a requirement for producing good work on the essays.**

#### **Students received this lecture prior to the exam.**

1. What is (relative) social equality and how do you get it? How was it achieved in America and what happened to that system?

One idea that came about was that after the achievement of the affluent society we must look at other aspects of social life besides social class. Women were always considered part of the family structure but what if we look at them independently? Blacks were for the most part agrarian laborers or in a few cities employed in the service industries (especially in restaurants, homecare, porters, etc.). What if we use employment as a means of integrating African Americans into society?

Social theory (that emerged in the 1960s) = developmental stages; we have moved past industrial society to postindustrial society, from a society of scarcity to an "affluent society" and THEREFORE – from issues of social class to that of gender and race; from politics organized around income equality and the argument over defining the "common good" to politics organized around identity and the awarding of entitlements. This also meant that

since paid labor (employment) was the primary motor of the new concept of social equality – the last bastions of the pre-capitalist order, specifically the family and the community, came under the pressure of the capitalist market

We are now living with the consequences of those commitments and policies.

What we are seeing is that for a number of reasons the question of social class re-emerging on a massive scale. We are now faced with a realization seen first in the right and now perhaps, and very reluctantly in some quarters on the left that the social theory of the 1960s

2. What is an international order? How did the current international order become established? Ours is a compromise between three elements: the system of individual state sovereignty, the system of great powers, and liberal international institutionalism. How much can we do between nations?

U.S. has faced three dilemmas developed out of American strategy:

- a. The vision of the planners of foreign policy and the people are entirely different – but the policy elite felt that history taught that we could not return to the world we had before the war. Result the cold war system: the outcome of power politics was not advantage but that has the disadvantage of becoming ideological – of becoming a crusade. Eventually people tire of crusades especially when they prove to costly in blood and treasure.
- b. Great power competition undermined the independent of states, which led the US to develop an alliance system to protect those states. But alliances also makes the great power strangely dependent on the independent states remaining independent leading to wars of intervention that were ultimately unsustainable.
- c. Alternative to an alliance system of containment is a policy of global engagement. The more interconnected the economic system, the greater the specialization the more wealth generated but the greater inequality and

3. What is a crisis? Opposite of continuity. When there is a break in political ideological system caused by either disruption in the world of commodities or in social and cultural values that legitimize a system, or both.

According to Weber, that a political regime is legitimate means that its participants have certain beliefs or faith (“Legitimitätsglaube” – legitimasjons tror) in regard to it: “the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige” (Weber 1964: 382). . . . Weber distinguishes among three main sources of legitimacy—understood as the acceptance both of authority and of the need to obey its commands. People may have faith in a particular political or social order because it has been there for a long time (tradition), because they have faith in the rulers (charisma), or because they trust its legality—specifically the rationality of the rule of law (Weber 1990 [1918]; 1964) – Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy. To which we can add a fourth reason – because the political order is morally just.

## ENG 2534 EXAM

Essay – choose one

1. Between 1968 and 1974 American politics was fundamentally changed. Discuss this statement with reference to the major political figures of the period and the policies enacted by the Nixon administration.
2. According to our textbook, the design of American foreign policy after WW2 was largely the doing of a small foreign policy and security elite whose plans for the US role in the world far outweighed public expectations. What were the institutions and concepts that underlay post-war foreign policy up until 1968. On what basis was American foreign policy explained to the public?
3. The Democrats arose in the 1930s as the architects of the New Deal. More than a set of policies the New Deal was an approach to shaping a majority. The last of the New Dealers, Lyndon B. Johnson, won a sweeping majority in the Election of 1964. Four years later his majority was in shambles. Why?

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## ENG 4534 – EVALUATING THE EXAM (take-home type exam)

**For the Master's degree students, the take-home exam covers many of the same issues as for the undergraduates, but the questions are framed more abstractly and in relation specifically to the development of American political ideologies in the postwar era. A brief excerpt from Hartz's book, *Liberal Tradition*, was distributed to students and a class hour spent explaining that reading. The reading would make a useful point of departure or reference for the essay questions that follow below, but students should be judged on their capacity to address the issues raised by the question and only secondarily on the use of Hartz in the discussion.**

Students were given the following excerpt from Hartz one week before the exam. I added notes and some textual material as well editing the material carefully. We went through the text in class.

Reading for Final Exam

Brief selection from . . .

*The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political thought Since the Revolution*

By Louis Hartz, intro. T. Wicker

New York: Harcourt, 1991 [1955]

[https://books.google.no/books?hl=en&lr=&id=VokvhXQBiAAC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=5vj\\_wDVXd-&sig=9qEH84dnVpBJROwPbT2l-mOARpl&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.no/books?hl=en&lr=&id=VokvhXQBiAAC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=5vj_wDVXd-&sig=9qEH84dnVpBJROwPbT2l-mOARpl&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Key terms: liberal society concept, liberal idea, national uniqueness, petit-bourgeois hybrid

The analysis which this book contains is based on what might be called the storybook truth about American history: that America was settled by men who fled from feudal and clerical oppressions of the Old World. If there is anything in this view, as old as the national folklore itself, then the outstanding thing about American history ought to be the nonexistence of those oppressions, or since the reaction against them was in the broadest sense liberal, that the American community is a liberal community (3) [*in the tradition of the English philosopher John Locke. Locke believed that human society was founded on property rights and that it preceded the formation of the state. In fact the state was created as a "social contract" among people in order to provide protection and other essential services. This position can be contrasted with that of Aristotle, founder of the European tradition, which sees the state as an organic expression of the polis – the people and the community. The social contract grants certain powers to the state in order to maintain a human community, but these powers are limited and the state is not an organic expression of the society, but a "referee" which maintains order and good standing among the individuals and groups that comprise the society. This form of thinking is both individualistic and legalistic, hence the emphasis on a Constitution and the interpretation of the law, but note it is by no means against the idea of community as suggested in Hartz's reading.* – ML]

...

One of the central characteristics of a nonfeudal society is that it lacks a genuine revolutionary tradition, the tradition which in Europe has been linked with the Puritan and French revolutions: that it [America] is "born equal" as Tocqueville said. And that being the case it also lacks a tradition of reaction: lacking [the famous or infamous and bloody French revolutionary leader] Robespierre<sup>1</sup> it lacks Maistre<sup>2</sup>, lacking Sidney<sup>3</sup> it lacks Charles II.<sup>4</sup> Its liberalism is what Santayana called, referring to American democracy, a "natural" phenomenon. But the matter is curiously broader than this, for a society which begins in

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<sup>1</sup> Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) was a lawyer and political leader of the French Revolution (b. 1783) who believed in political equality and advocated universal manhood suffrage. Later he was principle in the reign of terror that suppressed political opponents through use of torture and execution.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) was a French political philosopher who advocated social hierarchy and return to monarchy.

<sup>3</sup> Algernon Sidney was an English republican political theorist (1623-1683), member of the Long Parliament under Cromwell and soldier in the English Civil War. He opposed the monarchy.

<sup>4</sup> Charles II (1630-1685) was deposed as king but later restored the monarchy to England in 1660 following the defeat of the English Commonwealth. His father Charles I had been executed by the rebels in 1649.

Locke, and thus transforms him, stays with Locke, by virtue of an absolute and irrational attachment it develops for him. And becomes as indifferent to the challenge of socialism in the later era as it was unfamiliar with the heritage of feudalism in the earlier one. It has within it, as it were, a kind of self-completing mechanism, which insures the universality of the liberal idea. . . . (5-6)

. . .

Which brings us to the substantive quality of the natural liberal mind. And this poses no easy problem [of distinguishing the American concern with liberty from the French, for example] . . . And yet if we study the American liberal language in terms of intensity and emphasis, if we look for silent omissions as well as explicit inclusions, we begin to see a pattern emerging that smacks distinctively of the New World. It has a quiet, matter of fact quality, it does not understand the meaning of sovereign power, the bourgeois class passion is scarcely present, the sense of the past is altered, and there is about it all, as compared with the European pattern, a vast almost charming innocence of mind. Possibly this is what is meant when they say that European thought is “deeper” than American . . . (6-7)

. . .

The top strata of the American community . . . have yearned for the aristocratic ethos. But instead of exemplifying the typical Western situation, these yearnings represent an inversion of it. America has presented the world with the peculiar phenomenon, not of a frustrated middle class, but of a “frustrated aristocracy” – of men, Aristotelian-like, trying to break out of the egalitarian confines of middle class life but suffering guilt and failure in the process. The South before the Civil War is the case par excellence of this, though New England of course exemplifies it also. Driven from Jefferson by abolitionism, the Fitzhughs<sup>5</sup> of the antebellum [the period before the Civil War] dared to ape the doctrinal patterns of Western reaction, of Disraeli<sup>6</sup> and Bonald<sup>7</sup> . . . The South, as [the poet and essayist] John Crowe Ransom has said, has been part of America closest to Old World Europe, but it never has really been Europe. It has been an alien child in a liberal family, tortured and confused, driven to a fantasy life which, instead of disproving the power of Locke in America, portrays more poignantly than anything else the tyranny he has had. . . . Here we have one of the great and neglected relationships in American history: the common fecklessness of the Southern “feudalists” and the modern socialists. It is not accidental, but something rooted in the logic of all Western history, that they should fail alike to leave a dent in the American liberal intelligence. . . . (8-9)

We can . . . say of the right in America that it exemplifies the tradition of big propertied liberalism in Europe, a tradition familiar enough . . . It is a tradition which embraces loosely the English Presbyterian and the English Whig, the French Girondin and the French Liberal: a tradition which hates the *ancien regime*<sup>8</sup> up to a certain point, loves capitalism, and fears

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<sup>5</sup> George Fitzhugh (1806-1881) was an American pro-slavery politician. He wrote sociological tracts defending the institution of slavery and supported southern secession from the union.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Disraeli was a famous British Tory politician (1804-1881). He is often seen as a principal founder of modern conservatism.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Gabriel Ambroise, [Vicomte](#) de Bonald (1754-1840) was an aristocratic conservative French politician and sociological theorist strongly opposed to the French Revolution.

<sup>8</sup> Means the “old order” of Europe. This refers to feudal system where rights and privileges were based on different “estates” in which the nobility (large land owners) and the clerics had most of the privileges and all of the power. Everyone else was a commoner.

democracy.<sup>9</sup> Occasionally, as a matter of fact, American Hamiltonianism has been called by the English term “Whiggery” . . . Similarly the European “petit-bourgeois” tradition is the starting point for an understanding of the American left.<sup>10</sup> Here . . . one of the main things America did was to expand and transform the European “petit-bourgeois” by absorbing both the peasantry and the proletariat into the structure of his personality. . . .

America represents the liberal mechanism of Europe functioning without the European social antagonisms, but the truth is, it is only through these antagonisms that we recognize the mechanism. We know the European liberal . . . by the enemies he has made take them away in the American fashion and he does not seem like the same man at all. . . . After 1840 when the American Whig gives up his Hamiltonian elitism and discovers the Horatio Alger ethos of a liberal society, [i.e.] discovers “Americanism,” the task of identification is even harder (16). . . .

...

The American democrat, that “petit-bourgeois”<sup>11</sup> hybrid of the American world, raises even more intricate questions. To take away the Social Republic from the French Montagnards<sup>12</sup> changes their appearance just about as much as taking the feudal right from the Whigs. But the American democrat . . . deviated sharply from the Montagnards to begin with, since in addition to being “petit-bourgeois” in their sense he was a liberal peasant and a liberal proletarian as well. . . . We have to tear the giant figure of Jackson apart, sorting out not only the “petit-bourgeois” element of the man but the rural and urban elements which the American liberal community has transformed.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, as with the Whigs, for all the magical chemistry of American liberal society, we are dealing with social materials common to the Western world (17).

...

[The appeal of the] liberal idea . . . [lies] in the social fluidity [that] was peculiarly fortified by the riches of a rich land, so that there was no small amount of meaning to Lincoln’s claim in 1861 that the American laborer, instead of ‘being fixed to that condition for life’, works for ‘a while,’ the “saves,” then “hires another beginner” as he himself becomes an entrepreneur. . . . The “petit-bourgeois” giant of America, though ultimately a triumph for the liberal idea, could hardly have chosen a better material setting in which to flourish” (17-18).

...

. . . The historic Whig-democrat battle . . . is the characteristic of a liberal society. . . . America, by making its “*petit-bourgeois*” **hybrid the mass of the nation**, makes him unconquerable, save in two instances: when he is disorganized, as prior to Jefferson and

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<sup>9</sup> Hartz means that the English Whig type has a protestant ethos and an elitist attitude based on the successful exercise of his personal powers under the emerging capitalist economy (i.e. on the ability to earn and accumulate money).

<sup>10</sup> By “American left,” Hartz means the Democrat Party as founded by Jefferson and Jackson up through FDR’s New Deal.

<sup>11</sup> French for “small owners” as for example the independent small farmer or small businessman or master craftsman.

<sup>12</sup> Montagnards belonged to Le Montagne (The Mountain); they were democratic socialists of the Second French Republic (1840s).

<sup>13</sup> Thus the re-creation of the small owner into the American “common man” which Hartz calls a hybrid.

Jackson [founders of the Democrat Party], or when he is enchanted with the dream of becoming a Whig himself, as prior to the crash of 1929. (19, emphasis added - ML)

Further reading:

Gabriel, Ralph H. "Hartz on American Liberal Tradition," Reviewed work(s): *The Liberal Tradition in America*, by Louis Hartz, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (Jan., 1956), pp. 136-138. <http://people.brandeis.edu/~woll/gabrielhartz.pdf>

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ENG 4534 - EXAM

**Louis Hartz (1955) argues that liberalism is not only the predominant ideology in the U.S. it is the only ideology – the one set of political ideas capable of commanding a majority, as well as the underlying principle of the American political system. Write an essay in which you discuss the meaning(s) of liberalism in response to ONE of the following questions:**

1. Was post-war American liberalism from Truman to Johnson, a coherent political philosophy or a bundle of contradictions held together by the personalities of the political leaders or something in between?
2. Did American conservatism from the 1950s through the 1970s offer a clear alternative to liberalism or have conservative doctrines shared much with liberalism?
3. What has been the impact of social movement politics and identity politics on how liberalism is understood and practiced?