A distinctive American politics and culture is said to have emerged, clearly and perhaps even triumphantly, during the early republic, the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War or Reconstruction. Several generations of scholarship elucidated this period as the locus classicus of American political ideologies (republicanism, liberalism, democracy, constitutionalism, nationalism, race), cultural forms (the captivity narrative, the boycott, the celebratory parade, blackface minstrelsy) and institutions (the voluntary association, the political party, the press, the presidency). And yet the nature and boundaries of that culture and that politics now appear to have been not only porous but also deeply contested. It seems less certain what the Revolution created or what the Civil War resolved, and thus less clear how the first century of the nation created patterns or cycles followed or broken. Nor is it obvious or settled what mattered more: the formal politics or what occurred seemingly outside it in the culture wars of the time. Or how to characterize the relationship between the two, or those messy middle grounds between politics and culture that scholars began to identify, during the late twentieth century, with terms like ideology, political culture, and cultural politics. Or to put it differently, whether to approach the making of the United States as a state, as states, or as a state or states of mind.

At a time when American exceptionalism has come under renewed and withering criticism for its politicized uses, how should we approach the making of an American politics and culture(s)? Did the first century of the republic set "American"—or other--patterns? What was united – or disunited – and how? What was the national state and the states, and what were the stakes of state-making? Is it sufficient to conclude that the battles over what would be American politics and culture constituted the politics, the culture? Are the concepts of culture and of politics with which historians have worked adequate to the task of understanding the history and its significance? This seminar will address these questions by comparing classic and recent work by historians, by literary and cultural studies scholars in the American Studies tradition, and by political scientists -- including some scholarship that puts forward longer narratives that reach from the early republic to or through the twentieth century, something historians no longer do as often or as boldly as scholars in cognate fields. During some weeks there will also be a primary source or artifact under consideration that will help us evaluate whether various trends in scholarship are adequate not only to what we want and need to know now, but also to the demands the evidence may make on us.

Requirements:

(1) Active participation. This is a discussion class. During some weeks you will be tasked to bring in a primary source or talk about assigned ones (see below).

(2) One 5-page discussion paper. Beginning in March, each week two students will worth together to write/present a short paper, to be circulated the evening before class, on how the readings for the week relate to previous readings and to initiate discussion.
(3) Final Paper proposal, due March 24, and 15-20 page term paper, in the form of an essay on scholarship on a topic of your choice, or a research proposal along similar lines, due May 20.

**Schedule of Readings and Classes**

+ signifies texts available as e-books in the GC library
*signifies to be posted on Blackboard

**Feb. 4** Introduction: U.S. Political Culture as a Solution and a Problem

For historiographical background on US political history and the concept of political culture:
- Ronald P. Formisano, “The Concept of Political Culture,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31 (Winter 2001), 393-426
- Steven Pincus and William Novak, “Political History after the Cultural Turn,” AHA *Perspectives on History* (May 2011)
- Julian Zelizer, “The Interdisciplinarity of Political History,” *Perspectives on History* (May 2011)

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**On cultural history:**

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**On cultural and historical approaches in political science & political theory:**

**Feb. 11** The American Revolution and the Founding: Isms and Structures

- Elvin T. Lim, “Political Thought, Political Development, and America’s Two Foundings,” *American Political Thought* 3 (2014), 146-56.

**Feb. 18** Political Parties as American Cultures

* campaign materials from 1840
Feb. 25 Back to the Future in the Early Republic: Political Culture as Cultural Politics

March 3 Structures and Cycles Revisited
*read one presidential inaugural address

March 10 Women, Gender, and Politics by Cultural Means

March 17 Print and Nation-Making Reconsidered
*come to class prepared to discuss one issue of a U.S. newspaper from between 1780 and 1880

March 24 What was the Nation-State?
→Paper proposal due (2-3 pages plus bibliography)

March 31 State and Empire-Making (Culturally)
*Philip J. Deloria, “From Nation to Neighborhood: Land, Policy, Culture, Colonialism and Empire in U.S-Indian Relations” in Cook et al eds., The Cultural Turn in U.S History (2008), 343-82.

April 7 Culture and Politics in Post-British America
+ Kariann Yokota, Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation (2011)
OR Sam Haynes, Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World (2010)
*Van Gosse, “‘As a Nation, the English are our Friends’: The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772-1861,” American Historical Review (Oct. 2008), 1003-28.
*come to class prepared to discuss the place of England or Britain in one document or artifact of the period
Apr. 14  Mainstream and Margins in Transformation: Slavery, Race and Politics  

**Apr. 21** Another nation, another empire, another war  
Robert E. Bonner, *Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood*  

*Constitution of the Confederate States of America*

**Spring Break – no class Apr. 28**

**May 5** Second Emancipation/Reconstruction as Political Culture  
Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, ch. 7 (pp. 173-282).  

**May 12** Reconceptualizing the American Political Tradition  

**Week of May 15**: Presentations on paper topics, with bibliographies, for the group (week of May 15, to coincide with annual department meeting/party).

Final Paper due May 20