

Emory University
Department of Sociology
Spring Semester 2022
MW 2:30-3:45 p.m./Tarbutton 106

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Office Hours: MW 1:30-2:30 p.m.

SOC 389 Progressivism and Its Discontents: Debating the Issues

Content and goals

Progressivism is one of the most influential ideologies of our time. In the United States, progressive views prevail in higher education and progressive assumptions shape many public policies. But how valid are progressive arguments? Even where they appear to command broad support, what might be a serious case against them? To address such questions, this course critically examines influential progressive approaches to controversial issues and public policy, across a number of domains, through sustained argumentation and debate. While engaging with the content of progressive claims, we will also reflect sociologically on their function and impact as ideology. To do justice to the subject, this course will give more attention to history, political philosophy, and current affairs than most sociology offerings. It has the following goals:

- to probe the nature and impact of progressivism as a dominant ideology in the U.S. today
- to examine its assumptions and arguments more in-depth than is common in academia
- to show by example how best to make a case for (or against) a position on major issues
- to develop critical thinking skills by actually thinking critically

Format

While some classes will partly consist of lectures, much of the course will involve informal discussion and formal debate, including several structured team debates, all of which will call for very active student engagement.

Readings

All readings are listed in the schedule below and will be available on Canvas or via the library.

Requirements

1. Active participation, worth 10% of final grade. A key part of the course.
2. Two written responses to instructor presentations, one assigned, worth 10% each.
3. Two team debates, assigned roles and topics, including debate brief. 10% each.
4. One essay on a relevant issue of your choice, 3-4 pages. 20% of final grade.
5. Reflective essay, reviewing course materials, 6-8 pages, in lieu of final. 30% of grade.
6. Completion of some brief ungraded assignments, each less than 30 minutes of work.

Note: see Canvas for specific guidelines and rubrics for all major tasks.

Task	Weight	Due
Participation	10%	All semester
Two lecture responses	20%	Variable: 48 hours after relevant class
Two team debates	20%	2/14-21, 3/23-3/30
Topical essay	20%	4/18 (but earlier is better!)
Reflective essay	30%	5/4

Grading

- All work will be graded on a 100-point scale
- Letter grade equivalents are as follows: 92-100: A; 90-91.99: A-; 88-89.99: B+, etc.

Attendance policy

Because this course will often operate like a seminar and involve much discussion and debate, attendance is important. Do not take this course if you cannot commit to being present, including during virtual sessions demanded by the university. Because things happen, you may take one unexcused absence; each additional absence will result in 20 points off your participation grade. Documented health emergencies count as excuses, as do major family events if discussed with the instructor in advance.

Course etiquette

At times, this course will deal with issues typically considered controversial or even sensitive. Especially in debate, you should expect to challenge and be challenged. This makes it all the more important for us *also* to respect each other as valuable participants and to welcome the expression of diverse views. I have great confidence in Emory students' ability to engage constructively, but I reserve the right to intervene or set more detailed ground rules to maintain an open learning environment, if necessary.

Course policies [assuming in-class instruction]

1. No use of laptops, except when explicitly permitted (or as part of an accommodation)
2. No food or gum; water or other drinks OK
3. On-time arrival expected to avoid disruption
4. Honor code applies, as usual
5. In virtual sessions mandated by the university, turn cameras on

Assistance

- For accommodations, contact the [Department of Accessibility Services](#)
- For help with writing, contact the [Writing Center](#)
- To clarify any course materials, see me after class or come to office hours
- I am also available for informal discussion over lunch or coffee (M/W)

Schedule

- All book and most article titles refer to **excerpts**, available in electronic format on Canvas
- Sessions on “**the** case against . . .” will at least present **a** case and expand upon the shorthand-label used
- I may make small adjustments in the schedule or materials as needed
- I usually post short announcements prior to each class; make a habit of reading them
- Anticipate about 2 to 2.5 hours of work per class on average
- To manage workload, some readings may be assigned to subgroups and some made optional
- Note the dates for debate prep and debate (2/14-21, 3/23-3/30): those weeks will be busy, so plan ahead

- 1/12 Introduction. Progressivism and Its Discontents: Approach to the course
Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life*
Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*
- 1/19 What was Progressivism?
Walter Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction*
Stephen Skowronek and Stephen M. Engel, “The Progressives’ Century”
R.J. Pestritto, *America Transformed: The Rise and Legacy of American Progressivism*
Bradley C.S. Watson, *Progressivism: The Strange History of a Radical Idea*
R.J. Pestritto, “On Progressivism, Liberalism, and the Administrative State” [optional]
- 1/24 What is progressivism? 1: progressive views
Roberto Mangabeira Unger/Cornel West, *The Future of American Progressivism*
Joseph E. Stiglitz, “A Progressive Agenda for the 21st Century”
Bruce Ackerman, “What Is to Be Done? A New Progressivism for a New Century”
Gordon Hak, *Liberal Progressivism: Politics and Class in the Age of Neoliberalism and Climate Change*
- 1/26 What is progressivism? 2: the case against it
Thomas Sowell, “A Conflict of Visions,” “Patterns of the Anointed”
Christopher Caldwell, “Really Existing Progressivism: Its Strengths and Weaknesses”
Ruy Teixeira, “The Five Deadly Sins of the Left: An Update”
Michael Lind, “How American Progressives Became French Jacobins”
Lawrence Reed, *Excuse Me, Professor: Challenging the Myths of Progressivism* [optional]
- 1/31 Meritocracy 1: progressive views
Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*
Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Meritocracy*
Daniel Markovits, “How Life Became an Endless, Terrible Competition”
Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Myth of Meritocracy”

- 2/2 Meritocracy 2: the case against the “tyranny of meritocracy”
 Adrian Wooldridge, *The Aristocracy of Talent*
 James Hankins, “[American Meritocracy: A Tipping Point?](#)”
 UC Senate, *Report of the UC Academic Council Standardized Testing Task Force*
 Dorian Abbot, “[The Views That Made Me Persona Non Grata at MIT](#)”
- 2/7 The Constitution 1: progressive views
 Erwin Chemerinsky, *The Case against the Supreme Court*; and *We the People: A Progressive Reading of the Constitution for the Twenty-First Century*
Boston Globe, “[Editing the Constitution](#)”
 Jack Balkin et al., *The Constitution in 2020*
 Sanford Levinson, *Our Undemocratic Constitution*
 Bruce Ackerman, “[The Living Constitution](#)” [optional]
- 2/9 The Constitution 2: the case against the “living Constitution”
 William Rehnquist, “[The Notion of a Living Constitution](#)”
 George Will, *The Conservative Sensibility*
 Ilan Wurman, “[The Case for Originalism](#)”
- 2/14 In-class debate preparation/team deliberation
- 2/16 Debate 1: *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*
- 2/21 Debate 2: hate speech and cancellations
- 2/23 The nation 1: progressive views
 Martha Nussbaum, “[Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism](#)”
 Tomas Pueyo, “[The End of Nation-States: How They Will Fall](#)”
 Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Idea That Is America*
 Nikole Hannah-Jones, *New York Times’ 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*
- 2/28 The nation 2: the case against “cosmopolitanism”
 Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism*
 Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation*
 Rich Lowry, *The Case for Nationalism*
 Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation*
- 3/2 Racial inequality 1: progressive views
 Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*
 Frederick Harris and Robert Lieberman, “[Racial Inequality After Racism](#)”
 Andrea Flynn et al., “[Toward a Third Reconstruction](#)”
 CAP, *Eliminating the Black-White Wealth Gap Is a Generational Challenge*

3/7-11 Spring Break

- 3/14 Racial inequality 2: the case against “systemic racism”
John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*
Paul Taylor, “[Critique of Critical Race Theory](#)” (essay series)
Christopher Caldwell, “[The Inequality of ‘Equity’](#)”
- 3/16 Criminal justice 1: progressive views
Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
Emily Bazelon, *Charged: The New Movement to Transform American Prosecution and End Mass Incarceration*
Jessica Eaglin, “[To “Defund” the Police](#)”
Brennan Center for Justice, “[Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings](#)”
- 3/21 Criminal justice 2: the case against the “carceral state”
Charles Stimson and Zack Smith, “[“Progressive” Prosecutors Sabotage the Rule of Law](#)”
Andrew McCarthy, “[The Progressive Prosecutor Project](#)” and
“[Fictions of the ‘Carceral State’](#)”
Rafael Mangual, “[Mass Decarceration Is Not the Answer](#)”
- 3/23 In-class debate preparation/team deliberation
- 3/28 Debate 3: open borders and amnesty
- 3/30 Debate 4: police defunding
- 4/4 Social democracy 1: progressive views
Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America* and *Social Democratic Capitalism*
Kate Aronoff et al., *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism—American Style*
Thomas Piketty, “[Long Live Socialism!](#)”
The Economist, “[The Great Embiggening](#)” [optional]
- 4/6 Social democracy 2: the case against “social justice”
Friedrich Hayek, *The Mirage of Social Justice*
William Voegeli, *Never Enough: America’s Limitless Welfare State*
John Cogan, *The High Cost of Good Intentions*
Nicholas Eberstadt, “[The Great Society at Fifty: The Triumph and the Tragedy](#)”
- 4/11 Climate change 1: progressive views
IPCC, *AR5 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2014; Global Warming of 1.5°C*
Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright, *Climate Leviathan*
Center for American Progress, *A 100 Percent Clean Future*

- 4/13 Climate change 2: the case against “climate crisis”
Steven Koonin, *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn’t, and Why It Matters*
Bjørn Lomborg, *False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails to Fix the Planet*
Michael Shellenberger, *Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All*
- 4/18 Conversation about essays
Topical essay due
- 4/20 Covid policy 1: progressive views
TBA!
- 4/25 Covid policy 2: the case against “follow the science”
Ben Shapiro, “How Science™ Defeated Actual Science”
Scott Atlas, *A Plague upon Our House*
David Zweig, “[The CDC’s Flawed Case for Wearing Masks in School](#)”
Robby Soave, “[Against Faucism](#)”
- 5/4 **Reflective essay due**