Identities in American Politics in the 21st Century

Fall 2018

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Marvin L Astrada
Email: ma190@nyu.edu
Office hours: By appointment

Course Information

POL-UA 9994 DC1

Identities in American Politics in the 21st Century

1. Course Description:

“When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.” - Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man

“I am not one and simple, but complex and many.” - Virginia Woolf, The Waves

Identity and the politics of identity, as analytic concepts, fields of study, and in practice, have evolved since the inception of what is commonly referred to as “identity politics” in the mid-twentieth century. Presently, identity politics in the US encapsulates a broad range of theories, concepts, ordering principles, assumptions, and practices located in the ostensibly “shared” experiences of marginalization and oppression of individual subjects based on their distinctive actual or apperceived membership within certain identity-based communities and/or sub-groups. Rather than organizing on explicitly sociopolitical and/or economic belief systems, ideological platforms, or political party affiliations, many modern political movements/organizations are based on politicized identity. Such movements/organizations typically aim to declare, clarify, and secure sundry rights and freedoms to enhance the well-being of a specific identity-based
constituency that has been marginalized within the larger societal context, politically, socially, and/or economically.

Members—or rather designated or self-appointed representatives—of such a constituency ostensibly re/assert or re/claim ways of explaining and understanding their distinctiveness, their experiences, history, that directly challenge a dominant constituency’s (oppressive) characterizations of out-groups’ experiences and status in society. The stated overarching goal of identity-based socio-political programs, as put forth by elite representatives of an identity group, is usually to obtain greater self-determination, autonomy, rights, and recognition of the value and worth of a marginalized group’s experience. In doing so, politicized identity becomes an exercise of power. Identity has become not only a basis for political representation but also a means of obtaining and exercising power – politically, economically, and socio-culturally in the realms of law – via pursuit of a political program that directly impacts public policy.

As an expression of power, identity politics has profoundly impacted the fabric of American political culture, and affected the political, legal, cultural, and socioeconomic actuality of those who reside within and without classificatory schema based on identity. For example, in the 21st century the hyper-development of technological mediums of expression and communication has enabled media (social and traditional) to saturate the public mind about the extant and ever-growing divide between and among Americans based on binary identity oppositions—liberals v. conservatives, urbanites v. suburbanites, black v. white, police v. minorities, young v. old, native-born v. immigrant, heterosexual v. homosexual, and even Trump v. Anti-Trump in an era of “Trumpism”—based on notions of race, ethnicity, gender, sex, religion, and ideology, among other signifiers. The binary persists, and its power effects are embedded in identity politics.

In this seminar, we will thus explore the complexity of identity, the politics of American identity, and the affects/effects politicized identity has for the character and content of the American polity. We will examine and analyze historical and present manifestations of politicized identity in the US, interrogate proffered binaries, and delve into the enterprise of critically evaluating identity, politicized identity, and the effects each has on American identity. The aim is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to appreciate and gauge the conceptual complexity of politicized identity, and reveal how the conceptual directly informs the practice of identity politics.

To identify, reveal, and critically analyze the power-effects and consequentialness of politicized identity is the overarching aim of this seminar. Identity politics has had and continues to have a profound e/affect on defining the potential and actuality of political, social, and economic reality for groups, sub-groups, and individual subjects. This seminar will provide students with a select and rigorous introduction to select theoretical perspectives and issues that arise when critically appraising politicized identity. The course employs materials from the humanities, social sciences, and/or law to explore politicized identity in the US.

2. Prerequisites: Although there are no formal prerequisites, it is strongly recommended that students have completed coursework in American government, history, politics, law, political
theory, and/or political science. We will be reading materials that assume a working knowledge of the foregoing areas of study.

3. **Date/Time:** Monday 6:15PM–9:15PM (*Note: There may be at least one non-Monday make-up day*)

4. **Location:** B109

### Course Overview and Goals

Ideally, the aims of this course are for students to:

1. Develop a working knowledge and understanding of the philosophical, historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors underpinning identity, identity politics, and politicized identity.

2. Be conversant with, and have an appreciation for, select conceptual approaches to/theories of identity politics in the US.

3. Develop a deeply critical perspective of identity and politicized identity.

4. Through leading a class discussion, intensive participation, and assuming a point role in interviewing identity-based policy professionals in the DC area, learn how to critically examine politicized identity, and pose questions that facilitate thoughtful and respectful debate.

5. To deeply question preexisting ideas and beliefs held about identity and the politics of identity.

**Upon Completion of this Course, students will ideally be able to:**

- Identify and critically assess the power-effects of politicized identity
- Appreciate the complexity of identity and how it manifests in discourse and policy
- Be cognizant of the nexus betwixt theory and practice, concepts and policy

### Course Requirements

**Class Structure, Participation, Expectations & Assessment**

1. **THIS IS A READING-INTENSIVE SEMINAR:** The assigned readings are extensive and dense, yet necessary to provide the student with basic working materials to adequately engage and critically analyze complex conceptual approaches/frameworks. Also, the readings reflect the fact that each session is comprised of 2 classes.
2. **THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE SEMINAR:** You are expected to actively and substantively participate in all class discussion, activities, debate, and presentations. This is not a passive participatory seminar.

3. Respect and civility between students, and students and instructor are **basic and expected at all times.** We will be discussing controversial, difficult, and complex issues. The seminar serves as an academic space wherein ALL points of view and perspectives can be questioned and critiqued, whether one approaches (identity) politics from a traditional “Left” or “Right” perspective. The seminar provides a place where questions are welcomed, and wherein thoughtful, civil dialogue and disagreement can take place. The censoring of “unpopular” views, norms, values, etc., the bolstering of “popular” views, norms, values, etc., and/or attempting to find “correct” interpretations of identity, the politics of identity, and politicized identity are NOT the purpose of this seminar.

**Assignment**

1. Interactive Presentation
2. Analytic Paper 1
3. Analytic Paper 2
4. Interview

**Required Text/Assigned Readings**

2. Additional materials will be posted to NYU Classes.

**Grading of Assignments**

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments/Activities</th>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Presentation</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Paper 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Paper 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Failure to timely submit or fulfill any required course component may result in grade reduction or failure (Grade of “F”).
Guidelines for Assignments

Interactive Presentation

**Format:** 35–45 minutes formal presentation on assigned topic/reading(s) from syllabus. Students will either select or be assigned a topic/reading and class period to present. Allocation of dates and topics/readings will be determined during the first class session. Power Point or other formal presentation format is required. Note: Please email the presentation to the class and instructor before class begins. Loss of points will occur when:

1. unclear/incoherent presentation – up to 20 points.
2. insufficient critical thought/reflection, insufficient engagement with materials/class – up to 20 points.

Some examples of how to lose points: Presentation regurgitates assigned readings’ arguments, concepts, theories; Presentation is simply read off prepared notes/outlines; Presentation is not participatory, it does not engage the class; no formal guide such as PowerPoint or handouts provided to class to focus and organize the presentation.

Some examples of how to obtain points: Presentation focuses on key points/aspects that student finds interesting, problematic, in need of analysis and critical commentary; Presentation uses materials to engage the class in debate, discussion, activities designed to explore and question class materials; Presentation does not merely provide summaries of readings and importance.

**Substance** – *Very brief* summaries of reading. The bulk of your presentation should be spent on your critical reading and analysis of the topic/reading – in particular, a critique/analysis of the proffered thesis/argument should be presented. Presentation should not paraphrase, regurgitate, etc., material; rather, the presentation should highlight your select critical analysis of some major aspect(s) of the reading’s thesis/hypothesis, implications, and/or methodology. Presentation should be focused, clear, and engage the assigned topic/reading. Most importantly, the presentation should engage the audience; i.e., you are not simply presenting information to a passive audience. Active class participation is to be facilitated, e.g., through group activities, and/or posing, answering, and debating questions. Media accounts can be incorporated into the presentation if related to subject matter.

Analytic Papers

**Format** – Title page, one-inch margins, 1.5 or double-spaced, 11 or 12-font Times New Roman, Word doc, consecutively numbered pages. Proper grammar, citation, style, etc., is expected and required. Clear, coherent prose is expected when writing entries. MLA format or other academic format acceptable for citation. Analytic Paper #1 is due at the beginning of Session 8, and Analytic Paper #2 is due by 5:00PM the Monday of Finals Week. Each paper is worth 25% of final grade. Each paper should be approx. 8-10 pages, but no more than 12 pages. Loss of points will occur when:
1. improper formatting, unclear/incoherent grammar/prose, lack of citations – up to 25 points per paper.

2. insufficient critical thought/reflection, insufficient engagement with materials – up to 25 points per paper.

**Substance** – The overall purpose of the analytic papers is for you to develop, document and critically engage and appraise your perspective(s) on politicized identity. The papers should reflect thoughtful engagement with the materials and class discussion. Each paper should encompass critical reflection and analysis of theories, concepts, principles, issue-areas etc., covered in materials and class discussion up to the due date. The second paper is limited to the second half of the seminar (non-comprehensive) Your view, opinion, of the readings (supported by the materials) is expected. Papers should:

Posit a theme(s), thesis/theses, to organize reflection and discussion. Papers should be organized by theme/concept/principles that structure the class, e.g., the role of power in identity formulation, the role of sex and gender in politicized identity, or the role of economy in formulating politicized identity, and the consequences, effects, etc., that result from such postulations.

Although you do not have to cover every reading, you will find significant overlap when viewing politicized identity form a macroscopic conceptual level of analysis. Focus on a set(s) of readings, how they relate to other set(s), general themes in class, etc. Explore your views, opinions, assessments of the materials and class debate/discussion in the papers using the materials as primary sources.

The papers should encompass your view/opinions of arguments/contentions made utilizing the assigned materials as evidence to support a thesis or contention. Papers should be a product of your thought, opinions, and contentions based on and employing the materials. There are no “right” answers.

**Suggestions:** You may wish to: Write 2-3 pages on each session’s readings per week, like a journal format; focus on overarching themes and plug individual reading assignments into this type of framework. Or you may wish to focus on how a particular set of readings comprehensively informs the others, or why a set of readings is more noteworthy than others and why.

**Preparation for Papers/Presentations/Class Discussions:**

You will maximize your learning experience if you actively engage the materials and the class. The presentation format includes ample time for substantive participation by all students in discussions. (You will find that most of class time will most likely be spent on discussion). You will critically explore the content of the assigned readings in your papers, presentations, and class discussion. You should always keep in mind (and perhaps prepare some type of notes as you do the readings on each of) the following questions for every assigned reading:

Identify the author’s argument, and try to summarize it in one or two sentences. For instance, what are the logical steps of the argument? Does the author propose a theory?
An interpretation? Can you identify normative assumptions or philosophical foundations of the argument? What is the evidence?

Do you find the argument compelling? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

How does the analysis in a text measure up to analyses offered by other authors we are reading in this seminar (or arguments made in other texts you have read)? With your own life experience?

How well do the theory and/or findings apply outside of the text, i.e., are they helpful if we want to understand important questions or phenomena beyond the reading? For example, what exactly constitutes an identity? Is it a sociocultural construct, or a “real” thing? What are the power-effects of politicized identity?

Interview

Thanks to a grant from NYU, students will have a unique opportunity help design and administer interview scripts/questions for local identity-group advocacy and policy leaders, and then analyze interviews in light of class materials and discussion. The professor will coordinate (supervised) student scripts/interviews with senior advocacy and policy leaders and national experts from identity-based advocacy organizations in the DC area. Interviewees may include senior staff of national advocacy organizations, senior staffers from Capitol Hill, and national research experts from local non-profit organizations. Potential (politicized) identity-based group advocates/policy professionals to be considered/interviewed (from both sides of the political spectrum) are: The American Enterprise Institute, George Mason Mercatus Center, Libre Initiative, Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute, National Council of La Raza, ACLU, Center for Responsible Lending, NAACP, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and Center for American Progress. Students and the Professor will collaboratively develop topics/questions. The interviews will be recorded for podcast format. The content of the podcasts will provide subject matter for class debate and discussion. Advocacy and policy professionals and experts will be interviewed with scripts developed by students on relevant and current events and topics in the realm of identity politics. The unique aspect of this podcast will be that it is comprised of student-generated content and questions, and that students will be able to meet and interview senior level community and policy leaders in the DC area. The project is designed to expose and immerse students in the local context and culture of identity politics. The interviews provide an empirical manifestation of concepts explored in the readings.

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>94-100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Letter Grade** | **Points** | **Percent**
--- | --- | ---
A- | 3.67 | 90-93
B+ | 3.33 | 87-89
B | 3.00 | 84-86
B- | 2.67 | 80-83
C+ | 2.33 | 77-79
C | 2.00 | 74-76
C- | 1.67 | 70-73
D+ | 1.33 | 67-69
D | 1.00 | 65-66
F | .00 | Below 65

**View Grades**
Grades will be available on the NYU Classes site.

**Course Schedule**

**Topics and Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27- Aug-18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Assignment Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Sept-18</td>
<td>Labor Day - No Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Constructing &amp; Concretizing Politicized Identity &amp; Identity Discourse</td>
<td>Norton Anthology:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Politicized Identity: Some Fundamental Challenges &amp; Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Assignment Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. David Harvey, Norton Anthology, pp. 1772–79.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Problematizing Politicized Identity: The Political &amp; Socio-Cultural</td>
<td>Norton Anthology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-Oct-18</td>
<td>Fall Break - No Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Assignment Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 8</td>
<td>The Political &amp; Socio-Cultural: Sex &amp; Gender</td>
<td>Norton Anthology:</td>
<td>ANALYTIC PAPER #1 DUE BEGINNING OF CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Eve Sedgwick, pp. 2277–90.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 9</td>
<td>The Political &amp; Socio-Cultural: Discourse &amp; Ideology</td>
<td>Norton Anthology:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Louis Althusser, pp. 1282–1311.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 10</td>
<td>The Political &amp; Socio-Cultural: State Identity &amp; the Subject</td>
<td>Norton Anthology:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week/Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Assignment Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Session 13 30-Nov-18 | Designed make-up day for Monday classes | Imagining Communities: Revisiting Theory & the Politics of Identity  
| Session 14 3-Dec-18 | Conclusion/Wrap Up |                                                                                                                                  |                 |
### Course Materials

#### Required Textbooks & Materials

- 2. Additional materials will be posted to NYU Classes.

#### Optional Textbooks & Materials

- Readings will be provided for interested students

#### Resources

- Access your course materials: [NYU Classes](nyu.edu/its/classes)
- Databases, journal articles, and more: [Bobst Library](library.nyu.edu)
- Assistance with strengthening your writing: [NYU Writing Center](nyu.mywconline.com)
- Obtain 24/7 technology assistance: [IT Help Desk](nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

### Course Policies

#### Attendance and Tardiness

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade (for courses that meet once per week; for courses that meet twice per week, it is a one percent reduction per missed class).

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must use the online absence reporting form within 24 hours of their first missed class. Students may be required to produce a doctor’s note with that day’s date, especially if the student has missed any classes already that semester or if exams/presentations/papers occurred in the missed class.
Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Staff at least 7 days before the missed date(s) in question. If faculty members do not receive notification of an excused absence, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each lecturer to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/ or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave Washington, DC before the end of the finals week.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

**Late Assignment**

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.
2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed.
3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.
4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.
5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.
6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.
7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

**Incomplete Grade Policy**

An “incomplete” is a temporary grade that indicates that the student has, for good reason, not completed all of the course work. This grade is not awarded automatically nor is it guaranteed; rather, the student must ask the instructor for a grade of “incomplete,” present documented evidence of illness, an emergency, or other compelling circumstances, and clarify the remaining course requirements with the instructor.

In order for a grade of “incomplete” to be registered on the transcript, the student must fill out a form, in collaboration with the course instructor and the academic administration at the site; it should then be submitted to the site’s academic office. The submitted form must include a
deadline by which the missing work will be completed. This deadline may not be later than the end of the following semester.

**Academic Honesty/Plagiarism**

As the University’s policy on "[Academic Integrity for Students at NYU](https://www.nyu.edu/policy/academic-integrity/)" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." [Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.](https://www.nyu.edu/policy/academic-integrity/)

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the lecturer. Your lecturer may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

[NYU Academic Integrity Policies and Guidelines](https://www.nyu.edu/policy/academic-integrity/)

[NYU Library Guides](https://www.nyu.edu/library/guides/)

**Disability Disclosure Statement**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

**Religious Observances**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Washington, DC Academics team in writing via email at least 7 days before being absent for this purpose.
Miscellaneous
Classroom Etiquette

1. Please arrive on time; lateness is extremely disruptive. If you must be late, please enter in an unobtrusive and quiet manner. Once the class has started, students are expected to stay until the end of the class period. Lastly, please be attentive and respectful for the duration of the class period; refrain from talking or making other noise while in class. Failure to arrive promptly and remain for the duration of the class will result in student being marked absent.

2. Electronic Devices. Personal computers (for the purpose of note-taking) should be the only electronic devices utilized while attending class. Please refrain from engaging in online social media of any kind (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and the like) while using computers in class. While I can understand the allure of passing time in class via social media, doing so will negatively impact your experience/final grade; if you are caught using social media for part or all of class time, then you are, in essence, not in class and may be marked absent. While in class please turn off/silence ALL electronic devices, including but not limited to cell-phones. The noises emitted from various electronic devices are disruptive. Please do not use a cell phone in class. If you are expecting or must take a call, excuse yourself quietly from the classroom; please do not answer your phone while in the classroom. Please do not use a cell phone while in class for any purpose. Interruptions of this nature will negatively impact your experience/grade in the class. I reserve the right to ask you to leave the classroom and mark you absent if you violate this policy. Problem behavior will be reported to the Academic Director/Coordinator.