

# Politics Of The 1990s

## *Annotated Syllabus*

This annotated syllabus reflects the readings and course topics of a 400-level advanced seminar on political developments in the 1990s and their reverberations into the twenty-first century. This class was co-taught by Dr. Howell Williams and Chris Powers at Western Connecticut State University during the Fall 2025 Semester. At the end of the syllabus is a reading list of books consulted throughout the semester as well as a list of topics that could have been incorporated but were not due to time constraints.

### **Week 1: Intros**

CLASS #1—Course Introduction

- 1990s Student Brainstorm Activity: “What do you already know about the 1990s politically and what do you think is the ‘decade-defining’ event of the 1990s”

### **Week 2: Neoliberalism 1**

CLASS #1—Labor Day...No class

CLASS #2—Neoliberalism and Reaganism

- **TOPICS**
  - John Meynard Keynes and Keynesian Economics
  - FDR and the New Deal Order
  - The Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, and Stagflation
  - Jimmy Carter as the transitional president to Neoliberalism & Paul Volcker
  - Ronald Reagan and the resurgence of the American Conservative
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - F. A. Hayek, “[The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons](#)” (1945)
  - David M. Gibbs, “[America’s First Neoliberal President](#),” *Compact Magazine* (2024)

### **Week 3: Neoliberalism 2**

CLASS #1—America, Global Super Power

- **TOPICS**
  - Ronald Reagan and the Cold War
  - The End of the Cold War
  - The Gulf War
  - The United States’ Role in:
    - The Good Friday Agreement
    - North Korean Agreed Framework
    - The India/Pakistan Conflict
    - The Israel/Palestine Conflict

- The Oslo Accords
- The 2000 Camp David Talks
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire [speech](#)” (1982)
  - Institute for Middle East Understanding, “[Explainer: The Oslo Accords](#)” (2023)

CLASS #2—Clintonism, the DLC, and Third Way Politics

- **TOPICS**
  - The Birth of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)
  - Clintonism and Third Way Politics
  - The 1992 Republican Primary
    - Overview of Major Candidates and the Primary
    - Bush vs Buchanan
      - CLIP: “[Read My Lips: No New Taxes](#)”
  - The 1992 Democratic Primary
    - Overview of Major Candidates and the Primary
    - Clinton Scandals
      - CLIP: Bill and Hillary’s [60 Minutes Response](#) to Allegations
  - The 1992 General Election
    - Ross Perot’s 3rd Party Bid
    - Bush’s Involvement in Iran Contra (October Surprise)
    - Presidency/Senate/House Election Results
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Lily Geismer, “[How the Third Way Made Neoliberal Politics Seem Inevitable](#)” (2022)
  - 1992 Election [episode](#) of the podcast *History As It Happens*

**Week 4: Race and Criminality**

CLASS #1—1994 Crime Bill

- **TOPICS**
  - Prison Rehabilitation and Furlough Programs
  - Willie Horton and the power of the Perception of Crime
    - CLIP: [Willie Horton Ad](#)
  - Increasing Crime Rates in the early 1990s
  - The 1994 Crime Bill
    - Federal Assault Weapon Ban
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Rashawn Ray and William A. Galston, “[Did the 1994 crime bill cause mass incarceration?](#)” (2020)
  - The Marshall Project, “[Willie Horton Revisited](#)” (2015)

CLASS #2—The OJ Simpson Trial

- **TOPICS**

- Black Americans' perceptions of Policing
- The Beating of Rodney King
- The 1992 LA Riots
- The OJ Simpson Trial
  - Key Footage Shown to Students:
    - Bronco Chase
    - Mark Fuhrman denying saying the N-word
    - OJ Simpson trying on the gloves
    - The Fuhrman Tapes
    - Fuhrman pleading the Fifth
    - "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit"

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- Jonathan Freedland, "[The OJ Simpson trial was sensational – and a portent of the strife-torn America we see today](#)" (2024)

## **Week 5: Civil Rights 1**

### **CLASS #1—Civil Rights**

- **TOPICS (Student Presentations)**

- Employment Division v. Smith (1990)
- Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
- Family and Medical Leave Act (1993)
- Vernonia v. Acton (1995)
- California Prop 209 (1996)

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- Amistad Digital Resource, "[Social and Economic Issues of the 1980s and 1990s](#)" (n.d.)

### **CLASS #2—Womens' Rights**

- **TOPICS (Student Presentations)**

- Anita Hill's Testimony against Clarence Thomas (background prefatory lecture)
  - CLIP: Footage of both [Hill](#) and [Thomas](#)' testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee
- Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992)
- United States v. Morrison (2000)
- Harris v. Forklift Systems (1993)
- J.E.B. v. Alabama ex rel. T.B. (1994)

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- Allison Yarrow, "[How the '90s Tricked Women Into Thinking They'd Gained Gender Equality](#)" (2018)
- "[Girl Power and the Faux Feminism of the 1990s](#)," Bossed Up podcast (2025)

## Week 6: Civil Rights 2

### CLASS #1—LGBT Rights

- **TOPICS (Student Presentations)**
  - Americans' Perceptions of LGBT Individuals (background prefatory lecture)
  - Don't Ask Don't Tell (background prefatory lecture)
  - Defense of Marriage Act (1996)
  - Romer v. Evans (1996)
  - Baker v. Vermont (1999)
  - Boy Scouts of America v. Dale (2000)
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Paula Ettelbrick, "[Since When Is Marriage a Path to Liberation?](#)" (1989)

### CLASS #2—No class

## Week 7: Welfare Reform

### CLASS #1—Gingrich, Contract with America, and the 1994 midterms

- **TOPICS**
  - Newt Gingrich's Style of Politics
    - CLIP: [Gingrich Floor Speech](#)
  - The "Contract with America"
  - The 1994 Midterm Elections
  - The First 100 Days of the 1995 Congress
    - CLIP: [Gingrich's National Address](#)
  - Connecting 1994 to the Tea Party (2010), Trump, and the modern Republican Party
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Republican Party, "[Contract with America](#)"
  - Norman J. Ornstein, Amy L. Schenkenberg, "[The 1995 Congress: The First Hundred Days and Beyond](#)" (through page 18, *Dueling Agendas*)

### CLASS #2—Welfare reform and PRWORA of 1996

- **TOPICS**
  - Political Capitol
  - President Clinton's 1993 Budget Battle and Passage
  - Clinton's Attempts to Reform Healthcare
    - CLIP: [Clinton's Healthcare Veto Threat](#)
    - CLIP: [Harry and Louise Ads](#)
  - The Political Calculations and Politics of the PROWRA and Welfare Reform
  - The Legacy of the PROWRA
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - H. Howell Williams, "['Personal Responsibility' and the End of Welfare as We Know It](#)" (2017)

- H. Howell Williams, “Take Time to Be a Dad Today” (book chapter from *Fatherhood, Race, and the American State* [Penn Press 2026])

## **Week 8: The Radical Right**

### **CLASS #1—Rise of the Radical Right**

- **TOPICS**

- The Politics Journey of the Brady Bill
  - CLIP: [Assassination Attempt of Reagan](#)
  - Specifics of the Brady Bill
- Printz v. United States (1997)
- The Lautenberg Amendment
- United States v. Lopez (1995)
- The Politics of Gun Control
  - Novel Interpretations of the 2nd Amendment
  - Harlon Carters’ Transformation of the NRA
  - Resistance to Gun Control Legislation
  - CLIP: [Ronald Reagan’s Embrace of the NRA](#)
- Ruby Ridge
- Waco

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- [Ruby Ridge Documentary: American Standoff | Retro Report | The New York Times](#)
- [The Shadow of Waco | Retro Report | The New York Times](#)

### **CLASS #2—Rise of the Radical Right**

- **TOPICS**

- American Militia Movement
- Rush Limbaugh and Talk Radio
- Oklahoma City Bombing
- The 1996 Republican Primary
  - Truncated Primary Calendar and Power of the Establishment
- The 1996 General Election
  - The “Boring” Election
  - Ross Perot’s Second Campaign
  - CLIP: [First 1996 Presidential Debate](#)
  - Presidency/Senate/House Election Results

## **Week 9: Media**

CLASS #1—Media in the 90s

- **TOPICS**

- Atlanta's Channel 17 and WTCG
  - CLIP: [Bill Tush's News Program](#)
- Expansion of Cable and Satellite Broadcast Television
  - CLIP: [First Satellite Broadcast](#)
- Financial Model of Cable Television
- Ted Turner, Reese Schonfeld, and the Birth of CNN
- The Launch of CNN
  - CLIP (0:09 - 6:45): [CNN's First Broadcast](#)
  - CLIP: (22:04 - 23:07): [CNN's First Broadcast](#)
- CNN's Expansion in the Late 80s/Early 90s
- The Gulf War
  - CLIP (starting at 4:10): [CNN First to Report Gulf War](#)
- MSNBC
  - CLIP: [MSNBC's First Broadcast](#)
- Fox News
  - CLIP: [Fox News' First Broadcast](#)
- The Role of Cable Television in the 1990s
  - CLIP: [Crossfire](#)

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- That's The Way It Is Chapter 5 from That's The Way It Is by Charles L. Ponce de Leon
- Hate Inc Chapter 13 from Hate Inc. by Matt Taibbi

CLASS #2—No class

## **Week 10: Film in the 90s**

**\*\*no class this week, but be prepared for the discussion on film in the 90s**

## **Week 11: Film recap and Impeachment 1**

CLASS #1—Film in the 90s discussion

- **TOPICS (Film Discussion)**

- American Beauty
- Apollo 13
- Armageddon
- Boyz N The Hood
- Election, Forest Gump
- Independence Day
- Magnolia

- Malcolm X
- Saving Private Ryan
- Tank Girl
- The Truman Show
- The Birdcage
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Watch Film(s)

CLASS #2—Clinton impeachment 1

- **TOPICS**
  - Clinton Controversies and Conspiracies
    - Whitewater
    - Travel Gate
    - File Gate
    - Vince Foster’s Suicide and Files
  - The Paula Jones Accusation
    - CLIP: [Paula Jones Accusation](#)
  - Clinton v. Jones (1997)
  - Whitewater Special Council and Ken Starr’s Appointment
  - Importance of Scandal to the Clinton Name
  - Who is Monica Lewinsky?
  - Detailed Description of Lewinsky and Clinton’s Relationship
  - Who is Linda Tripp?
  - Linda Tripp’s Relationship with Monica Lewinsky
  - Tripp’s Tape Recordings
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - [Monica Lewinsky: An Intern vs. The President \(Full Episode\)](#)

**Week 12: Impeachment 2**

CLASS #1—Impeachment 2

- **TOPICS**
  - Luciane Goldberg and Susan Carpenter McMillan
  - Tripp and Lewinsky’s Legal Involvement
  - Lewinsky’s “Day From Hell”
    - Linda Tripp’s Bugged Conversation
    - Expansion of the Whitewater Investigation
    - FBI Interception of Lewinsky
      - CLIP: [Dramatic Recreation of the Lewinsky Interception](#)
    - Lewinsky’s Illegal Interrogation
  - Clinton’s Deposition
    - CLIP: [Clinton’s Word Games](#)
  - The Publication of the Affair
  - The Court of Public Opinion
    - CLIP: [“I Did Not Have Sexual Relations”](#)

- The Slut Shaming of Monica Lewinsky
      - CLIP: [Jay Leno's Slut Shaming of Lewinsky](#)
    - Linda Tripp's Defense
      - CLIP: [Tripp's Grand Jury Conference](#)
      - CLIP: [Tripp SNL Portrayal](#)
    - Hillary Clinton's Role
      - CLIP: [Vast Right Wing Conspiracy](#)
  - Clinton's Public Admission of Guilt
    - CLIP: [Address to the Nation](#)
  - Polling Data on Lewinsky, Clinton, Tripp, Starr, and the Affair-Itself
  - The Starr Report
    - CLIP: [Clinton's Post-Starr-Report Apology](#)
  - Israel and Benjamin Netanyahu's Attempt to Blackmail Clinton over the Affair
  - The Impeachment Inquiry Vote
  - The 1998 Midterm Election
  - The House Impeachment Vote
    - Publication of the Tripp Tapes
    - Bob Livingstone's Affair Revealed
    - CLIP: [Clinton's Unity Press Conference](#)
  - The Senate Trial
  - The Aftermath of the Impeachment Scandal
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - [Ken Starr's Whitewater Investigation | 60 Minutes Archive](#)
  - [The price of shame | Monica Lewinsky | TED](#)
  - [Articles of Impeachment](#) against President Bill Clinton

#### CLASS #2—2000 Election and Bush v. Gore

- **TOPICS**
  - The 2000 Republican Primary
    - Overview of Major Candidates and the Primary
    - Bush vs McCain
      - The Brutal South Carolina Primary
  - The 2000 Democratic Primary
    - Al Gore vs Bill Bradley
    - Bradley's Attempted New Hampshire Insurgency
    - Substantial Flaws of Al Gore
  - The 2000 General Election
    - Economic Boom of the Late 1990s
    - Lingering Fallout of Impeachment
    - Ralph Nader's Candidacy
    - The Reform Party
      - Jesse Ventura Wrestles the Party from Ross Perot
      - Donald Trump vs Pat Buchanan
    - October Surprise

- CLIP: [Bush's DUI October Surprise](#)
    - CLIP: [Fox News' Reaction](#)
  - The Senate Results
    - The Missouri Senate Race
  - The House Results
  - The Presidential Results
    - Party Shift Dynamics in the South, Midwest, West Coast and amongst White College/non-College voters, Hispanics, and Muslims
    - Close results in Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin
    - The Florida Connundrum
  - Bush v. Gore (2000)
    - The Transformation of the Supreme Court
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Newsweek, "[Caught In Clinton's Shadow](#)" (2000)

### Week 13: 9/11

#### CLASS #1—9/11

- **TOPICS**
  - What is Terrorism?
  - How Do We Perceive Terrorists?
  - Islamic Extremism
  - The World Trade Center Bombing
  - Osama Bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad
    - May 1998 Attempt to Assassinate Bin Laden
    - CLIP: [Bin Laden Interview](#)
  - East Africa Embassy Bombings
  - USS Cole Attack
  - Anticipations of Terrorist Attacks in the United States
    - Bush's Anti-intellectualism and Apathy Towards Foreign Policy
    - Various Warnings in the Presidential Daily Brief and Intelligence Sources
  - Discussion on the Idea: "Bush Did 9/11"
- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**
  - Executive [memo](#): "Bin Ladin Determined To Strike in US"
  - Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, Chapter 8 (snippets) and Chapter 9

#### CLASS #2—End of the 1990s

- **TOPICS (Discussion Based on the Following Questions)**
  - Review of the Politics of the 1990s (Previous Classes)
  - Culture:
    - How did 9/11 signify the cultural end of the 1990s?

- How did partisanship evolve from the early 1990s through the post-9/11 era?
  - How did Americans' perceptions of the Presidency shift from the 2nd Clinton administration to the 1st Bush administration?
  - How did the ideology of "personal responsibility" influence our response to 9/11?
- Global Policy:
  - How did America's role in a post-Cold-War world impact their response to 9/11?
- Civil Rights:
  - How did the legacy of the crime bill and how society views criminals affect the US' treatment of terrorists?
  - Do you think that Bush's treatment of civil rights following 9/11 validated the concerns of the Radical Right?
- Media:
  - How did the media developments of the 1990s affect the coverage of the events of 9/11 and the Iraq War?
- Alternative History:
  - Do you think 9/11 would have happened if Al Gore won the 2000 election, and if yes, would the United States have invaded Iraq?

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- Jean Edward Smith, *Bush*, Chapters 10-12

**Week 14:**

**CLASS #1—Odds and Ends of the 90s (Regulating the Internet)**

- **TOPICS**

- The Birth of the Internet
- The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998
  - Section 512
  - Section 1201
  - Section 1202
- The Legacy of Napster
  - *A&M Records, Inc. v. Napster, Inc* (2001)
- The Communications Decency Act of 1996
  - The Miller Test
  - *Reno v. ACLU* (1997)
  - Section 230

- **STUDENT PRE-CLASS MATERIAL**

- Danielle Draper, "[Summarizing the Section 230 Debate: Pro-Content Moderation vs Anti-Censorship](#)" July 5, 2022

**CLASS #2—Thanksgiving...No class**

## Week 15: Presentations and Conclusion

### Reading list:

Alter, Jonathan. *The Defining Moment*. United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Berlant, Lauren and Lisa Duggan. *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and the National Interest*. United States: NYU Press, 2001.

Ganz, John. *When the Clock Broke: Con Men, Conspiracists, and How America Cracked Up in the Early 1990s*. United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024.

Gerstle, Gary. *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era*. United States: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Harris, John F.. *The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House*. United States: Random House Publishing Group, 2005.

Hemmer, Nicole. *Partisans: The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s*. United States: Basic Books, 2022.

Khalidi, Rashid. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*. United States: Henry Holt and Company, 2020.

Napoli, Lisa. *Up All Night: Ted Turner, CNN, and the Birth of 24-Hour News*. United States: Abrams, 2020.

Ponce de Leon, Charles L.. *That's the Way It Is: A History of Television News in America*. United Kingdom: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Renfro, Paul M.. *The Life and Death of Ryan White: AIDS and Inequality in America*. United States: University of North Carolina Press, 2024.

Shade, Colette. *Y2K: How the 2000s Became Everything (Essays on the Future That Never Was)*. United States: HarperCollins, 2025.

Slobodian, Quinn. *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy*. United States: Henry Holt and Company, 2023.

Smith, Jean Edward. *Bush*. United Kingdom: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Taibbi, Matt. *Hate Inc: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another*. United Kingdom: OR Books, 2019.

### **Additional topics in Politics of the 90s:**

- America, Global Super Power
  - Democratic Instability in the Former-USSR
  - Russian and United States Space Relations
- Civil Rights
  - Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
  - Civil Rights Act of 1991
  - The Killing of Amadou Diallo
- LGBT Rights
  - The Murder of Matthew Shepard
  - The Ryan White CARE Act
- Media Developments
  - The Fairness Doctrine
  - The Equal-Time Rule
  - Media Sensationalism
- Impeachment:
  - Hillary Clinton's Cattle Futures (Controversies and Conspiracies)
  - Additional Pop Culture Aspects
- Technology:
  - High Performance Computing Act
  - Y2K
- Economy:
  - Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (Financial Services Modernization Act)
  - Creation and Adoption of the Euro
  - NAFTA
- Science:
  - Human Genome Project
  - Dolly the Sheep
  - Hubble Telescope
  - First Stem Cell Cultures
  - Deep Blue
- Miscellaneous
  - Columbine High School Shooting
  - The Gun-Show Loophole
  - The Heritage Foundation