

How did it Come to This? The Roots of Inequality in the UK and US in the Age of Trump and Brexit

Instructor: Dr Sagar Deva; TA: Mgr. Denisa Krasna

Course Objectives: The purpose of this course will be to understand why, despite being advanced, liberal-democratic systems supposedly predicated in concepts of Liberty, Equality, and Justice, the United Kingdom and United States remain deeply unequal and currently divided societies. To do so, it will seek to offer a nuanced and critical historical and socio-political discussion of the two primary Anglospheric nations. At the end of this course, participants should have a clear understanding of the underlying historical and conceptual frameworks which underpin inequality in the United Kingdom and United States as well as an understanding of how these behaviours impact the interaction of these countries with the wider international sphere. Participants in this course will be expected to undertake key readings before each seminar and come prepared to discuss them. Participants will also be expected to complete two pieces of assessed work: a series of short response papers, as well as a longer assessed essay of 2,500 words.

Seminar 1: Module Outline and Introduction to Western Political Thought.

This introductory seminar will begin by discussing the broad, thematic context of the module. It will outline the wider module objectives before moving on to discuss the origins of Western Political Thought through looking at early scholars such as Locke, Rousseau, and JS Mill. It will provide a foundation for understanding the theoretical principles on which Western democracy stand. This will provide a basis for understanding the ways in which these principles have not been lived up too, which will be elaborated in later seminars.

Please watch **Video** below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP8k_f3PFq8&t=513s

Seminar 2: British Politics and Exceptionalism: The Roots

This seminar will introduce students to British politics and its history. It will start by looking at the origins of the British political system and then move on to a discussion of colonialism and Empire. It will draw on both political and literary sources to demonstrate how an idea of British 'exceptionalism' emerged which remains in place today and has been a driving force behind many of the issues that face the United Kingdom today, and how this has effected the Covid pandemic response.

Readings: Tilford, Simon. "The British and their exceptionalism." *Centre for European Reform*, May 2 (2017).

Mahmud, Tayyab. "Colonialism and modern constructions of race: A preliminary inquiry." *U. Miami L. Rev.* 53 (1998): 1219.

Please also read this brief Article from the Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/11/coronavirus-exposed-myth-british-exceptionalism>

Seminar 3: Populism and Brexit: Why did it happen?

This seminar will explore Brexit in more depth. It will examine why the British people chose to do something that seemed manifestly against their economic interest. In doing so, it will discuss the right-wing populism currently sweeping the Western World. It will look at how this populism fuelled an antipathy towards reasoned opinion and expert judgement, with a particular focus around ideas of immigration and culture. It will also discuss how this emergent populism is affecting many other countries in the Western World- including the Czech Republic, and the implications of this for a Liberal-Democratic future.

Readings: Daddow, Oliver. "Brexit and British exceptionalism: the impossible challenge for Remainers." *LSE Brexit* (2018).

Corbett, Steve. "The social consequences of Brexit for the UK and Europe: Euroscepticism, populism, nationalism, and societal division." *The International Journal of Social Quality* 6.1 (2016): 11-31.

Seminar 4: Civil Rights and Slavery in the US: The Constant Fight for Justice

This seminar will focus on Civil Rights and the struggle for equality in the United States. It will outline the historical basis of the US political institutions, in particular the US constitution, and then go on to discuss the history of Slavery and Civil Rights in America. It will do this with a view to demonstrating how the current injustices in the United States are linked to deeply entrenched prejudices that have arisen historically, and how these injustices continue to blight the cultural, social, and economic landscape of the United States. Finally, in light of recent protests, and touching upon the idea of the 'social contract', it will discuss whether African Americans are morally obligated to follow the law in all circumstances or whether particular breaches might be justified in light of the structural injustices they face.

Readings: Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001, Chapter 2: What is Racism?

Shelby, Tommie. "Justice, deviance, and the dark ghetto." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35.2 (2007): 126-160.

Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*, 1845.

Seminar 5: TRUMP

This Seminar will focus on the Trump Presidency. In line with the themes of Civil Rights, Populism, and Nationalism discussed in prior seminars it will outline the factors that drove Trump to an unlikely election victory in 2016. It will also assess the development of his presidency, discussing the loss of civility in US discourse, political polarisation, and the potential long term impacts of 'Trumpism' on the United States and world at large.

Readings: Yang, Mimi. "Trumpism: a disfigured Americanism." *Palgrave Communications* 4.1 (2018): 1-13.

Komlos, John. "The economic roots of the rise of Trumpism." (2018).

Seminar 6: Feminism, the Patriarchy, and Intersectionality.

This Seminar will give a broad, historical introduction to Feminist thought in Britain and the United States, focusing on two key ideas: Patriarchy and Intersectionality. It will explain the concept of 'patriarchy', first expounded by Kate Millett, as something far deeper than institutional or political inequality but rather as a deep 'ideology' and 'superstructure' that is embedded in every element of human existence. It will further, through the work of Bell Hooks, introduce the idea of 'intersectionality', demonstrating the divergent experiences and exacerbated difficulties of BAME women within the feminist experience, particularly within the history of the USA.

Readings: Millett, Kate. *Sexual politics*. Columbia University Press, 2016, Chapter 2.

Bell Hooks. *Aint I a Woman?* (Any edition), Introduction and Chapter 4.

Seminar 7: Contemporary Feminisms, Neoliberalism, and Femicides

This seminar will briefly introduce some of the many contemporary forms of feminism, such as ecofeminism, vegetarian-feminist theory, Chicana feminism and Indigenous feminism. It will show why traditional white feminism is inapplicable to issues that marginalized groups face. To demonstrate how the other feminisms better address concerns of subaltern women, we will look at two case studies -- femicides in Mexico and the missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. Furthermore, the former will shed more light on the intricacies of neoliberalism and the atrocities it generates.

Readings: Christine Welsh: *Finding Dawn*, 2006, watch here:
https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding_dawn/

Please read the **pages 1-8** of the article below:

Sarah Rose Olson. "Dismantling the Human/Animal Divide in Education: the Case for Critical Animal Education." ed. Agnes Trzak, in *Essays on Social Justice, Animals, Veganism, and Education*, 2019.

Seminar 8: Socialism and Capitalism in the Anglosphere

This seminar will look at the socio-economic structures of Capitalism and Socialism to understand their impact on the United Kingdom and particularly the United States. It will explore how the importance of capitalism and the industrial revolution on the emergence of these countries as major powers and the impact of this philosophy on the institutional and socio-economic structures of these countries. It will then explore Marxist critique of the capitalist structure, focusing in particular on what Marx describes as the 'Alienation' of labour.

Readings: Marx, Karl. "Estranged labour." (1844): 32-38.

Seminar 9: The Reagan-Thatcher Consensus, Neoliberalism and the Third World

While previous seminars have focused more on the domestic implications of Anglospheric policy, this seminar will explore the impact of Neoliberal Capitalism on the developing world, focusing on the 'Reagan-Thatcher' consensus. It will look in particular at how this neoliberal, capitalist mentality impacted the operation of International Organisations and treaties- including the WTO, IMF, and NAFTA in seek to impose unrestrained free-market economics on third world countries, often to their extreme detriment. This seminar will thus take a more 'big picture' look at injustice produced by the UK and US in the wider world and the implications of this for theories of global justice.

Readings:

Krasna, Denisa, and Sagar Deva. "Neoliberalism, NAFTA, and Dehumanization: The case of femicides in Ciudad Juárez." *Fast Capitalism* 16.1 (2019).

Mueller, Julie L. "The IMF, neoliberalism and hegemony." *Global Society* 25.3 (2011): 377-402.

Seminar 10: Conclusion

This seminar will sum up the content of the course, as well as spend some time discussing essay writing skills and methods to help with the main assessment.