University of Colorado

American Conservatism

Spring 2027

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Office Hours:

Email:

Course Description:

What does it mean to be a conservative in the United States? Rather, is there such as a thing as being conservative in a country where there is famously a "liberal tradition"? Is it the case that conservatives in the United States are actually liberals? More fundamentally, what is the case for conservativism today?

This course will explore these questions by examining the conservative tradition in America. We begin with the classic account of conservativism by a non-American, Edmund Burke, and then move to the American Revolution and Constitution. Before moving to the twentieth century, we consider the case for states' rights by a defender of slavery, John C. Calhoun. We then consider the Progressive critique of the Constitution – a critique which reads the Constitution as too conservative – and then move to the New Deal and the Rights Revolution. We will then be able to explore the two rival critiques of American liberalism, namely, libertarianism and traditionalism, and then consider the rise of originalism as a judicial methodology. We conclude with MAGA and then post-liberalism.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation: 20%

Class attendance is required. For every absence after two absences, your class participation grade will be reduced by a portion of a letter grade (from a B+ to B, for example).

Exams: 60%

There will be three in class blue book style exams.

Paper and Class Presentation: 20%

Each student will prepare a short paper (3 pages) and presentation for one of the readings.

Books to Purchase:

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (Penguin)

Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018)

Hayek, *Road to Serfdom* (1944)

Ross Lence, ed., *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun* (Liberty Fund)

Antonin Scalia, *A Matter of Interpretation* (Princeton)

Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago)

Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991)

Week One: 20th Century Parties

Roger Scruton, "Why I became a Conservative," The New Criterion (2003)*

FDR, Commonwealth Club Address (1932)*

LBJ, "Remarks at the University of Michigan" (1964)*

Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing" (1964)*

Michael Anton, "The Flight 93" Election" (2016)*

Donald Trump, First Inaugural Address (2017)*

Weeks Two and Three: Conservatism, traditionally understood

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (Penguin)

Week Four: The American Revolution

Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991)

Week Five: Exam #1 and Begin American Constitution

Exam #1

The Federalist Nos. 10 and 39

Week Six: The American Constitution Cont.

The Federalist Nos. 37, 49, 51, 55-57, 62-3, 70-72, 78, and 84.

Week Seven: States Rights

Selections from John Calhoun in Ross Lence, ed., *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun* (Liberty Fund)

Week Eight: Progressivism and the New Deal

Herbert Croly, The Promise of America Life (1909), selections*

Woodrow Wilson, Constitutional Government (1908), selections*

FDR, "Four Freedoms" (1941)*

Wickard v. Filburn (1942)*

Week Nine: The Libertarian Critique

Hayek, *Road to Serfdom* (1944)

Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" (1945)

Week Ten: The Traditionalist Critique

Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago)

Week Eleven: The Rights Revolution and the Court

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*

Mapp v. Ohio (1961)*

Griswold v. Connecticut (1965)*

Swan v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education (1971)*

Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey (1992)*

Obergefell v. Hodges (2015)*

Week Twelve: Exam #2 and Originalism and the Conservative Court

Exam #2

Antonin Scalia, *A Matter of Interpretation* (Princeton)

Minority Report, Iran Contra Committee (1987)

Week Thirteen: Neoconservatism

Selections from the Moynihan Report (1965)*

James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, "Broken Windows," 1982, *The Atlantic**

William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (1996)*

Jonathan Bronitsky, "The Brooklyn Burkeans," *National Affairs**

Max Boot, "What the Neocons Got Wrong," *Foreign Affairs*, 2023*

David Brooks, "What the Neocons Got Right, *The Atlantic*, 2026*

Week Fourteen: Post-liberalism

Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018)

Week Fifteen: Final Exam