



HOW TO WIN ELECTIONS AND LOSE THE COUNTRY

Michael Steele Study Group Outline

The study group will meet five times in the Spring 2020 semester. Meeting dates are Mondays, February 3, 10, 24, March 2, and 9. All meetings will take place from 2 p.m.-3:30 p.m. in the Kim Koo Library.

THE OVERVIEW

To paraphrase Friedrich Nietzsche, madness is rare in individuals - but in parties it is the rule. From the very founding of our American political system, we have been less than sane when it comes to our politics and political parties. But what makes the madness different today? And why does it feel so personal? How do policymakers manage the growth of grassroots movements from the Tea Party to Occupy Wall Street to “Trumpism” while dealing with insurgencies within their own ranks?

We’ll look at both the madness and the methods of our political parties and the systems they create in the fight for domination and electoral success; and ultimately how the emergence of Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders and the myriad of political actors signal not just a profound transformation of both political parties but their potential end.

Week1 (Feb 3)

We’ve Been Here Before

We’ve always had political fights between our nation’s political parties. It’s part of the fabric of American politics. We are passionate, verbose and quite serious about our politics sometimes to the point of violence. Our early history is replete with stories of political mayhem at the hands of our elected officials—the caning of Senator Charles Sumner (R) by Representative Preston Brooks (D) on the Senate floor; or the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton. Heck, many of the biggest instances of name-calling, bad-mouthing and in-your-face aggression have occurred *within* the respective parties. From the tumultuous floor fight at the Republican convention of 1912 in Chicago to the “Red, White and Bruising” at the Democratic Convention in 1968 also in Chicago (what is it about Chicago?).

Week 2 (Feb 10)

1986-2016: A Political Odyssey. How the political strategy to take control of Congress transformed more than just the Speakership

How did this tribalism begin? What makes the rhetoric and the vitriol between Rs and Ds today so different? What happened to those “Rodney King moments” expressed by the likes of President Reagan and Speaker Tip O’Neil? How potent was the Newt Gingrich approach to Congressional control? Are the national parties alienating voters (“War on Women”, “You can keep your healthcare” “Deplorables”) to the point that they have hardened the tribalism they often complain about? Have the seeds of discord and disagreement ultimately distorted the relationship between the president and the congress to the point neither can govern—regardless of party?

Week 3 (Feb 24)

A Political Pick’em or Pickle? The Fake Consumerism of American Politics

Consumerism is all about protecting or promoting the interests of the consumer; and consequently, organizations work hard to improve their services to the customer. But it’s a different set of operating principles in politics where the interests of the customer (the voter) is often determined by effective communication, crass political sloganeering and voter manipulation designed either to get voters to the polls or to make them mad and disinterested enough to stay home. These tactics are as old as the Republic but the advent of social media has crystalized the impact of such communications in a dramatic way. The election of Barak Obama was supposed to have ushered in a new era in American Politics. It did—but voters became less interested in hope and were frustrated by little change. Hillary Clinton’s campaign struck a personal tone with “I’m With Her” but found voters were not—with her. Donald Trump redefined the political conversation with “Make America Great Again” and opened enough old wounds for many voters to feel it was more about making America white again. Are we really that gullible?

Week 4 (Mar 2)

Politics and Race

The racial lines of black and white America are not as well defined as they once were. In fact, those lines have taken on new hues and textures as America has changed—socially and demographically. We’ve become more sophisticated at self-segregation while we ignore the truth of “gentrification”. How much have our anxieties about immigration, the economy, jobs contributed to the rise of white supremacy and nationalistic calls of “America First”? Is American Exceptionalism being replaced by American Nationalism? How have our politics reshaped our views about events like Charlottesville and Baltimore; and efforts to ban Muslims from entering the country or policies that would place children in cages? Despite

our “protests” and “outrage” about such efforts, how many of us actually sleep better at night?

Week 5 (Mar 9)

2020: Why Elections Matter and What Happens When Citizens Believe They Don't

Part 1: How Donald Trump won 2016 had everything to do with why Donald Trump won—and why the press nor the political establishments understood that. The Great Setup for 2020.

Part 2: Now What Speaker Pelosi? The impact of Impeachment, an ever changing Democratic Primary and how much of the 2018 Mid-Terms are a precursor to the 2020 presidential? Suburban White women vs. African American women: who holds the true power to change electoral outcomes in 2020 and beyond?