



Canadian Political Issues: The Culture Wars

POLS/SOCI-2300 // Winter 2024, T 6-8.45 PM // C167 (North)

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Summary: Why do people disagree so vehemently about gender identity, affirmative action, wealth redistribution, or climate change? Why do people get angry when their core beliefs are challenged? How does social media (and other technology) contribute to polarization and the breakdown of social cohesion? The concept of a “culture war” has existed in American discourse for over 30 years, describing a movement toward group affiliation based on contemporary expressions of moral virtue rather than more traditional categories such as religious or political affiliation, ethnicity, social class, or economic status. This course examines how such a political cleavage has come to exist, and its implications for social cohesion and trust in public institutions. We will explore the ideas and evidence surrounding this concept, including the nature/nurture debate about the origin of variation in social norms.

Objectives:

1. Understand the significance of axiological conflicts in contemporary “Western” society
2. Understand the social, historical, and theological dimensions of axiological conflict
3. Consider the role of nationhood and hard power in the enforcement of axiological norms
4. Identify and represent the main groups and representatives of various perspectives
5. Formulate a meta-analysis and independent opinion on issues related to cultural conflict
6. Help others interpret axiological conflict with greater perspective

[Axiology is the study of the nature, types, and criteria of values and of value judgments.]

Deadline for withdrawal TBD

Reading List

REQUIRED TEXTS

Haidt, Jonathan. 2013. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. First Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books.

Hunter James Davison. 1991. "Cultural Conflict in America" and "The Anatomy of Cultural Conflict," in *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: BasicBooks.

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

Mason, Lilliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, Rhys. 1997. *Is America In A Culture A War? Yes — No — Sort Of*. From *The Christian Century*. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from <https://www.religion-online.org/article/is-america-in-a-culture-a-war-yes-no-sort-of/>

See the full list of texts online at postgrowth.ca/culturewars

Assignments and Grades

Letter	Percentage	Grade Points	Descriptor
A+	90–100	4.5	Exceptional
A	85–89	4.25	Excellent
A-	80–84	4.0	Great
B+	77–79	3.5	Very Good
B	73–76	3.25	Good
B-	70–72	3.0	Satisfactory
C+	67–69	2.5	Competent
C	63–66	2.25	Acceptable
C-	60–62	2.0	Adequate
D	50–59	1	Marginal

An "excellent" assignment (A) would display:

1. Original thinking and a superior grasp of the subject matter
2. A highly developed capacity for critical evaluation, synthesis, and creativity
3. Appropriate descriptions and quotations
4. Organizing and subordinating information well; writing and/or speaking clearly
5. The use of research sources using *any* recognized style format. For reference, see:

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Eighth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018

Artifact / event prompts	10%
Participation + attendance (ongoing)	10%
Presentations (ongoing)	20%
Reading responses + debates	20%
Debate reflections + peer evaluation	20%
Final essay	20%

Artifact/event prompts: Each class, students will be required to share their response to a current event in the news and relate it to the course material. Please list your article(s) or sources. Please note that current event engagement will be graded separately from participation and engagement with other course material. A record will be kept through an online prompt.

Class participation: Your participation grades will be posted at the middle and end of the term; each grade is worth 10%. You will be graded on the quality and quantity of interaction – that is, not only the volume of interaction, but the quality and thoughtfulness of your contributions. Attendance will also be factored into your participation grade and the instructor will assess this by virtue of your prompts, reflections, and peer evaluations.

Presentation: For each chapter, students will prepare a presentation that summarizes the main argument of the reading in order to catalyze in-class discussion. Presentations are intended to be substantive, yet conversational. Those performing the summary will be asked to consider and summarize the main argument/point, the sub-sections supporting the main argument/point, and the implications and conclusion. Please also provide a critical analysis, including a series of questions to engage discussion. Was there a problem with the author's argument? Is there something that wasn't considered? Questions should lead the class to defend/critique the reading and may be posed throughout the presentation or at the end of it. You will be graded by your peers, who recommend a grade to the instructor.

Written reading responses + debates (in-class): At the end of each presentation, the instructor will pose a question for students to respond to the reading. Students will have to maintain a repository ("portfolio") of their reading responses in a shareable electronic document and will be encouraged to post them (be ready to share your work in class!). Following each reflection, the class will engage in debate on the topic.

Debate reflection + peer evaluation (in-class): From time to time, following a debate, peers will offer critiques and revisions in an in-class exercise, which should be incorporated into your final reading response. This is essentially an opportunity to solidify or shift your opinion on a given topic. You will be graded on the quality of your evaluation.

Final essay: Write a 2000-word thesis dealing with an issue related to the course material. Your paper will be evaluated on its appraisal of the issue, its quality of argument, and the topic's relevance to the subject matter covered in the course. Your reflections might serve as inspiration for your research topic.

Policies

Final grades: Grades submitted by instructors become final only after they are vetted by the Dean's Council. That process occurs early in January for fall semester grades and early in May for winter semester grades.

Academic integrity: *Academic Integrity*—All material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU's [website](#) and in the CMU Calendar. If you still have

questions about appropriate referencing and what plagiarism is, a useful tutorial can be found [here](#). For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see CMU's *Academic Calendar*.

Accessibility: CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at sloppky@cmu.ca or 204.487.3300 x.340. In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.

Academic support services: Student studying, tutoring, and the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) program are offered to CMU students free of charge in the Marpeck Mezzanine.

Counselling: University students face many challenges and at times may benefit from having a trained professional to talk to. There are qualified counsellors at CMU who volunteer their services free of charge to students on the CMU campus. Students wishing to book an appointment with a counsellor are asked to contact the North Side Receptionist at 204.487.3300 or info@cmu.ca. Confidentiality is maintained at all times. The counselling office is located at C365 (north side) and is free for CMU students.

Course schedule

	Theme	Haidt	Supplementary
Jan	9 What are cultural/moral issues?	Where does morality come from?	1 Thomson, Ch. 1 Mutz and Jahnavi; Williams Angus Reid; National Post articles
	16 Demographics, genes, + LR distinction	The intuitive dog and its rational tail	2 Charney Bobbio
	23 What is Political Psychology?	Elephants rule	3 Sears et al. Jost et al.
	30 Groupness	Vote for me (here's why)	4 Tversky & Kahneman; Converse Maks-Solomon & Rigby
	Feb	6 Income, class, and the "elite"	Beyond WEIRD morality
	13 The "elite" and business	Tastebuds of the righteous mind	6 Chatterji & Toffel Global Strategy Group; ESG reading Huntington
	20 <i>Reading week - no class</i>	<i>*reading responses and debate reflections due</i>	
	27 Faith and the "clash of civilizations"	The moral foundations of politics	7 Perry Goodwin Vox video; Podcast (no presenter) McWhorter (podcast/transcript)
Mar	5 Life and death	The conservative advantage	8 Kingsnorth No Jargon podcast Evans; MAID reading
	12 Gender and queerness	Why are we so groupish	9 Kaufmann & Petrocik Sezler & Yanus Artifacts: 4 articles
	19 Race: Indigeneity, Blackness, Whiteness	The hive switch	10 Hooghe & Dassonneville Eisenberg Artifacts: 2 articles; 1 explainer
	26 The Environment as Culture War	Religion is a team sport	11 Artifacts: 4 articles
Apr	2 Conclusion: Politics-as-Identity	Can't we all disagree more constructively?	12 Mason
	<i>*final essay due</i>		