

# American Political Divides and Great Debates

[84-309] | Fall 2026

Prof. Jonathan Cervas

Updated: August 20, 2026

Professor **Jonathan Cervas**

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Location: Scaife Hall 234

Time: Tuesday/Thursday 2:00p-3:20p Eastern

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**CMU Academic Calendar**

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**Course Relevance:** DC: Perspectives on Justice and Injustice

**Learning Resources:** All resources will be provided via Canvas

**Prerequisite Knowledge:** NONE

## August

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|    |    |    |    |    |    | 1  |
| 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |
| 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| 30 | 31 |    |    |    |    |    |

## September

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|    |    | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |    |    |    |

## October

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|    |    |    |    | 1  | 2  | 3  |
| 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |

## November

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  |
| 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 |    |    |    |    |    |

## December

| S  | M  | T  | W  | T  | F  | S  |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|    |    | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |    |    |

☒ in person

☒ remote

☐ no class

Why are Americans so divided — and is the premise even true? We spend a month on what political science actually knows, then the semester is yours: student teams pick the topics, assign the readings, and run the room.

## 01 Assessment

The course grade will be a weighted average of the following components:

| Assignment                                      | Percent of Final Grade |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Attendance</b>                               | <b>25%</b>             |
| <b>Discussion Board</b> (before each class)     | <b>15%</b>             |
| <b>Student Led Topics</b>                       | <b>9%</b>              |
| <b>Surveys</b> (3: intake, midterm, evaluation) | <b>2%</b>              |
| <b>Book Review</b> (Slides + Presentation)      | <b>12%</b>             |
| <b>Op-Ed Project</b> (Draft + Review + Final)   | <b>20%</b>             |
| <b>Group Policy Brief</b>                       | <b>17%</b>             |

## 02 Due Dates

| Assignment               | Due Date                         |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Discussion board post    | 9:00 a.m., each class day        |
| Surveys (3)              | August 26, October 7, final week |
| Op-ed, first draft       | September 21                     |
| Op-ed peer review        | September 24                     |
| Op-ed final draft        | September 28                     |
| Book Review (slides)     | October 24                       |
| Group Project            | December 1/3                     |
| Group Project reflection | December 4                       |

## 03 The Essentials

- **Before every class:** one short discussion-board post, due **9:00 a.m.**, in Canvas.
- **Attendance is 25%.** The first three absences cost almost nothing; four to six is where a semester goes wrong.
- **Late work** costs one point per hour, but never drops below 50% — with one exception: the **op-ed rough draft (September 21)** loses 10% immediately, then 1% per hour, with no floor and no exceptions, because two classmates are waiting on it.
- **Devices stay in bags.** Non-class use of a laptop or phone means being marked absent for that session.
- **Surveys** and their screenshot receipts run through **Canvas, under Assignments.**

## 04 The Full Syllabus

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Everything else — the week-by-week schedule with all readings, assignment details, and every policy — lives in the full syllabus:

<https://jcervas.github.io/teaching/2026-2027/class-cmu-2026-84-309/readme.html>