

Ch 7: Civil Rights

Part 1

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Course: American National Government (GOVT 2305)

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Today's class

We will give a brief overview of the history of discrimination in the US, and watch the Baldwin vs. Buckley debate as a portrayal of how the Civil Rights argument plays out contemporarily.

- Beginnings
- Civil War
- The debate - Video recording on YouTube

Slavery

- Not uniquely American
- But the American flavor was to enslave people who could've instead been treated as citizens of the land
- Those considered slaves were brutally abused.
- Abolitionism and the Enlightenment

Native Americans

- Native Americans were killed to make room for a growing European settlement.
- Native Americans were considered to only belong to their own pre-existing political structures as opposed to a citizen

Women

- Right to vote or participate in public life was denied
- Only in 1916 did the first woman held public office
- The law largely didn't acknowledge the rights of women especially within a marriage

Other Inequalities

- Ultimately, at the founding, white Protestant men of English ancestry who owned substantial property enjoyed full rights
- Hispanics and Chinese immigrants on the west coast were discriminated against.
- While not nearly as institutionalized as slavery, even other European settlers from Ireland and Italy were discriminated against.

Missouri Compromise

- Prohibited slaves above a certain latitude



Dredd Scott v Sanford

Video in-text

The Civil War

- Legality of slavery was the primary argument
 - The state autonomy argument was instrumental but continues to come up in arguments about discrimination even today.
- Abraham Lincoln, then President, was initially trying to make concessions but then shifted tact to get the Emancipation Proclamation passed and slavery fully abolished
- “Confederacy” ran out of resources and surrendered in 1865

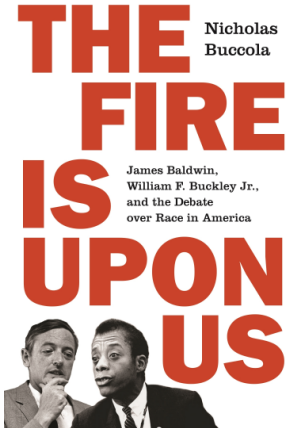
Reconstruction

- Three amendments to the constitution
 - The Thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery.
 - Equal Protections Clause: The Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed citizenship to all those born in the United States, extended “equal protection of the law” to all people, and extended due process requirements to state actions.
 - The Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed that the right to vote could not be infringed on the basis of race or for a person having previously been a slave.
- Hiram Revels - first Black senator in 1870
- No African Americans in the Senate from 1881-1967
- Reconstruction waned
 - North couldn't keep sending armies
 - Political equilibrium shifted

Racism after slavery

- De jure vs De facto rights in the post-reconstruction era
 - “De jure” meaning in law, and “De facto” meaning in practice
 - People in positions of power can do whatever they want especially if the majority supports it! The legal system can easily have “De jure” vs “De facto” syndrome.
- Jim Crow laws went into effect
- Lynchings of African Americans were carried out, especially in the South, publicly in broad daylight
- This continued unchecked for nearly a century after the War

Book by Buccola (2019)



The transcript uploaded on Canvas is from this book. The book does a lot more by providing a wider context to the arguments from both speakers.

On Baldwin

- Born 1924 in Harlem in NY
- Born into poverty to parents who came to Harlem escaping Jim Crow during the Great Migration ([URL](#))
- Had to overcome stepfather's abuse
- Inspiring teachers - Bill Miller and Countee Cullen - nourished him.
- Some important works
 - Notes of a Native Son
 - The Fire Next Time
 - See here ([Wikipedia URL](#)) for a fuller bibliography

On Buckley

- Born 1925 in NY
- Born into affluence
- Father had strong views on individualism
- Buccola (2019) writes, “Buckley, “born to absolutes” and “nurtured on dogma,” did not accept everything his parents taught him, but the basic outline of his worldview was set at a young age. This worldview consisted of an amalgamation of devout Catholicism, antidemocratic individualism, hostility to collectivism in economics, and a strong devotion to hierarchy - including racial hierarchy - in the social sphere.”

Framing of the debate

- The debate can be interpreted to concern two arrows:
 - Baldwin's position: Discrimination of African-Americans $\xrightarrow{\text{the "expense" of}}$ "American Dream" (or)
 - Buckley's position: "American Dream" $\xrightarrow{\text{ameliorates}}$ Discrimination of African-Americans
- Should the direction that the US has been taking to create its prosperity ("American Dream") left to continue as-is?
 - The answer would be no if one accepts that it is coming at the "expense" of the discrimination of African-Americans.
 - The answer would be yes if one accepts that it will continue to ameliorate discrimination.
- More context: The debate is happening at the peak of the Civil Rights movement.
 - Bloody Sunday at Selma, Alabama happens mere weeks later. See here (Youtube URL) to learn more about these violent events. (Warning: Includes graphic imagery)

Why does Baldwin say “*attack* a system of reality”?

- Taking “system” to be a synonym of *model*, note that the way we have discussed models in this class so far has been highly impersonal. Why should changing an impersonal thing be an “attack”?
 - See textbook and Day 2 lecture slides on Canvas for Ch 6 about the Judiciary for a discussion of the *model* in this course so far.
- Metacognition: Why does this lecture feel different from the other lectures? Maybe the *model* in this class suddenly feels personal!
 - Why? The law was there (de jure) but not practiced (de facto) because a lot of ordinary people - like us - turned a blind eye when the law was not upheld especially in the South.
 - Many times the law was made in a way to segregate (Jim Crow laws) with a vast majority of the people’s endorsement - people like us.
 - The model in this class is not about somebody else (Congressman, President, Judge) but *us*!

Models can be personal - Poli Sci vs Civic Duty

- All *models* in the humanities flatten a human being - like *us* - by making general assumptions about people like *us*. So, it is conceivable that changing a *model* that is personal could feel like an “attack.”
 - The line between creating assumptions to make a model, and perpetrating stereotypes is thin. Discretion is needed.
 - Realize all the “models” in this class can be personal. Because the models were pertaining to humans, and we are humans!
 - Notice, in the models, we did flatten the Congressman, the President, and the Judge.
- With that said, making models to understand aggregate behavior is indeed useful in policy making. Making better models that are less discriminatory is necessary.
- We must remain in touch with our sense of *civic duty*. This particular class is helping us realize this vividly.
 - Realize that ordinary people - you and me - are culpable in the country's institutions (not) going well!
 - Models in the humanities can also be culpable, and so they must be made responsibly.

“...literature and sociology are not one and the same...” (Baldwin 2012)

- Baldwin makes a similar point in this quote from *Notes of a Native Son* (Baldwin 2012).
- In his context, he is attempting to define what is the role of literature while I'm clarify the role of poli sci (“sociology”).
- Baldwin's belief in this lens of *realism in literature* - to not flatten characters and imagine them more complexly - shines throughout his speech both for the descendants of the slaves, and the slavers.

An incredible inversion

- In the speech, Baldwin defines the “expense” of the “American Dream” (quoting the debate’s proposition) in two ways - a “literal” way and “another” way, as he terms it.
- As a direct descendant of slaves, the “literal” expense is obvious to Baldwin who says, “I picked the cotton, and I carried it to market, and I built the railroads, under someone else’s whip, for nothing. ”
- The “another” way involves understanding what is going on in the heads of the slaver’s descendants - an incredible inversion that doesn’t flatten people.
 - Here is that Realism lens.

“that is what concerns me most”

- “... black people are just like everybody else... We are also mercenaries, dictators, murderers, liars. We are human too.”
- Know that Baldwin has relations with both Malcolm X and MLK Jr. and this lets him not flatten the civil rights movement to a single model but see the strains within it.
- That is why he says this “concerns me most.”
 - Realism lens again
 - He beckons us to grapple with tough questions: What happens when continued discrimination severs the lines of dialog with whole groups of people who decide to take matter in their own hands? Can the US afford this terrible “expense”? Isn’t it high time to start dealing with the issue head on?

Other points

- De jure v de facto and the loss of trust - "...if the amendment was not honored then, I have don't have any reason to believe that the civil rights bill will be honored now"
- "What one begs the American people to do for all our sakes is simply to accept our history."
 - The question I posed is answered: *Why should we engage with this uncomfortable and brutal history?*
 - Policy outcomes have a path dependence. The inequalities we see today has roots from before and understanding these roots and the path that we have taken since can help us design policy better.

Responding to Buckley

- Buckley's account ignores *systemic discrimination*. This will be the focus of our discussion in the second part of this class.
- Buckley's account was shown in class *not* to perpetrate stereotypes but rather to show the cliché arguments that are typically posed so that you can spot them when you learn further about these issues.
 - Buckley (in the transcript) mentions the phrase “the blacks who sold us these slaves.” The history of slavery in Africa is known (Lovejoy 2011). But remember the choice the founders made - they chose to continue allowing it. The reseller's culpability can't be ignored especially when it continued (c)overtly for too long.
 - He claims African Americans of his day want “regression of the white people” but his plan is to “disqualify 65 percent of the white people” from voting in Mississippi!
 - Buckley quotes statistics about income levels across races. But income is a short-term signal, and fails to highlight the persistent wealth gap caused by historic, systemic discrimination. We will discuss this in more detail next...

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References I



Baldwin, James. 2012. *Notes of a native son*. Beacon Press.



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