

Protest and Progress

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Professor William Field, SAS – Political Science

W, 09:50A-12:50P

Honors College Rm HC S126

College Ave Campus

Will Count Towards the SAS-Political Science Major

Will Count Towards the SAS-Political Science Minor

American history is marked by frequent episodes where individuals and groups claim that divine law trumps human law. These challenges to the social order come from both "left" and "right" on the American political spectrum. What is unusual about the US, perhaps, is the extent to which groups claim divine support for what are essentially ordinary political arguments, whether these arguments are over membership in the body politic, over access to freedoms already granted to other groups or exemptions from generally recognized obligations.

High levels of religiosity in the United States compared to other wealthy countries suggest we are an anomaly. This course argues otherwise. We will explore periods of protest in art, history, and contemporary politics to explore the source of the law. The fundamental question underlying this course is whether the law is inherently and only human made. For individual cases we will ask whether appeals to divine law add increased legitimacy to otherwise mundane political demands and whether they increase the chance of success of the demands being made. A broad question, especially relevant given today's clashes over LGBT rights, is whether appeals to divine law tend to accelerate or inhibit progress. We will explore these questions in a variety of historical time periods and modern political systems starting with the ancient Greeks and ending with present day political conflicts in the United States and Europe.