

POL381H Topics in Political Theory: American Political Thought

Instructors

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Office Hours: Tuesday 4-6 PM or by appointment

This course is an introductory survey of American political thinkers. Many have observed that the United States is a nation of contradictions; this course seeks to vindicate this view by exposing you to the diverse and divergent strains of American thought, and the various approaches American thinkers have used to answer the perennial problems of American society. However, in doing so, we hope to give you the tools to navigate and reconcile these contradictions. This course, then, has two main aims: 1) to expose you to the rich array of American thinkers and their contributions to political theory; and 2) to use this theoretical understanding to make sense of contemporary political and social issues in the US.

This course proceeds in 3 parts. We will spend the first three weeks acquainting ourselves with the theories which undergirded the founding of the United States, specifically the debates between the federalists and the anti-federalists. As we will see, the founding was full of tensions which were never fully exorcised, and which have continued to haunt the US. In the second section of the course we will look at important traditions of political theory developed throughout the course of American history. In many ways all of these philosophical traditions were developed in order to deal with the unresolved problems of the founding. In the final section of the course we will look at important 20th century political issues and debates over inequality, foreign policy, race, and identity. By looking at these theoretical disagreements (which should be a bit more familiar to you) we will be in a place to see how these debates are informed by America's various philosophical traditions.

Finally, a word of warning. "American Political Theory" is a large and complex subject, making a course like this very difficult. This is made even more difficult by virtue of being taught in a condensed summer term. As a consequence this course has a heavy reading load and can only be effective if students do all the required reading. This course assumes some familiarity with American political history, as well as political theory. Completion of POL203 (Introduction to American Politics), or a comparable background in American political history, is highly recommended; please contact the instructors if you have any questions about this.

Grading

Attendance and *Informed* Participation 15%

This topic requires more than mere presence at lectures. You must come prepared, be attentive, and participate. This involves attending lectures having done all the required readings, having thought about

the readings, and grown puzzled in the process. There will be ample opportunity to ask questions and participate during lectures

In-class Test on the Founding Debates (July 14) 15%

The first three sessions will focus on writings on and from the American founding. In addition to a few short readings on the nature of the “American Experiment” and “American Exceptionalism” these will focus on the debates and disagreements between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. These texts will inform the way we approach the thinkers we read in the remainder of the course. For this reason, *during the first half-hour of Session 4 on July 14th we will have an in-class exam testing your comprehension of the concepts, terms, and arguments which underpinned these disagreements.* This exam will ask you to define terms and concepts, as well as answer short-answer thematic questions. A long list of possible questions will be distributed by e-mail prior to the exam by July 10; the test will be comprised of a random selection of questions from this list.

Proposal and Essay: 5% (1 page proposal, due July 21), 35% (10-12 page paper, due August 11)

For each week’s topics there are two sets of readings: required readings and recommended readings. For your essay you must select one week’s topics, read **all** of that week’s readings (both required and recommended), and write an essay on a topic of your choosing based on these readings. Within these constraints you have a large degree of freedom: you may choose to focus mainly on one of these readings, using the other readings to inform your reading of that one text; you may focus on agreements or disagreements which you feel run through all these texts; or you might select a particular political or cultural document (which we also have provided in the syllabus), and demonstrate how the texts from a particular week help us understand what is at stake in this document. You must submit a proposal no longer than one page which explains the question you are interested in answering with these texts, and the themes and concepts within these texts on which you will be focusing in order to answer your question. You will not be bound to this proposal, but you must write it so that we can make sure you have started mapping your route and that this route is a viable one. Writing about authors, texts, or documents not included on this syllabus is discouraged but may be approved after meeting with one of us in person and making your case.

*Proposals are to be e-mailed to the instructors by the due date. **Late Proposals will not be accepted** Papers will be submitted to turnitin.com by the due date (more on turnitin.com at the end of this document). **Late papers will be penalized 3% a day. Extensions will be granted only for medical and extreme circumstances, and must be asked for and granted in writing, prior to the due date. More details to come.***

Final Exam (during exam period): 30%

More information about the final exam will be provided as the course goes on. It will be cumulative, and will test both your careful reading of required texts as well as thoughtful attention to the broader themes and patterns of the courses as a whole.

Reading Schedule

All readings will be posted to blackboard or links will be provided for online access.

Note that there are three categories. Required readings must be thoughtfully read **prior** to lecture each

week. Thoughtful reading means not simply reading, but actively making connections between the readings and core themes of the course in the process. Most importantly, it means noting where you are confused, and where you are puzzled. Confusion is the mark of a thoughtful student; if you feel you understand the texts perfectly then, as a general rule, you are not reading thoughtfully enough. Recommended readings are suggested for understanding lectures, and are required reading if your essay is on that week's topic. The cultural, literary, and documentary suggestions are highly recommended as they will be referenced in lectures

I. Tensions in the Founding

Wednesday, July 2. Introduction: Puritan Origins, Multiple Traditions, and American Exceptionalism.

Required:: John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"
The Federalist #1
Kurt Vonnegut, "In a Manner that Must Shame God Himself"

Recommended: Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, selections

Documents: The Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence

Literature: Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth"

Monday, July 7. Liberalism, Federalism, and the Expanded Republic

Required: *The Federalist Papers*, selections

Recommended: *The Federalist Papers*, entire

Documents: The Articles of Confederation, Constitution of the United States

Wednesday, July 9. Jeffersonian Republicanism and the Union

Required:: Thomas Jefferson, *Selected Writings*
The Anti-Federalist Papers, selections

Recommended: *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, entire
Webster-Hayne Debate, selections

Documents: U.S. Congress: The Act of March 26, 1790; The Indian Exclusion act of 1830.

II. American Theoretical Traditions

Monday, July 14. Transcendentalism (First 30 minutes: In-class test on the founding debates)

Required: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance";
Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

Recommended: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "John Brown--Speech at Boston"; "Brahma"
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* selections

Literature: Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, selections

Wednesday, July 16. The Prophetic Tradition

Required:: Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural"
Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, selections

Frederick Douglass, "On the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument"

- Recommended: David Walker, Preamble to the *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*
Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?" *The North Star* selections
Ida B Wells, *Southern Horrors*, selections
WEB DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, selections
MLK "I have a dream"
- Music: Duke Ellington, *Black Brown and Beige*

Monday, July 21. Pragmatism and Progressivism

- Required: John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy"
- Recommended: John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* selections,
Jane Addams, "A Function of the Social Settlement"
Oliver Wendell Holmes, "On Natural Law", *The Common Law* selections
Cornell West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, selections
- Documents: FDR, "Call for Federal Responsibility"
- Literature: Mark Twain, "The War Prayer"
Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Oklahoma!*

Wednesday, July 23. American Conservatism

- Required: George F. Will, *Statecraft as Soulcraft*, selections
Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose*, selections
Wendell Berry, "It All Turns on Affection," 2012 Jefferson Lecture
- Recommended: Booker T. Washington, "1895 Address to the Cotton States and International Exposition"
Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, selections

Monday, July 28. American Feminism

- Required:: Letters of Abigail Adams
Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?"
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Declaration of Sentiments"
bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* selections
- Recommended: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* selections
Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* selections
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* selections
Martha Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody"
- Literature: Edna St. Vincent Millay, "I, being born a woman and distressed"
- Music: Bikini Kill, "Rebel Girl"

III. 20th Century Conflicts

Wednesday, July 30. Inequality, Efficiency, and the Role of the Welfare State

- Required: Eugene V. Debs, "The Social Spirit," "Industrial and Social Democracy"

- Michael Harrington, *The Other America*, selections
 FDR, “A Call for Federal Responsibility”
 Richard Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law*, selections
- Recommended: William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* selections
 John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism* selections
 Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”
 John Rawls, “The Problem of Distributive Justice” from *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*
- Document: Lyndon B. Johnson, Speech to Congress, March 16 1964 (“The War on Poverty”)
 Literature: Sarah Norcliffe Cleghorn, “The Golf Links”
 Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron”

Monday, August 4. Race, Resistance, and Power

- Required: Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”
 Martin Luther King JR, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
 Audre Lord, “The Master’s Tools will never dismantle the Master’s House”
- Recommended: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Selected Letters*
 Malcolm X, “Message to the Grassroots,”
 MLK, “Black Power Defined”
 Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union”
 Glenn Loury, “Obama is no King: On the Fracturing of the Black Prophetic Tradition”
- Literature: Langston Hughes, “Harlem”;
 Music: Phil Ochs, “Love me I’m a Liberal”
 Len Chandler, “Move on Over”
 Dead Prez, “Police State,”
 Jay-Z, “Moment of Clarity”
- Film: *Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (specifically the interview with Angela Davis);

Wednesday, August 6. Foreign Policy: America’s Place in the World

- Required: Reinhold Niebuhr: Selections from *The Irony of American History*
- Recommended: William Graham Sumner, “The Conquest of the U.S. by Spain”
 Robert Kagan and William Kristol: “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy”

Monday, August 11. What is “American?” Who is American?

- Required: Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* selections
 Samuel Huntington, *Who are We?* selections
 Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* selections
- Recommended::
 Alexis de Tocqueville, “Social Condition of the Anglo-Americans,” “Of Individualism in Democratic Countries” from *Democracy in America*
 Michael Walzer, “What it means to be American”
 Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory*, selections

Music: Buffy St. Marie, "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying"
Outernational, "Todos Somos Ilegales"

A Note on Turnitin.com

All assignments are to be submitted electronically to turnitin.com. If students do not want to use turnitin.com then they should inform the instructors at least 2 weeks before the due date. In that event students will be asked to provide notes, rough drafts, and/or participate in an oral examination to confirm the originality of the paper. The University of Toronto requires that the following message be placed on the syllabus: "Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site".

We would like to personally add a particular message about plagiarism: don't do it. Not only is it unfair to your fellow students and against university policy (which can result in extreme ramifications), it is also offensive to those of us who have dedicated our personal and professional lives to intellectual and academic enterprises. As a result, by university policy and personal inclination, we have no discretion in dealing with cases of academic dishonesty: all discovered cases will be directed to academic affairs.