

American Political Thought

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Course Description

This course examines political ideas that have emerged in the United States from the Founding. It will consider those ideas revealed in the debates concerning the American Founding, the American Civil War, Progressivism, and the Civil Rights Movement. It will also consider how the American government relates to the larger tradition of Western political thought.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the principles, purposes, institutions, and mores that constitute American government.
- Understand the debate over the U.S. Constitution's creation and ratification.
- Understand the debate over slavery, secession, and popular sovereignty.
- Examine critiques and alternatives to America's founding political ideals.
- Improve our ability to read closely.
- Sharpen our ability to make good arguments.

Required Texts

The books are available for purchase at Bookstore.

Course Requirements

Grading	Weight
Participation	10%
Hypothes.is Comments	20%
Short Paper and Presentation	20%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%

Attendance: I will expect you to attend all scheduled classes. If emergencies prevent you from attending, please let me know as soon as possible.

Participation (10%): Please read, take notes, and think about all assigned readings before class. I encourage participation in the form of questions and comments.

Hypothes.is Comments (20%): I will post some assigned readings on Hypothes.is. Students are required to highlight sentences and have comments or questions on them.

Short Paper and Presentation (20%): Each week one seminar participant will be required to give a presentation on the material to be discussed during that meeting and submit a 7-10 page paper by the next class.

Midterm Exam (25%) and **Final Exam** (25%): You will be required to write your answers in response to the prompts I provide on the exam dates.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

- No required readings.

Week 2: Religious Foundations

- The Mayflower Compact. 1620
- John Winthrop. 1630. "A Model of Christian Charity"
- Alexis de Tocqueville. 1840. *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Part 1, Chapter 2.
- (Optional) David H. Fischer. 1989. *Albion's Seed : Four British Folkways in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (Optional) Donald S. Lutz. 1988. *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- (Optional) Edmund S. Morgan. ed. 1965. *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Week 3: The Principles of the American Revolution

- Thomas Paine, 1776. *Common Sense*
- Declaration of Independence, 1776
- (Optional) Hannah Arendt. 1963. *On Revolution*. University of Chicago press.
- (Optional) Bernard Bailyn. 2017. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- (Optional) Garry Wills. 1978. *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Week 4: (Classical) Liberalism Hypothesis

- Louis Hartz. 1955. *The Liberal Tradition in America : An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- John Locke. 1690. *Second Treatise of Civil Government*

- Montesquieu. 1748. *The Spirit of the Laws*, Books I-XI, XX
- (Optional) Thomas Hobbes. 1651. *Leviathan*.
- (Optional) Adam Smith. 1776. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*
- (Optional) David Hume. 1777. “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”; “Of Commerce”, in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*
- (Optional) Donald S. Lutz. 1984. “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought”, *The American Political Science Review* 78: 189-97.

Week 5: Republicanism Hypothesis (and Its Critics)

- Gordon Wood. 1998. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- J.G.A. Pocock. 1975. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Part III. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- (Optional) Niccolò Machiavelli. 1517. *Discourses on Livy*.
- (Optional) Thomas L. Pangle. 1988. *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (Optional) Paul Rahe. 1994. *Republics, Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution*. Vol III. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Week 6: The Anti-Federalists

- The Federal Farmer 1. 1787.
- Brutus 1. 1787.
- Patrick Henry. “Speech Before Virginia Ratifying Convention”. 1788
- (Optional) Herbert Storing. 1981. *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (Optional) Murray Dry and Herbert J. Storing. ed. 1996. *The Anti-Federalist: An Abridgment of the Complete Anti-Federalist*. University of Chicago Press.

Week 7: The Federalists

- Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, 1788, *The Federalist*. Nos. 1-2, 9-10, 14, 37, 39, 51, 85.
- (Optional) David F. Epstein. 2008. *The Political Theory of The Federalist*. University of Chicago Press.

- (Optional) Douglass Adair. 1998. *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair*. ed. Trevor Colbourn. Liberty Fund, Inc.
- (Optional) Martin Diamond. 1959. "Democracy and the Federalist: A Reconsideration of the Framers' Intent." *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1.
- (Optional) Gerald Stourzh, 1970. *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Week 8: Midterm Exam

Week 9: Tocqueville's View of American Democracy

- Alexis de Tocqueville. 1840. *Democracy in America*. Volume I, Introduction; Volume I, Part 2, Chapters 1-9.
- (Optional) Harvey C. Mansfield. 2010. *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 10: Abolitionists

- William Lloyd Garrison, "Fourth of July Address" 1829; "Opening Statement of the First Issue of the Liberator" 1831.
- Frederick Douglass, "The Right to Criticize American Institutions" 1847; "The Constitution and Slavery" 1849; "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" 1852.
- (Optional) Frederick Douglass. 1994. *Autobiographies*. ed., Henry Louis Gates. New York: Literary Classics of the United States.

Week 11: Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas on Slavery

- Abraham Lincoln, "Address to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield" 1838; "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois" 1854; "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision" 1857; "House Divided Speech" 1858; "First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Ottawa" 1858; "Speech at Columbus, Ohio" 1859.
- Stephen Douglas, "Speech at Chicago" 1858.
- (Optional) Harry V. Jaffa. 2009. *Crisis of the House Divided : An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Week 12: Lincoln's Statesmanship

- Abraham Lincoln, "Farewell Address at Springfield, Illinois" 1861; "Speech at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania" 1861; "First Inaugural Address"

1861; “Proclamation Revoking General Hunter’s Emancipation Order” 1862; “Address to Border-State Representatives for Compensated Emancipation” 1862; “Address on Colonization” 1862; “Final Emancipation Proclamation” 1863; “Gettysburg Address” 1863; “Second Inaugural Address” 1865; “Speech on Reconstruction” 1865.

- (Optional) James M. McPherson. 1988. *Battle Cry of Freedom : The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Week 13: Progressivism, Historicism, and Natural Right

- Ronald J. Pestritto. ed. 2005. *Woodrow Wilson: The Essential Political Writings*. pp. 31-41, 61-65, 107-123, 175-190, 211-229.
- Leo Strauss. 1953. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Introduction; Chapters I, II, and III.
- (Optional) Charles R. Kesler. 2021. *Crisis of the Two Constitutions: The Rise, Decline, and Recovery of American Greatness*. New York: Encounter Books.

Week 14: Liberal-Communitarian Debate

- John Rawls. 1999. *The Theory of Justice*. Chapters 1-3.
- Alasdair C. MacIntyre. 2007. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- (Optional) Charles Taylor. 1992. *Sources of the Self the Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- (Optional) Michael J. Sandel. 1998. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Week 15: Racial Equality

- *Plessy v. Ferguson*. 1896.
- *Brown v. Board of Education*. 1954.
- Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” 1963; “I Have a Dream” 1963.

Week 16: Final Exam