

**Constitutional Principles:  
Critics and Champions of American Life**  
Syllabus

GOV 312P

Constitutional Principles: Core Texts

Fall 2021

#38875

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Office Hours: Fridays 1-4, on Zoom

**Course Description**

This course examines the principles, aspirations, virtues, and limitations of the American regime, as seen through the lens of its most profound advocates and its most profound critics. The word “regime” is here understood not only as a system of government, but also in the broad Aristotelian sense of the word: What way of life does a particular polity encourage? Who is admired? Who is scorned? Who rules? Who cannot? What habits, pursuits, and qualities of character are encouraged or discouraged by the various moral, institutional, religious, familial, and economic presuppositions that a community and its citizens more or less implicitly adopt? Those presuppositions preserve and even constitute, in large part, our regime.

And thus we are confronted with a danger. Perhaps we ourselves, immersed in the American regime as it currently stands, have adopted blindly certain false presuppositions, or have veered away from (or misunderstood) certain true presuppositions that need to be recovered. That is a danger, or a pair of dangers, that every thoughtful citizen must confront. This course attempts to offer students a path toward such a confrontation.

**This course fulfills the second half of the legislative requirement for Government.**

**Texts**

1. Locke, *The Second Treatise and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Dover Thrift Editions, 2002).
2. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Dover Thrift Editions, 2002)

3. Publius, *The Federalist Papers* by John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton.  
(Signet Classics edition, ed. Rossiter). ISBN 0451528816
4. The Anti-Federalist Papers (Signet Classics, 2003; Ralph Ketcham)
5. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Hackett Classics, 2000; Kessler and Grant)
6. Booker T Washington. *Up From Slavery*. Dover Classics. ISBN 0486287386.
7. WEB Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Classics. ISBN 0486280411.
8. Course Reader: Available at Jenn's Copies on Guadalupe and Dean Keaton.
  - Be sure to purchase the particular editions of the books ordered for this class, and always bring the book we are reading to class.

## Requirements

Careful reading is the most important requirement. The reading assignments in this course are not long, but they are quite difficult. Be sure to read them slowly and to take notes, in the margins or in a separate notebook, while you read. You should try to come to every class with questions, comments, and interpretations. To motivate close reading, I will give unannounced free-writing assignments.

There will be two short papers (1500 words), one in the middle of the term (on liberalism and the Founding) and the other at the end of the term (on Tocqueville, race, Marx, and Nietzsche). There will also be a final exam (on all of the authors, but with slightly greater weight given to the second half of the course). The exam will be an essay exam.

## Electronics Policy

- No computers are allowed in class, unless you have a special need for one (in which case you should explain that need to me, during my office hours).
- Please turn your cell phones off, and do not take them out at any time in the classroom.

## **Grades**

Your grade will be calculated by the following method. *Plus/minus grades will be used in the final grades.*

Attendance and Participation: 15%

First Paper (due Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>): 20%

Second Paper (due Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>): 20%

Free-writing Exercises: 15%

Final exam: 30%

## **Cultural Diversity in the United States**

This course carries the flag for Cultural Diversity in the United States. The purpose of the Cultural Diversity in the United States Flag is for students to explore in depth the shared practices and beliefs of one or more underrepresented cultural groups subject to persistent marginalization. In addition to learning about these diverse groups in relation to their specific contexts, students should engage in an active process of critical reflection. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one underrepresented cultural group in the U.S.

## **Ethics**

This course carries the Ethics flag. Ethics courses are designed to equip you with skills that are necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments involving ethical issues and the process of applying ethical reasoning to real-life situations.

## **Course Plan**

### **Week One: Political Philosophy and the American Regime**

Week 1: What is Political Philosophy? [No Reading for 8/26]

Aug 26

## Weeks Two-Five: Liberalism on Morality and Religion

### Week 2: The Contrast between Illiberal and Liberal Political Philosophy

Tuesday: The Ancient Greek and Medieval Christian View	Aug 31
Aristotle <i>Ethics</i> 10.9	(in course reader)
+ Aristotle, <i>Politics</i> 1.1-2, 3.6-9	
+ Aquinas on Law's Goals (92.1, 95.1)	
Thursday: John Locke's Social Contract Theory	Sept 2
Locke's <i>Second Treatise</i> pages 1-10, 12-13, 44-45, 57-66	
+ Declaration of Independence	
+ John Winthrop: "A Model of Christian Charity"	

### Week 3: John Stuart Mill: Liberty and the Harm Principle

Tuesday: <i>On Liberty</i> pages 1-24	Sept 7
Thursday: <i>On Liberty</i> pages 24-54, 63	Sept 9

### Week 4: Madison and Locke on Freedom of Religious Belief

Tuesday: Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> pages 113-130	Sept 14
+ Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance"	
Thursday: <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> pages 130-153	Sept 16

### Week 5: Locke's Letter and Stanley Fish's Response

Tuesday: Fish: "Mission Impossible" (pages 38-55)	Sept 21
Thursday: Fish: "Mission Impossible" (pages 57-62)	Sept 23

## Weeks Six-Nine: The Design & Diagnosis of the American Regime

### Week 6: The Federalist Papers: The Science of Politics

Tuesday: Federalist 1, 9, 10, 39	Sept 28
Thursday: Federalist 48, 49, 51, 52, 57	Sept 30

### Week 7: The Anti-Federalist; The Great Debate

Tuesday: Brutus 1, Brutus 3, Centinel 1, Federal Farmer 2, 7	Oct 5
Thursday: Brutus 4, 7, 10, 17; Melancton Smith Speech, June 21, 1788	Oct 7

### Week 8: Tocqueville: Equality, Federalism, and the Tyranny of the Majority

Tuesday: <i>Democracy in America</i> pages 1-15, 34-41, 50-62	Oct 12
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Thursday: *Democracy in America* pages 68-73, 87-123

Oct 14

Week 9: Tocqueville: The Democratic Mindset, and the Danger of Individualism

**FIRST PAPER DUE (October 19<sup>th</sup>): Liberalism and the Federalist Debate**

Tuesday: *Democracy in America* pgs. 124-142, 170-183, 187-188, 192

Oct 19

Thursday: *Democracy in America* pgs. 201-237, 244-248

Oct 21

**Weeks Ten-Twelve: The Question of Race in American Politics**

Week 10: Slavery, Popular Sovereignty, and Natural Rights

Tuesday: Frederick Douglass: "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

Oct 26

Thursday: Lincoln, "A House Divided" Speech

Oct 28

+ Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate (in course reader)

+ Fragment (in course reader)

Week 11: Washington v. Du Bois

Tuesday: Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*:  
pages 1-11, 71-79, 86-91, 95-110

Nov 2

Thursday: Washington, *Up from Slavery* pages 114-115, 137, 154, 156-157  
+ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* v-vi, 1-7, 25-35, 69-82

Nov 4

Week 12: Washington v. Du Bois; Martin Luther King, Jr.

Tuesday: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 99-113, 155-164

Nov 9

Thursday: MLK, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Nov 11

**Weeks Thirteen-Fifteen: Outsider Perspectives on the American Way of Life, and Contemporary Accounts**

Week 13: Marx and Nietzsche

Tuesday: Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party"

Nov 16

Thursday: Nietzsche: *TSZ* Prologue Section 5 only,  
+ *Twilight* 37-48; *Antichrist* 56-62

Nov 18

Week 14: Tocqueville: The Danger of Soft Despotism

**SECOND PAPER DUE (Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup>): Tocqueville, Race, Marx, and Nietzsche**

Tuesday: *Democracy in America* pages 281-286, 297-319 Nov 23

Thursday: No Class – Happy Thanksgiving Nov 25

Week 15: Critiques of The Role of Social Media; A Synoptic View

Tuesday: Zadie Smith, “The Lazy River” Nov 30

+ Haidt and Stockwell, “The Dark Psychology of Social Networks”

+ Marche, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?”

Thursday: Francis Fukuyama, “Liberalism and its Discontents” Dec 2

+ readings from Lazarus, Whitman, Langston Hughes, Muriel Rukeyser

**FINAL EXAM: Date to be Announced**