

The University of Texas at Austin
Liberal Arts Honors, Government Honors & Core, Texts and Ideas

LAH351J/GOV379/CTI325 “Regime Perspectives on American Politics”

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Spring 2024

Meets: Wednesdays 3-6pm, MEZ 1.212

Office Hours: 1-2pm Wednesdays, MEZ 3.152

Canvas page: <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1385763>

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This is a seminar on American politics and culture. Two purposes govern the selection of texts for the course and guide our discussion of them. All of our texts attempt to look at American politics as a *whole*. Most books and courses on America look at only a part, such as the Presidency, or elections, or popular culture. Here we attempt to think about how the parts of America fit together. Even when these texts speak about a part, for example an institution such as the presidency or the Congress, they present the topic from a vantage point on the whole polity. To see the polity as a whole also means that we will have to revisit and rethink aspects of our political life that we take for granted – that we don’t examine because those parts have become so natural or familiar to us. Seeing the polity whole enables us to render the familiar unfamiliar, to make what we take for granted strange and new.

To see the polity as a whole requires that we get some distance from our subject, much as to see the planet earth as a whole requires one to look at it from outer space. Just as it is difficult to get visual perspective on a place living within it, it is difficult to understand the promise or pathologies of a regime from within. To get critical distance from our politics, we will closely study three sets of texts that look at American politics from a distance. The first part of the course will recover the perspective of the founding debate between Federalists and Anti-federalists. This fundamental debate reveals what is a stake in the basic architecture of the American regime. The second part of the course is a close study of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Regarded by many as the best book ever written on democracy and the best book written on America, Tocqueville sees our polity whole because he looks at it from the vantage point of Europe, in general, and France, in particular. In the third part of the seminar we think about American politics from the perspective of thoughtful commentators who feel only nominally included in the polity. We focus on one of the most impressive black American thinkers. Half in and half out of the polity, this extraordinary statesman, Frederick Douglass, reveals fissures and fault lines in the American regime.

It is now a UT norm to include learning objectives in the syllabus. This overarching objective of this course is for students to learn a new way of thinking about the political world that they inhabit. The objective is not to teach students what to think. Rather, it is to provide intellectual tools to better see and understand politics for themselves. The intellectual tools include close readings of classic texts exemplifying three outside perspectives on the American polity, discussion of them, and reflection about them.

These skills will be assessed through three analytic papers as well as through class participation.

It will take some time in class to explain the course objectives in detail, but here are a few additional features of the new way of thinking that we will seek to understand and deploy.

I seek to enable students to better understand the architecture of the American constitutional order. One could call this kind of knowledge “makers knowledge.” It requires students to understand and reckon with

tensions among the principles and ideas that frame the American political order. “Makers knowledge” invites the student to see the political world from the perspective of one who would take responsibility for its future. It can be contrasted with “users knowledge,” which might enable the student to negotiate the political world, but not necessarily equip or inspire the student to sustain, improve, or change it.

This way of viewing politics can be called "constitutional thinking" as long as one realizes that it goes well beyond thinking about the written document -- the capital "C" constitution -- to the constitution of the whole polity. This kind of thinking explores how fundamental choices and ideas shape the culture, society, economy and even the mental habits of individual citizens.

Medical Protocol

As we transition from the COVID pandemic to still challenging endemic circumstances in which respiratory viruses remain a public health problem – please take care to follow these guidelines:

1. **Take care of your own personal health! Don't hesitate to use UT medical facilities and counseling if you need it, including mental health counseling.**
2. **If you feel ill, or if you have a cough, or if you have a fever do not come to class. Stay home and get well. There will be no grade penalty. Out of consideration for your classmates, given the effect coughing can have on discussion, please do not come to class if you have a persistent cough, even if it is due to allergies. If you are able when you are ill, please still submit the online reader response comments described below.**
3. **COVID RESOURCES:**
 - UHS provides [symptomatic COVID-19 testing](#) for students. Schedule your appointment by calling 512-471-4955 or online within the [MyUHS patient portal](#). Learn more about [symptomatic COVID-19 testing](#) here.
 - Disposable masks are available for students at the William C. Powers, Jr. Student Activity Center and the Texas Union hospitality desks.
 - The [exposure action chart](#) offers guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19 or if you test positive. If you experience symptoms, stay home, isolate, and follow instructions for symptomatic in the chart.
 - Stay up-to-date on [COVID-19 vaccinations](#) by getting all available boosters when eligible. Vaccines are available through University Health Services, including Flu vaccines.

Requirements:

Three take home analytic essays, chosen from a list of topics, each weighted 25% of the course grade.

Regular attendance and informed participation in the seminar is a vital component of the course and will be weighted 25% of the final grade. Every student should prepare a short, one or two paragraph “reader response” before each class meeting and circulate it to the entire class via “Canvas.” Also, every student is expected to elaborate or respond to a post of at least one other fellow student. So to be clear: at least two posts every week (more is fine) on our Canvas discussion board. Each initial post needs to be submitted by 5pm on Monday. And the response posts to fellow students need to be posted by 5pm on Tuesday.

One or two students will be designated as the agenda maker for each week. The agenda makers will be responsible for reflecting upon the set of reader responses, constructing an agenda of topics for discussion, introducing the agenda with a short presentation, and assisting me in guiding the discussion for that class meeting during the second half of each week's class meeting.

Students who responsibly attend to their agenda leading responsibilities, regularly contribute reader responses, and who miss no more than two classes will receive an A- (90 on a 100 point scale) for the class participation component of their grade and a higher A if, in addition, they regularly contribute to class discussion and the if the led agenda making exercise results in productive conversation. Careless preparation of the agenda, of the reader responses, or unexcused absence from more than two classes will mean that the student will likely receive *no more than a C* (75) and, depending on the record, possibly less than a 75, for the class participation component of the grade.

NOTE WELL:

Plan now for the due dates: February 21 (Essay 1); April 3 (Essay 2); April 24 (Essay 3)

NOTE: I will always make accommodations for absences due to religious holidays. Please let me know at the outset of the semester if you will need to be absent for religious reasons.

NOTE: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

Grading: All assignments and class participation will be graded on a 100-point scale. The final course grade will be the weighted average of these grades on the following plus/minus scale:

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|--------|----|
| 94-100 | A |
| 90-93 | A- |
| 87-89 | B+ |
| 83-86 | B |
| 80-82 | B- |
| 77-79 | C+ |
| 73-76 | C |
| 70-72 | C- |
| 67-69 | D+ |
| 60-66 | D |
| 0-59 | F |

NOTE WELL:

Class Recordings: We are planning to meet in person. If circumstances require us to meet via Zoom the class will also be recorded. Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings. The reason for this rule is to protect freedom of expression in the class..

Please purchase these specific texts. They are all relatively inexpensive. It is useful to have the same texts so that we can more easily refer to passages we are discussing.

Texts:

- The Federalist Papers*, Clinton Rossiter, editor. (Signet Classics)
- The Anti-Federalist Papers*, Ralph Ketchum, editor. (Signet Classics)
- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Kessler trans. (Hackett)
- The Essential Douglass*, Buccola, editor. (Hackett)

Optional: Jeffrey K. Tulis and Nicole Mellow, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics*. [This book is available free online through the UT library, as well as from the University Coop.]

Schedule:

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|---------------------|---|
| January 17 | Introduction, Discussion of <i>Federalist</i> #1. |
| January 24 | Federalist 9-10, 14-16 Federal Farmer, (Ketchum pp.266-280) |
| January 31 | Federalist, 23-26, 37-42. Debate on federalism (June 21) in (Ketchum pp. 66-70) |
| | Recommended: Herbert J. Storing, <i>What the Anti-Federalists Were For</i> [Available free online through PCL. In interested, look for Herbert J. Storing, <i>The Complete Antifederalist</i> . This is the first volume.] |
| February 7 | Federalist 47-51 Centinel, (Ketchum 227-236) Cato (Ketchum, 317-323) |
| February 14 | Federalist, 52-58, 62-67 John Dewitt (Ketchum pp.189-98) Patrick Henry (Ketchum, pp. 199-216) Melancton Smith (Ketchum, pp.358-382) |
| | Recommended: Chapter 2, <i>Legacies of Losing in American Politics</i> Essay #1 topics assigned |
| February 21 | Federalist 69-73, 78-80 Federalist 84 Brutus, (Ketchum pp. 309-319) |
| Essay #1 DUE | |
| February 28 | Tocqueville, 1 – 73 |
| March 6 | Tocqueville, 73-168 |

March 11 to 16. Spring Break

March 20 Tocqueville, pp. 169-200

March 27 Tocqueville, pp. 201-248

 Essay # 2 Topics assigned

April 3. Tocqueville, pp. 248-319

Essay # 2 DUE

April 10 Readings for the last three weeks will be selected from the Buccola, ed. *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writings and Speeches*.

Essential, items 5, 6, 7, 8

 Essay #3 Topics assigned

April 17 Douglass, *Essential*, items 9, 10, 16

April 24 Douglass, *Essential*, Item 32

Essay #3 Due