

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

GOV 379C/LAH351J/CTI325 “Regime Perspectives on American Politics”

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Spring 2021

Meets: Mondays on Zoom from 3:00 to 6:00pm

Office Hours:

By appointment on Zoom

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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. Half in and half out, these extraordinary black American writers reveal fissures and fault lines in the American regime.

Requirements:

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

OR as an option: you may write the two short essays with the best of those two counting 25% of your grade and do a longer 15 page paper on a topic of your choice, in consultation with me, which will be weighted 50% of your course grade. Government honors students who are thinking of doing an honors thesis next year may prefer this option to begin to develop research and writing skills for longer work. Students who prefer this option will need to designate their preferred third short essay and have discussed with me a topic for their long paper by April 1.

Regular attendance on Zoom 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 Friday. And the response posts to fellow students need to be posted by 5pm on Sunday.

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 Zoom session.

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 22 (Essay 1); April 5 (Essay 2); May 3 (Essay 3 or Optional Paper)

NOTE: If you have difficulties with connections to Zoom, let me know and I will try to figure out a way for you to participate. All the classes will be recorded and if there is a good reason to miss the live Zoom session, we can arrange for you to use the recorded version.

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:

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: Because of the pandemic, the University has adopted new policies that will allow you to choose whether you would prefer a Pass/Fail grade instead of a letter grade. This option is available to all students **in addition** to the usual option for a limited number of courses taken pass/fail. Here is a link that explains the new temporary policy.

<https://provost.utexas.edu/2020/11/25/extended-deadline-for-q-drops-and-p-f-flexibility/>

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*, Goldhammer trans. (Hackett)
The Essential Douglass, Buccola, editor. (Hackett)

Schedule:

January 25 Introduction,
Discussion of *Federalist* #1.

February 1 Federalist 9-10, 14-16, 23-26
Federal Farmer, (Ketchum pp.256-269)

Recommended: Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*

February 8 Federalist 37-42, 47-51
Centinel, (Ketchum 227-236)
Cato (Ketchum, 317-323)

February 15 Federalist, 52-58, 62-67, 69-73
John Dewitt (Ketchum pp.189-98)
Patrick Henry (Ketchum, pp. 199-216)

Recommended: Chapter 2, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics*

Essay #1 topics assigned

February 22 Federalist 78-80
Federalist 84
Brutus, (Ketchum pp. 269-309)
Melancton Smith (Ketchum 336-356)

Essay #1 DUE

March 1 Tocqueville, 3 – 126

March 8 Tocqueville, 197-365

MARCH 15 to 20 Spring Break

March 22 Tocqueville, pp. 365- 514

March 29 Tocqueville, pp. 514-614

Essay # 2 Topics assigned

Students who wish to submit a long paper in lieu of the third essay should discuss their topics with me, and get approval, by this date.

April 5 Tocqueville, pp. 614-715

Essay # 2 DUE

April 12 Tocqueville, pp. 715-834

April 19 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

April 26 Douglass,
 Essay #3 Topics assigned

Essential, items 9, 10, 16

May 3 Douglass TBA
Essay #3 Due

Essential, Item 32