

Constitutional Principles: Core Texts

GOV 312P (Unique # 38505)

Spring 2021

Mezes B0.306, MWF 10-11

Final Paper Due: Sunday, May 16

Ian Myers

Office: TBD

Zoom Office Link: TBD

Email: igm503@gmail.com

Phone: 678-313-6909

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

COURSE GOALS

We all are living under a liberal democratic government, a government whose constitution is the oldest codified constitution still in use. It would be an error to infer from this that we know anything clearly about the principles of that government and its constitution. What's more, all or most of us have been deeply shaped, in our moral opinions, our longings, and our aspirations, by the direct and indirect education that growing up in a liberal democracy affords. To infer from this second observation that we know anything clearly about the grounds of those opinions and longings, or even that we are sufficiently aware of their alternatives as to wonder about their grounds, would be a greater error than the first.

It is a precondition for becoming a fully responsible democratic citizen that one make the effort to learn about these things, about the liberal democratic principles of the American Constitution, the theoretical basis for those principles, and the ways of life they encourage and require. We can't address the newly returned question of liberal democracy's spiritual viability, which should concern us all the more because of how often it is now raised *within* liberal democracies, before recovering the thought that has shaped the modern world.

What might be less obvious is that making this effort is also a precondition for becoming thoughtful, serious human beings who understand themselves and how they ought to live if they are to live well.

We will not deal with these problems to anyone's satisfaction. This is only one course in the history of political thought. But if you apply yourself to the texts we'll be studying, you'll have a foundation for struggling with these most important problems in the future. Our eyes will always be on the basic principles of American political life: democracy, equality, and liberty. By carefully examining core texts of the American political tradition, we'll try to see how these ideals took hold in the US, what arguments were made on their behalf, and what pitfalls there are for a society dedicated to those ideals. We will also look at the ethical questions that arise when leaders seek to put those ideas into practice.

This class carries "Ethics" and "Cultural Diversity in the US" flags. Ethics courses are designed to equip you with skills that are necessary for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. It should not then be surprising that a substantial portion of your grade will come from assignments involving ethical issues and the process of applying ethical reasoning to real-life situations. Our time in class will be no different. Cultural diversity in the US courses are

designed to familiarize you with the distinctive experiences of marginalized groups in the US. A substantial portion of the readings and writing assignments will require you to consider how American political principles look to Black Americans.

COURSE OUTLINE

We will turn first to John Locke, whose *Second Treatise of Government* is one of the deepest theoretical defenses of (and to a large extent the source of) liberal democracy, and whose *Letter Concerning Toleration* is the most famous early-modern defense of religious toleration. After our time with Locke, we'll move to *The Federalist Papers*, where we'll encounter powerful arguments for key features of the American Constitution and, at the same time, the first great attempt to apply Lockean principles in a political founding.

Having seen the theoretical basis for the spirit of the American Constitution and the rich political arguments for its ratification, we'll study Tocqueville's critical, but friendly, observations on American democracy and the spirit of its citizens before exploring the thought of a few of the great African American political thinkers. We will spend a quarter of the course studying Frederick Douglass, Booker T Washington, WEB Du Bois, Martin Luther King, and James Baldwin, focusing especially on their different evaluations of the meaning and import of American political principles to a people enslaved for a third of this country's history.

The course will end with a brief unit on Abraham Lincoln and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's political thought, which we will use also as an opportunity for comprehensive reflection on the thinkers we will have studied.

CLASSROOM POLICY

This course will meet in person until necessity demands otherwise. There will be no online option, and classes will not be recorded. If we must go online, we will meet via Zoom at the scheduled class time (synchronously).

You must come to class on time and stay the whole time. Our time in class will involve lectures, class-wide discussions on important and difficult questions in the readings, and small-group discussions. I can provide the lectures, but for the discussions to be profitable, you must come to class 1) having carefully read the assigned readings, 2) ready and eager to state your interpretations of the readings, listen to your classmates, and *respectfully* argue with them, and 3) with a physical copy of the assigned reading. Since the lectures will consist at their core of close textual analysis, your ability to follow and profitably engage with them will also depend on your having carefully read the assigned readings.

You will not profit from this course or succeed in it if you do not engage with the reading assignments.

The following are rules of classroom conduct:

- You must bring a physical copy of the book under discussion to each class. E-readers are not allowed in class.

- Phone use during class is a violation of class rules. If you are caught using one during class, it will count as two unexcused absences.
- Use of laptops during class is outlawed. Store your laptops before class begins.
- Do not eat in class. If your schedule is such that you feel you must eat, see me.
- Do not pack up before I have dismissed class. If this is a problem for you, see me.
- Do not be rude to your classmates or dismissive of their contributions to class discussions.

reserve the right to give you an unexcused absence for behavior that is distracting or disrespectful to your peers and myself. See below (**Attendance and Participation**) for the consequences of unexcused absences.

OFFICE HOURS

For safety reasons, office hours will occur on Zoom instead of in my office.

You are also welcome to ask questions via phone call. If you'd like to do this, send me a text to set up a call time. Only text me for this purpose. I will not answer questions over text.

REQUIRED TEXTS

You are required to own *paper copies* of all the books for this class. Electronic editions will not be allowed in class. With the exception of the course packet, which will be available only at the McCombs UT Document Solutions kiosk, you can buy these books from wherever you'd like. There should be copies at the Co-Op, but since the Co-Op is notorious for understocking course materials, I'd suggest being open to using Amazon, AbeBooks, or any other online book retailer.

1. Course Packet, available at the McCombs UT Document Solutions kiosk
2. John Locke. *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Edited by Ian Shapiro. Yale University Press. ISBN 0300100183
3. Hamilton, Madison, Jay. *The Federalist Papers*. Introduction by Charles Kesler, edited by Clinton Rossiter. Signet Classics. ISBN 0451528816.
4. Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Trans. Harvey Mansfield. The University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0226805360.
5. Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Signet Classics. ISBN 0756967104.
6. Booker T Washington. *Up From Slavery*. Dover Classics. ISBN 0486287386.
7. WEB DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Classics. ISBN 0486280411.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE CALCULATION

The most important requirement is that you show up ready to discuss the readings. There is a lot of reading for this course, but it is worth all the time and effort you can put into it. You can learn something important from everything we read.

60% Two Papers (30% each): You will write two 1000-to-1200-word papers on topics to be assigned in class. Papers will be due at 11:59 PM on February 28 and April 25. I will give additional instructions when I assign the papers. You will submit the papers to me at my email address. If possible, please submit your paper as a Microsoft Word document.

Late papers will lose 10% per day after the deadline.

30% Final Paper

Your final paper (up to 1000 words) will require you to give a synoptic comparison of several of the thinkers studied in the course. It will count as 30% of your final grade and be due on Sunday, May 16, at 11:59 PM. I will give additional instructions when I assign the paper. You will submit it to me at my email address. If possible, please submit it as a Microsoft Word document.

Late papers will lose 10% per day after the deadline.

10% Short Writing Assignments: A short paper (500 words) will be due on February 14 at 11:59 PM. This will make up half of your short writing assignments grade.

Late papers will lose 10% per day after the deadline.

At some point in the semester, I will assign you the task of reviewing another student's paper. The review will be due on either March 4 or April 8, depending on whether the paper you review was submitted on February 28 or April 4. This will make up the other half of your short writing assignments grade.

Late reviews will lose 10% per day after the deadline.

Attendance and Participation - Attendance is required at every class meeting. You get two unexcused absences with no penalty. **For every additional unexcused absence, your final grade will drop by 1%.** Having more than 8 unexcused absences—including the first two—will result in automatic failure of the course.

That said, due to concerns about COVID-19, I ask that you stay home if you are feeling at all ill. Err on the side of caution. Please do not risk the health of your classmates. Your absence will be excused, even without a doctor's note. Just let me know by email (use the subject heading "Absence") that you are missing class for health reasons.

Packing up early is a distraction to other students. I will end each class by 10:50 AM. In return, I expect you to refrain from packing up early. While any breach of the class rules enumerated above might earn you an unexcused absence, **I will ruthlessly enforce the rule against early packing up. If you do this, I will treat it as an unexcused absence.**

Because of the size of the class, I do not expect you to be able to speak in every class meeting. That being said, **active participation in class can modestly increase your final grade.**

Grade Calculation – Papers and exams will be given letter grades. In order to calculate your final grade, these will be translated into number grades as follows:

A: 97; A-: 91; B+: 88; B: 84.5; B-: 81; C+: 78; C: 74.5; C-: 71; D: 65; F: 30

I will often use grades like A/A- to indicate a numerical grade between the two letter grades. So, A/A- is a 94 and B-/C+ is a 79.5.

Final grades will be awarded on the following scale. Please note that grades will not be rounded up; a 93.9 is an A-.

A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-90; B: 83-87; B-: 80-83; C+: 77-80; C: 73-77; C-: 70-73; D: 64-70; F: 64
or below

GRADE COMPLAINTS

If you think you have been graded unfairly, I will regrade your assignment. But this is the condition: you have to send me an email, before the next class after the graded assignment was returned to you, explaining what you think I overlooked in your assignment or in the topic and why your work deserves a higher grade. I will not consider a regrade if this is not done. Since this email is your chance to convince me that my regrade should result in a higher grade, it is in your interest to think very carefully and write it very clearly.

A regrade might result in a lower grade. Only use this right if you think your case is strong.

READING SCHEDULE

Readings from the course packet are marked by “(CP).”

Wednesday, Jan 20	Plato’s <i>Laws</i> and Declaration of Independence (CP)
Friday, Jan 22	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 1-4
Monday, Jan 25	<i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapter 5
Wednesday, Jan 27	Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapter 6: Sections 52-58; Chapter 7; Chapter 8: Sections 95-100 and 119-122
Friday, Jan 29	Wednesday continued

Monday, Feb 1	<i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapters 9-14
Wednesday, Feb 3	<i>Second Treatise</i> , Chapter 19
Friday, Feb 5	Locke, <i>Letter Concerning Toleration</i> , 23-35
Monday, Feb 8	<i>Letter</i> , 35-46
Wednesday, Feb 10	<i>Letter</i> , 46-56
Friday, Feb 12	Federalist 1-2, 39
Sunday, Feb 14	Short Paper Due (11:59 PM)
Monday, Feb 15	Federalist 6, 8-9, 11
Wednesday, Feb 17	Federalist 10; Washington's Farewell Address (CP)
Friday, Feb 19	Federalist 37, 48, 49, 51
Monday, Feb 22	Federalist 52, 53, 55
Wednesday, Feb 24	Anti-Federalist Selection (CP)
Friday, Feb 26	Federalist 84; Bill of Rights Readings (CP)
Sunday, Feb 28	First Required Essay Due (11:59 PM)
Monday, Mar 1	Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> , Introduction
Wednesday, Mar 3	<i>DA</i> , I.1.3
Friday, Mar 5	<i>DA</i> , I.2.1, I.2.7
Monday, Mar 8	<i>DA</i> , I.2.9
Wednesday, Mar 10	<i>DA</i> , Volume II "Notice," II.2.1-3
Friday, Mar 12	<i>DA</i> , II.2.4-7
Spring Break	No Class
Monday, Mar 22	<i>DA</i> , II.2.8-9
Wednesday, Mar 24	<i>DA</i> , II.2.10-17
Friday, Mar 26	<i>DA</i> , II.2.18-20
Monday, Mar 29	<i>DA</i> , II.4.6-8
Wednesday, Mar 31	<i>DA</i> , I.2.10 (pp. 302-307, 326-348)
Friday, Apr 2	Review Day
Monday, Apr 5	Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> (19-128)
Wednesday, Apr 7	Early Selections from Douglass (CP)
Friday, Apr 9	Douglass, Fourth of July Speech (CP)
Monday, Apr 12	Booker T. Washington, <i>Up from Slavery</i> , 1-11, 57-64, 79-81, 105-115, 156-7; Selections in CP
Wednesday, Apr 14	Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , Forethought, 1, 3; "The Talented Tenth" (CP)

Friday, Apr 16	Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races” (CP); <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , 6
Monday, Apr 19	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , 14
Wednesday, Apr 21	King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” “I Have a Dream” (CP)
Friday, Apr 23	Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” and excerpts from “Down at the Cross”
Sunday, Apr 25	Second Required Essay Due (11:59 PM)
Monday, Apr 26	Lincoln, Lyceum Address (CP)
Wednesday, Apr 28	Lincoln, “House Divided” and Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate (CP)
Friday, Apr 30	Lincoln, Selections; Douglass, “Oration” (CP)
Monday, May 3	Solzhenitsyn (CP)
Wednesday, May 5	Solzhenitsyn Continued
Friday, May 7	Course Conclusion; Final Day of Class
Sunday, May 16	Final Paper Due (11:59 PM)

OTHER POLICIES

Covid-19 Safety and Class Participation/Masks

- Every student must wear a cloth face-covering properly in class and in all campus buildings at all times.
- Students are encouraged to participate in documented daily symptom screening. This means that each class day in which on-campus activities occur, students must upload certification from the symptom tracking app and confirm that they completed their symptom screening for that day to Canvas. Students should not upload the results of that screening, just the certificate that they completed it. If the symptom tracking app recommends that the student isolate rather than coming to class, then students must not return to class until cleared by a medical professional.
- Information regarding [safety protocols with and without symptoms](#) can be [found here](#).

If a student is not wearing a cloth face-covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). If the student refuses to wear a cloth face covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university’s Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). **Please do not make me do this.** Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for [obtaining an accommodation](#) working with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#).

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. Any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

COVID Caveats: Students should report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to [University Health Services](#), and faculty and staff report to the [HealthPoint Occupational Health Program](#) (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this [link](#) to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor or TA) tests positive for COVID, see this [University Health Services link](#).

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Academic dishonesty: Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. The university's Honor Code, with information on the meaning of academic integrity, is found at the following website: <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/>

Accommodations for religious holidays: If anyone needs to miss class for a religious observance, I will hold a make-up session for you and the absence will be excused. If anyone misses a religious observance for class, they can take it up with their god.