

The Graduate Center
Department of Political Science

Political Science 72100
American Political Thought

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This course presents some fundamental ideas that underlie the American political order. These ideas spring from numerous sources, the most important of which are republicanism, democracy, and liberalism. In some ways these currents merge and flow together, in other ways they diverge, become antagonistic and act against one another. Some observers point out that this political order is basically liberal, exemplified by the fundamental principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. Others point to elements antithetical to liberal thought. The Declaration itself may be seen as a locus of political and intellectual contestation open to divergent interpretations.

Republican thought rests upon the ideas of non-domination and autonomy, while democratic thought emphasizes the primacy of self-government by the people, and liberalism underscores the values of individualism and tolerance. Thus American political thought may be seen as a bundle of ideas and concepts which are simultaneously the cause and product of an on-going and contentious debate regarding the very nature of the American political enterprise. It encompasses, moreover, a continual struggle between nature and convention, interest/appetite and virtue/ethics, liberty and slavery, democracy and republicanism, liberalism and despotism, pluralism and elitism, individualism and community, religion and secularism, universalism and nationalism.

Course requirements: One take-home final examination and one paper on a subject chosen by the student, both due at the end of the semester.

Texts:

Thomas Paine, Common Sense
Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, The Federalist Papers
Herbert Storing, What the Antifederalists Were For
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected Essays (Penguin)
Mason Lawrence, ed., Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader
(Penguin)
Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience and Other Essays

I. Introduction: the concept of "founding" and its relation to
the Western political tradition

II. The Puritan Founding

The Mayflower Compact
John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity"
John Winthrop, "On Arbitrary Government"
Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for Cause
of Conscience"
Cotton Mather, "The People of God"
The Massachusetts Body of Liberties

Recommended:

Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self
William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation
The Book of Exodus
St. Augustine, Political Writings
Edmund s. Morgan, ed., Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794
Bernard, Bailyn, the Origins of American Politics

III. Novus Ordo Saeclorum: The Revolutionary Founding and the
Concept of the People

Thomas Paine, Common Sense
John Dickinson, "Letters from a Frammer in Pennsylvania"
John Adams, "Thoughts on Government"
Alexander Hamilton, "The Farmer Refuted"
John Adams, Letter on the American Revolution
Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence"
Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee on the Object of the
Declaration

Recommended:

Bernard Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American
Revolution
Jay Fliegelman, Declaring Independence
Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America
Jason Frank, Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in
Postrevolutionary America

Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., A Companion to the American Revolution
Pauline Maier, From Resistance to Revolution
Edmund S. Morgan, Inventing the People
Gordon Wood, The American Revolution: A History
Gordon Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution
Hannah Arendt, On Revolution
Paul Eidelberg, On the Silence of the Declaration of Independence
Danielle Allen, Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality
Alexander Tsesis, For Liberty and Equality: The Life and Times of the Declaration of Independence

IV. Empire of Liberty: The Constitution and Republicanism

The Articles of Confederation
The 1787 US Constitution
Publius, The Federalist Papers
Douglas Adair, Fame and the Founding Fathers
Joyce Appleby, "Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination," in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, eds., Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitutions and American National Identity
Richard Bouton, Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution
Jason Frank, "Publius and Political Imagination," Political Theory (February 2009)
Isaac Kramnick, "'The Great National Discussion:' The Discourse of Politics in 1787," William and Mary Quarterly 45 (1988)
Richard K. Mathews, If Men Were Angels: Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason
Gordon Wood, Creation of the American Republic
David J. Bederman, The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution

V. The Anti-Federalist Response

Herbert Storing, What the Anti-Federalists Were For
Brutus, I, VII, X, XI, XV
Richard Henry Lee, Letters from the Federal Farmer, I-V

Recommended:

Saul Cornell, The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting tradition in America, 1788-1828

Woody Holton, Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution

Celia Kenyon, Men of Little Faith

Jackson T. Main, The Anti-Federalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781-1788

Sheldon Wolin, Presence of the Past

VI. Democracy in America: Despotism and the New Political Science

Tocqueville, Democracy in America

Recommended:

William Connolly, Ethos of Pluralization

Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny

Michael Rogin, "Liberal Society and the Indian Question"

Sheldon Wolin, Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life

Gordon S. Wood, Empire of Liberty

VII. A Compound Republic

John Calhoun, "A Disquisition on Government"

John Calhoun, "Speech on the Slave Question"

Recommended:

Eugene Genovese, The World the Slaveowners Made

A.O. Spain, The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun

Harvey Wish, Antebellum

VIII. Transcendentalism and Democracy

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Idea of Self-Government"

Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience and Other Essays

Recommended:

Sharon Cameron, Impersonality

George Kateb, Emerson and Self-Reliance

George Kateb, The Inner Ocean: Individualism and American Culture

Robert D. Richardson, Emerson: Mind on Fire

Jack Turner, A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau

IX. Abolitionism and Democracy

Mason Lowance, ed., Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader

Recommended:

Berhard Boxhill, "The Two Traditions in African-American Political Philosophy," The Philosophical Forum (Fall-Spring, 1992)

Robert Fanuzzi, Abolition's Public Sphere

Walter Johnson, Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market

Joel Olson, "The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionists and the Democratic Uses of Zealotry," Perspectives on Politics (2007)

Richard S. Newman, The Transformation of American Abolitionism

George Shulman, American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture

John Stauffer, Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race

Andrew Delbanco, The Abolitionist Imagination

X. Popular Sovereignty and Natural Law

The Lincoln Douglas Debates, I, VII

Abraham Lincoln, "Lyceum Address"

Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural"

Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address"

Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural"

Recommended:

Paul M. Angle, ed., The Complete Lincoln Douglas Debates

Joseph R. Fornieri, Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith

Gary Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg

XI. Slave and Citizen

James Madison, Federalist No. 54

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July"

Frederick Douglass, "Oration on the Memory of Abraham Lincoln"

Tocqueville, Democracy in America, I, II, chap. 10

Recommended:

David Brian Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 177-1823
Jason Frank, "Frederick Douglass and 'We the People,'" in Andy Schaap, ed., Law and Agonistic Politics
Stanley R. Engerman, ed., Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom and Free Labor
Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan Roll
Eugene Genovese, In Red and Black
Eugene Genovese, From Rebellion to Revolution
Bill Lawson and Frank Kirkland, eds., Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader
James Oakes, The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics
Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death
Orlando Patterson, Freedom in the Making of Western Culture
Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life
James Mellon, Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember
James M. McPherson, The Negro's Civil War

XII. Progressives and Democracy

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems
Herbert Croly, Progressive Democracy

Recommended:

Andrew Feffer, The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism
James Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in American and European Social Thought
Michael McGerr, A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1970-1920
Robert B. Westbrook, John Dewey and American Democracy

XIII. Elitism and Pluralism

Gaetano Mosca, The Ruling Class
James Burnham, The Machiavellians
Roberto Michels, Political Parties
C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite
C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination
James H. Meisel, The Myth of the Ruling Class
Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy
E.E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People

Robert A. Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory
Robert A. Dahl, Who Governs?
Robert A. Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics
Peter Bachrach, The Theory of Democratic Elitism
Peter Bachrach, Political Elites in a Democracy
David M. Ricci, Community Power and Democratic Theory
David M. Ricci, The Tragedy of Political Science

XIV. Democratic Deliberation

Amy Guttmann, "Democratic Deliberation"
Michael Sandel, Democracy and Its Discontents
Anita L. Allen and Milton C. Regan, Jr., eds.,
Debating Democracy's Discontent

XV. Multiculturalism, Identity and the Political Subject

Abraham Lincoln, "Eulogy for Henry Clay"
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self"
Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream"
Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Limits of Pluralism"
Anne Norton, "The Virtues of Multiculturalism"
James Ceaser, "Multiculturalism and American Liberal
Democracy"
Samuel P. Huntington, "Who are We?"