

American Political Thought
Political Science 378W:01
Fall 2007

Wednesdays
6 – 8:50 p.m.
AB1 Room 302
Office Hours: M 2-3
T 5-6
W 5-6
or by appointment

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Course description

This course is an upper-level inquiry into what constitutes American political thought, what the most significant contributions have been to political theorizing in the United States, and how this tradition interacts with and fits into, the larger practices of political philosophy. Participants are expected to have a basic understanding of the structures, institutions and processes of American politics and to demonstrate an interest in the organizing principles, guiding ideas and ongoing debates associated with those.

In one particular tradition of political theory, this course uses no textbook. We will focus exclusively on original texts and you will be responsible for reading, comprehending, analyzing and reacting to, major significant works that have contributed to shaping American political thought. These texts vary across genres (many of them are not political in the sense of being about politics), across time periods when they were written and across the personalities of their authors (a woman who went from being a slave to being a traveling preacher and a man from very upper-crust French aristocracy share the capacity to give us insight into American politics).

Prerequisites: 6 hours of Political Science.

Course objectives and goals

The goal of this course is both to acquaint participants with the key texts involved and to provide an invitation to engage critically with the ideas presented. By taking this class, you are making a commitment to read and think seriously about American political thought – and by teaching the class, I am making a commitment to provide both the materials to read and the space in which they can be discussed. The course will be considered a success if substantial thinking and discussion have taken place. You are always invited to initiate discussions on the basis of the texts we are reading, in ways that are relevant to our current political realities.

Course texts

Given both the nature and the level of this course, there will be a fairly heavy reading load. We will be using books and source materials that are archived and made available online.

The books we will use in the class are available for purchase and will constitute a good basis for a library in American political thought – in fact, you may already own several of them. If that is the case, you may choose to use copies you already have but it is then your responsibility to read **exactly** those selections that are required. The books are:

ed. R. P. Basler. Abraham Lincoln – His speeches and writings. Da Capo. ISBN: 0-306-81075-1.

B. Franklin: The autobiography and other writings. Penguin. ISBN 0-14-039052-9

T. Paine: Common sense. Penguin. ISBN 0-14-039016-2

ed. C. Rossiter. The Federalist papers. SignetClassic. ISBN 0-451-52881-6.

ed. R. D. Heffner. Democracy in America – Tocqueville. Mentor. ISBN 0-451-62801-2

The additional source documents you need for the course, are made available through Blackboard. You are responsible for downloading and reading them. The different methods of presentation in no way warrant guesses about different levels of significance for these texts.

Assignments

Given the W designation of the course, portions of the final grade come from writing assignments. Please note that this means that perfect attendance and always completing the readings for a given day are **assumed** in this class and they will not be avenues to earning points.

The course is best understood as a succession of three blocks, each of which culminates in a major writing assignment. In each block, you will go through a series of small writing assignments as preparation for the major assignment at the end of the block. The goal of this strategy is to make the major writing assignments into well-prepared, familiar, low-stress processes.

The blocks and the assignments are the following:

Block 1 **2 reading responses** (in-class closed-book free-writing to check that you have done the readings; you will not receive comments on these and they will not be returned to you)
2 micro-themes (in-class writing in response to a question that is similar to what you should expect on an exam or to what would make a good paper topic; to limit the length of the writing, you will have to write on

index cards that are half of a regular letter-sized page; you will go through peer review with these: you will be provided with a simple rubric to review them; you will have to turn in both what you wrote and the review sheet)

in-class essay exam (this will be open-book, open-note, you will have the entire class period to write)

Block 2 **2 reading responses** (in-class closed-book free-writing to check that you have done the readings; you will not receive comments on these and they will not be returned to you)

2 micro-themes (in-class writing in response to a question that is similar to what you should expect on an exam or to what would make a good paper topic; to limit the length of the writing, you will have to write on index cards that are half of a regular letter-sized page; you will go through peer review with these: you will be provided with a simple rubric to review them; you will have to turn in both what you wrote and the review sheet)

thesis statement (this is to be written at home and to be turned in as a commitment to a paper topic; you will have to turn in **two** copies; you will be given comments on these)

thesis rewrite and bibliography (you will have to turn in an updated thesis statement as a response to the comments you were given, along with a bibliography showing what sources you will be using for your paper)

paper (an at-home assignment to be written on your thesis and with the help of the sources you had turned in as your bibliography)

Block 3 **2 reading responses** (in-class closed-book free-writing to check that you have done the readings; you will not receive comments on these and they will not be returned to you)

2 micro-themes (in-class writing in response to a question that is similar to what you should expect on an exam or to what would make a good paper topic; to limit the length of the writing, you will have to write on index cards that are half of a regular letter-sized page; you will go through peer review with these: you will be provided with a simple rubric to review them; you will have to turn in both what you wrote and the review sheet)

final essay exam (this is similar in format to the first exam in the class but is held at the time scheduled by SHSU for a final; open-book, open-note writing)

Grading plan

The various parts and assignments will be graded in the following fashion:

Block 1 **2 reading responses – 4 % of the final grade (2% each)**

2 micro-themes – 6% of the final grade (3% each)
in-class essay exam – 10% of the final grade

Block 2 **2 reading responses – 4 % of the final grade (2% each)**
2 micro-themes – 6% of the final grade (3% each)
thesis statement – 5 % of the final grade
thesis rewrite and bibliography – 5 % of the final grade
paper – 25% of the final grade

Block 3 **2 reading responses – 4 % of the final grade (2% each)**
2 micro-themes – 6% of the final grade (3% each)
final essay exam – 25% of the final

Grades will be assigned on the standard grading scale:

A = 100-90, B = 89-80, C = 79-70, D = 69-60, F = 59 and below.

Course policies

The policies that govern this course are included on the BlackBoard site of the course, under Course Documents. Please note that you are responsible for knowing and abiding by, the contents of the ‘Course Policies’ document and that everything in it has the same force as other items on the syllabus. Please familiarize yourself with the document early on. In addition to the policies described in that document, one additional policy will apply to this course: there will be no extra credit in this class.

Tentative course schedule

Date	Subject	Reading	Writing
Aug 22	Introduction		
Aug 29	Starting Points	Iroquois Constitution (on BB)	rr (2%)
Sept 5	Starting Points	Mayflower Compact, Model of Christian Charity, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (all on BB)	mt (3%)
Sept 12	Paine	all of Common Sense	rr (2%)
Sept 19	Franklin	see BB for reading selections	mt (3%)
Sept 26	EXAM		(10%)
Oct 3	Federalist Papers	no. 1, no. 9, no. 10	rr (2%)
Oct 10	Federalist Papers	no. 11, no. 35, no. 47, no. 48	mt (3%)
Oct 17	Federalist Papers	no. 49, no. 51, no. 70, no. 84	rr (2%), thesis due (5%)
Oct 24	Lincoln	‘Lyceum’ 01.27.1838. Douglas debate, Peoria, 10.16.1854. Springfield, 06.16.1858. Ottawa debate, 08.21.1858.	mt (3%)

Oct 31	Lincoln	Wisconsin agricultural society, 09.30.1859. First Inaugural, 03.04.1861. Gettysburg Address, 11.19.1863. Final Emancipation Proclamation, 01.01.1863.	thesis and biblio. due (5%)
Nov 7	no class meeting	WORK ON YOUR PAPER	
Nov 14	Tocqueville	2. Democratic social condition; 3. The sovereignty of the people; 7. Aspects of the federal Constitution; 12. Unlimited power of the majority	paper due (25%), rr (2%)
Nov 28	Tocqueville	13. Causes which mitigate the tyranny of the majority; 15. Future prospects; 26. Love of equality over liberty; 27. Of individualism; 28. Free institutions to combat individualism	rr (2%), mt (3%)
Dec 5	Questions	Declaration of Sentiments, Ain't I a Woman?	mt (3%)

final

25%

final exam to be scheduled by SHSU