POL S 305: American Political Thought
MWF 12-12:50
Spring 2013

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Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 1-2pm and by Appointment
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Course Description
This course considers foundational debates in American political thought. We study arguments for American independence and the philosophical justifications for revolution, the ratification debate over the Constitution, and the contested nature of many of the rights and liberties we have come to associate with American government.

Along with studying the Constitution, the Federalist Papers and Anti-Federalist, Locke, Mill, and Tocqueville, we will discuss different ideas of liberty, equality, and representation, paying special attention to their interaction with religion, race, and gender. The foundational understanding of natural rights, consent, and legitimate government authority that Locke provides in The Second Treatise will underpin many of the arguments we read throughout the course, from the early colonists to Madison, Jefferson, Lincoln, and the Supreme Court. We will trace how these ideas have evolved, as well as note the differences between earlier ideas and our own.

One of the key connections in this course is between reason, rights, and consent. Consider the following quote by Paul Rahe, “To vindicate human dignity, one must demonstrate man’s capacity for self-government” (Republics, Vol. 3); this was the proposition set forth by the colonial and founding generations. The analytical distinction between freedom and slavery turns on the role of reason. We will study slavery as an analytical as well as a socio-political status. One need not have been in chains to be a “slave” if the requisite institutions necessary for self-government and the realization of free thought and judgment are absent. Later in the course this argument will be used to combat legal slavery (of Africans) and political and social slavery (of women).

Course Objectives:
You will learn political and philosophical arguments that underpin American constitutional government and supporting principles of American Political Thought; including federalism, separation of powers, property rights, and equal representation. You will master each through a series of units, which “stack” in that each unit builds on knowledge already acquired in the previous unit. After the completion of each unit you will be able to define and analyze each main concept and connect it to the historical context and political and philosophical arguments relevant to developing American political culture and institutions. This means you will be able to discuss political debates and frameworks of thought discussed in class as well as write analytical essays that present a thesis argument, comparative analysis, and specific support for your argument by integrating different authors’ arguments and practical examples presented in lecture and through course readings.
Course Requirements

1. Class Attendance and Participation. You are required to attend class and come prepared with readings in hand. This course moves quickly and we will be covering multiple readings in one day. Excessive absences (more than 8 total for the semester) will result in a grade deduction.

2. Quizzes (30%). Quizzes will cover material presented in lecture and in readings. They are “pop” quizzes and will be graded on a point scale, which is posted on Blackboard. Each quiz is worth 5 points and there are 10 quizzes in all. Check the quiz scale to see your corresponding percent once you tally your point total.

3. Short Essays (30%). There are three essay assignments. Each essay should be 2 single-spaced pages, 12pt Times. See Blackboard Assignments for Essay Prompts and Due Dates. Keep your essays. You will staple them together and turn them back in on the last day of class.

4. Final Exam (40%). The Final Exam is comprehensive. It is scheduled during Final Exam week. Check the schedule here: http://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/Registrar/finalExams/13_spring.html

5. General Guidelines:
   a. Only excused absences or extenuating circumstances (including documented illness, hospitalization, or family emergency) will be considered grounds for a make-up of a missed assignment. All make-up assignments must be completed prior to the last day of class.

   b. No recording of lecture unless you have prior, written permission from me. There are no laptops or other electronic devices allowed during exams.

   c. Syllabus dates are subject to change (i.e. if we need an extra day for a given author we will take it and shift further readings and exam dates).

   d. All course assignments and requirements must be completed to receive credit for the course. Any missing assignment will result in an F for the course.

Required Books For Purchase:


Weekly Reading Schedule (Starred Items in the Reader ( *))

Unit 1: A Theory of Rights and Revolution

Friday, January 18: Introduction—Natural Rights and the American Polity


Wednesday, January 23: John Locke, Second Treatise, Chapters 1-5.

Friday, January 25: Locke, Chapters 7-9 and 19.

Monday, January 28th: “Britannus Americanus”* and “A Pennsylvanian.”*

Wednesday, January 30th: Review Lecture.

Unit 2: The American Founding, the Constitution, and Federalism


Monday, February 4: Continue Paine, Common Sense and Declaration of Independence (1776).*

Wednesday, February 6: Federalist 1 and 10.

Friday, February 8: Federalist 23, 39, 48, 51.

Monday, February 11: Selection from The Anti-Federalist, “Address of...Pennsylvania” (pp. 201-208)* and Essay of Brutus II.*

Wednesday: Review Lecture

Unit 3: Equal Representation?

Friday, February 15: Federalist 35 and 57, Selection from The Anti-Federalist, Melancton Smith (pp.336-337,340-344).*

Monday, February 18: Pitkin, “The Mandate-Independence Controversy.”*


Friday, February 22: Review Lecture
Unit 4: Unpacking the Philosophy of the First Amendment

Liberty and the Marketplace of Ideas


Wednesday, February 27: Mill, On Liberty, Chapters 4-5.


Monday, March 4: “Climate of Hate” Article.

Wednesday, March 6: Review Lecture

A City Upon a Hill: Religious Freedom

Friday, March 8: Locke, John, A Letter Concerning Toleration and James Madison’s, “Memorial and Remonstrance,” (June 20, 1785).

Monday, March 11: Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration continued.


Friday, March 15: Chronicle Articles, “An Officer and a Professor” and “College Requirements.”


Unit 5: Race in the American Consciousness

Wednesday, March 20: “Slave Petition…Massachusetts” (May 24, 1774).


Monday, March 25: Lincoln’s Cooper Union Address (1860) and Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 483 (1896).*

Wednesday, March 27: Plessy Continued.
Friday, March 29: Speech by Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?” (1851)*,

**Spring Break: April 1-5.**

**Unit 6: Gender Difference and Equality**


Wednesday, April 10: Susan B. Anthony, “Constitutional Argument” (1872)*

Friday, April 12: Okin, Susan Moller, Selection from Justice, Gender, and the Family* and Article “Judge Orders No More Children.”

Monday, April 15: Dothard v. Rawlinson, 433 U.S. 321 (1977)*


Friday, April 19: Review Lecture

**Unit 7: A Democratic Revolution? Contested Meanings and the American People**

Monday, April 22: Tocqueville, Editor’s Introduction

Wednesday, April 24: Smith, Rogers. “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America” APSR 87:3 (September 1993).*

Friday, April 26: Smith.

Monday, April 29: Final Exam Review.

Wednesday, May 1: Final Exam Review.

Friday, May 3: Final Exam Review.

Monday, May 6: Last Day of Class, Closing Lecture.