In “American Political Thought” we shall attempt to understand the nature of the American regime and her most important principles. We will explore the American Constitution and the philosophical and political ideas that animated its creation and subsequent development. Since we lack the time for a comprehensive survey of American political thinkers, we shall examine select statesmen and critical historical periods—specifically, the Founding era, Lincoln and the slavery crisis, and the Progressives. We shall also reflect on how the American regime relates to the larger tradition of Western political thought.

Despite being a relatively large class, “American Political Thought” often will be conducted as a seminar with frequent class discussion. You should come to every class prepared to participate in and contribute to an engaging conversation. The course is designed to help you: think more clearly and deeply about the purpose and limits of political authority, participate more thoughtfully and effectively in the democratic political process, better understand competing visions of American political ideals, and more thoroughly develop your own political ideals while also exploring ideals and viewpoints that are different from your own. Specifically, the course is designed to enable you to:

• Reflect on the meaning of “equality” in the Declaration of Independence
• Explore how the Founders designed the Constitution to promote ordered liberty
• Apprehend Lincoln’s statesmanship
• Understand, analyze, and evaluate the Progressives’ political philosophy
• Understand, analyze, and evaluate America’s founding political ideals and subsequent criticisms and alterations to those ideals
• Engage your classmates in civil conversation about contentious legal and political issues
• Present your ideas orally
Texts to be Purchased Immediately
Class Readers – Available at the DCL Campus Print Shop

Recommended Text

Course Requirements
American Political Thought is a participatory lecture class. Some classes will consist primarily in lecture, but I anticipate much class time to be devoted to discussion. Lectures and discussion will be based on the assigned readings. When I do lecture, I encourage participation in the form of questions and comments. In order to participate effectively, you must read, take notes, and think about all assigned readings before class. I cannot over emphasize this point. You will learn more, enjoy class more, and be able to participate more if you read the assigned materials before class. Completing reading assignments before class is the key to success in this class. As a good and informed citizen, you should also read a daily newspaper. We will often begin class with a short discussion of current events, especially those that pertain to subjects discussed in class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-class/short writing assignments 100 points</td>
<td>A 1000-930 C 779-730</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation 100 points</td>
<td>A- 929-900 C- 729-700</td>
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<td>Midterms 500 points</td>
<td>B+ 899-880 D+ 699-680</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final 300 points</td>
<td>B 879-830 D 679-630</td>
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<td>B- 829-800 D- 629-600</td>
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<td>C+ 799-780 F 599-000</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Explanatory Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Truly Exceptional</td>
<td><em>All</em> work meets or exceeds the highest expectations for the course</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Superior work in <em>all</em> areas of the course</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Superior work in <em>most</em> areas of the course</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Solid work across the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>More than Acceptable</td>
<td>More than acceptable, but falls short of solid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Meets <em>all</em> the basic requirements and standards for the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Meets <em>most</em> of the basic requirements and standards in several areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Work falls short of meeting basic standards in several areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Minimally Passing</td>
<td>Work just over the threshold of acceptability</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Failing</td>
<td>Unacceptable performance</td>
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No Extra Credit will be given. No exceptions.

No Incomplete Grades will be granted without remarkable circumstances.

Class Attendance is expected. No hats in class, unless for religious reasons.

Class Participation will be based both on the quality and quantity of your class participation. Good questions count for class participation. If you don’t understand something, find something confusing, want more clarification on a point, or just want to talk about something more in class, speak up and voice your concern.

Classroom Decorum: Our class will cover contentious subjects that can evoke passionate feelings. I expect all in-class comments to be expressed in a civil manner. You are certainly allowed and encouraged to disagree with the professor and your classmates, but you are expected to disagree in an agreeable manner.

Examinations: Success on examinations will require the ability to understand, compare and contrast, criticize, and analyze the concepts and details of the assigned reading, as well as the concepts and details of the class lectures and discussions. Knowledge of the assigned reading is necessary, but not sufficient for success. Class lectures and discussions will often address issues beyond the scope of the assigned reading for which students are responsible. Missed exams will be calculated as a zero. Make-up exams will not be given without prior permission of the instructor.

Laptop Computers, Tablets, Phones, and Recording Devices are not to be used in the classroom without prior permission of professor.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. I shall follow and enforce strictly the university’s policies regarding academic integrity.

Honor Code: Class members are expected to understand the principles and procedures set forth in the University of Notre Dame Academic Code of Honor (http://www.nd.edu/~hnrcode/) and abide by its pledge: “As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.”

Students with Disabilities will be accommodated as extensively as possible. Please talk directly with the instructor regarding any necessary arrangements.

Please Note. If you cannot make class for an important medical or family reason, please let me know ahead of time. Likewise, if you are having difficulties with an assignment, please talk to me before the assignment is due.
Tentative Schedule/Reading Assignments
This schedule will change. Final assignments will be given in class.
* = course reader

Introduction (Aug. 21)

I. THE AMERICAN FOUNDING
“It has been the will of Heaven that we should be thrown into existence at a period when the greatest philosophers and lawmakers of antiquity would have wished to live. A period when a coincidence of circumstances without example, has afforded to thirteen Colonies', at once, an opportunity of beginning government anew from the foundation, and building as they choose. How few of the human race have ever had any opportunity of choosing a system of government for themselves and their children! How few have ever had any thing more of choice in government than in climate! These colonies have now their election; and it is much wished that I may not prove to be like a prize in the hands of a man who has no heart to improve it.”
- John Adams
- January 1776

The Declaration of Independence & Principles of the American Revolution (Aug. 23)
The Declaration of Independence, in The Portable Thomas Jefferson (PTJ), pp. 235-241*
Thomas Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, PTJ, pp. 584-85*
John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, §4, 6-15, 19-21, 25-34*
James Madison, “Property”*
Edmund Morgan, The Birth of the Republic, pp. 1-112 (highly recommended)

The Articles of Confederation & the “Critical Period” (Aug. 28)
Edmund Morgan, The Birth of the Republic, pp. 100-158
The Articles of Confederation, in Morgan, pp. 163-70
George Washington, Letter to James Warren, 7 October 1785*
George Washington, Letter to John Jay, 1 August 1786*
Madison, “Vices of the Political System of the United States”*
The Constitution of the United States of America (in The Federalist Papers)
The Bill of Rights (including amendments not ratified) and Additional Amendments to the Constitution*

The Constitution (Aug. 30 – Sept. 18)
“But whatever may be the judgment pronounced on the competency of the architects of the Constitution, or whatever may be the destiny, of the edifice prepared by them, I feel it a duty to express my profound & solemn conviction, derived from my intimate opportunity of observing & appreciating the views of the Convention, collectively & individually, that there never was an assembly of men, charged with a great & arduous trust, who were more pure in their motives, or more exclusively or anxiously devoted to the object committed to them, than were the members of the Federal Convention of 1787, to the object of devising and proposing a constitutional system which would best supply the defects of that which it was to replace, and best secure the permanent liberty and happiness of their country.”
- James Madison
- Introduction to The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787
“The Address and Reasons of Dissent on the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to Their Constituents,” 18 December 1787*
Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws*
- Book III, Chapters 1-3, On the Principle of Democracy
- Book V, Chapters 1-7, On Laws and Elements Related to Democracy (recommended)
- Book VIII, Chapters 1-4, 15-20, On the Corruption of the Principles of the Three Government

Letter of Agrippa, #IV*
The Federalist Papers, #s: 1, 9, 10, 14, 23, 25
The Federalist Papers, #s: 37, 40
The Federalist Papers, #s: 47-49, 51
The Federalist Papers, #s: 57, 62, 63
The Federalist Papers, #s: 70-72
The Federalist Papers, # 78
Essays of Brutus: #s 11, 12, 15*

September 13, 2012  Charles Kesler Lecture. Attendance expected
September 18, 2012  Barry Cushman, Constitution Day Lecture. Attendance encouraged
September 21, 2012  Faculty Panel on the HHS Mandate/Religious Liberty controversy. Attendance encouraged

On The Necessity of a Bill of Rights (Sept. 20)
George Mason’s proposal of a bill of rights at the constitutional convention, 12 September 1787*
James Wilson in the Pennsylvania Convention, 28 November 1787*
The Federalist Papers, #84
Jefferson-Madison correspondence on a bill of rights
- Jefferson to Madison, 20 December 1787, PTJ, pp. 428-33*
- Madison to Jefferson, 17 October 1788*
- Jefferson to Madison, 15 March 1789, PTJ, pp. 438-40*

The Relationship of the Constitution to the Declaration (Sept. 25)

September 27 – First Midterm Examination

Religion and the Founding (Oct. 2 & 4)
Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, Declaration of Rights, Arts. II-III*
Barnes v. Falmouth (1810) – MA Supreme Court*
George Washington
- “Farewell Address”* (excerpt)
- Letter to the Quakers, September 1789
- Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, August 1790
Thomas Jefferson
- “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” PTJ, pp. 251-53*
- “Religion” from Notes on the State of Virginia, PTJ, 208-13*
- “Manners” from Notes on the State of Virginia, PTJ, 214-15*
- Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, 1 January 1802, PTJ, 303-04*

James Madison
- “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments,” 20 June 1785*
- Letter to Edward Livingston, 10 July 1822*

Tocqueville, Democracy in America, I.II.9, “Principles Causes that Tend to Maintain the Democratic Republic in the United States,” p. 129-142*
- “Religion Considered as a Political Institution and How it Powerfully Contributes to the Maintenance of a Democratic Republic Among the Americans,” p. 129-31
- “Indirect Influence of Religious Beliefs upon Political Society in the United States,” p. 131-36
- “The Principal Causes That Make Religion Powerful in America,” p. 136-142

II. A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM: LINCOLN & THE CIVIL WAR

Perpetuation? (Oct. 9 & 11)
Lincoln, “Temperance Address,” 22 February 1842

The Coming Crisis (Oct. 23-30)
John C. Calhoun, Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions, 6 February 1837*
William Harper, “Slavery in the Light of Social Ethics,” 1860*
A Reader’s Companion to the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*
Stephen Douglas, Speech at Chicago, 9 July 1858, in Johannsen (ed.), The Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 22-36*
Abraham Lincoln, Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise, Peoria, Illinois, 16 October 1854*
Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857)*
Abraham Lincoln, Speech on the Dred Scott Decision, June 1857*
Lincoln, House Divided Speech, 16 June 1858, ALGS, 24-32

Equality, Slavery and the Founding (Nov. 1)
Thurgood Marshall, “Reflections on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution,” 1987*
Thomas Jefferson:
- Notes on Virginia, PTJ, 127-28, 184-93, 214-15*
- Letter to Benjamin Banneker, PTJ, 454-55*
- Letter to Henri Gregorie, PTJ, 517*
- Letter to Edward Coles, PTJ, 544-47*
- Letter to John Holmes, PTJ, 567-69*
John Adams:
- Letter to Evans, 8 June 1819*
- Letter to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley, 24 January 1801*
George Washington, Letter to Robert Morris, 12 April 1786*
James Madison
- Memorandum on an African Colony for Freed Slaves, ca. 20 Oct. 1789*
- Letter to Robert J. Evans, 15 June 1819*
- Letter to Robert Walsh, 27 November 1819*
- The Federalist Papers, #54

Alexander Hamilton, Letter to John Jay, 14 March 1779*
James Wilson, Pennsylvania Ratifying Convention, 3-4 Dec. 1787*

John Jay to the President of the [English] Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, June 1788*

Nov. 2 Akhil Amar lecture, “The Unwritten Constitution.” Attendance encouraged

Lincoln and the Civil War (Nov. 6 & 8)
“Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina From the Federal Union,” 24 December 1860*
Lincoln, First Inaugural, 4 March 1861, ALGS, 55-61
Stevens, “Cornerstone Speech,” 21 March 1861*
Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session, 4 July 1861, ALGS, 62-75
Lincoln, Final Emancipation Proclamation, 1 January 1863, ALGS, 98-100
Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 19 November 1863, ALGS, 103-04
Lincoln, Second Inaugural, 4 March 1865, ALGS, 106-09

Nov. 9 John Tomasi lecture, “Free Market Fairness.” Attendance encouraged

Frederick Douglass (Nov. 13)
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 3-228 (highly recommended)
“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”
“Free Blacks Must Learn Trades,” 349-352
“Three Kinds of Abolitionists,” 353-59
“What Should Be Done With Emancipated Slaves,” 373-78
“The Progress of Blacks Twenty Years after Emancipation,” 379-88
“The Future of Blacks in the United States,”
“Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln,” 14 April 1876,” 389-91*

Second Midterm Examination – November 20, 2012

III. THE PROGRESSIVES’ CRITIQUE OF THE FOUNDING & THE NEW DEAL (Nov. 15-29)
“We of the present generation are in the first season of free, outspoken, unrestrained constitutional criticism. We are the first Americans to hear our own countrymen ask whether the Constitution is still adapted to serve the purposes for which it was intended . . . .”
- Woodrow Wilson
- Congressional Government, 1885

Woodrow Wilson
- “Leaders of Men”*
- The New Freedom (excerpts)*

Franklin D. Roosevelt
- The Commonwealth Club Address, 23 September 1932*
- Second Acceptance Address, 26 June 1936*
- ‘Four Freedoms’ Speech, Eighth Annual Message to Congress, 6 January 1941*
- 1944 State of Union Address, 11 January 1944*

Home Building and Loan Association v. Blaisdell (1934)*
Herbert Hoover, “The Consequences of the Proposed New Deal,” 31 October 1932*

IV. REFLECTIONS ON DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA
“The nations of our day cannot cause conditions within themselves to not be equal. But it depends upon them whether equality leads them to servitude or to liberty, to enlightenment or to barbarism, to prosperity or to wretchedness.”

- Tocqueville
- Democracy in America

The Modern Left (Dec. 4)
Lyndon Baines Johnson, The “Great Society” Speech, 22 May 1964*
Lyndon Baines Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” 4 June 1965*
Mario Cuomo, Keynote Address at the 1984 Democratic Convention, 16 July 1984*
Barack Obama, “Our Constitution,” in The Audacity of Hope (Three Rivers Press, 2006), 71-100 (esp. 84-98)*

The New Right (Dec. 6)
Barry Goldwater, Acceptance Speech, 17 July 1964
Clarence Thomas, Speech to the National Bar Association, 28 July 1998
Edwin Meese III, “Interpreting the Constitution” (1985)*

Tocqueville, Democracy in America
II.I.1 “The Philosopheric Method of the Americans” 170-74
II.I.2 “The Principal Source of Beliefs among Democratic Peoples” 175-78
II.I.10 “Why the Americans Are More Devoted to the Practice of the Sciences Than to Their Theory” 189-195
II.II.1 “Why Democratic Peoples Show a More Ardent and More Lasting Love for Equality Than for Liberty” 201-04
II.II.2 “Individualism in Democratic Countries” 204-206
II.II.4 “How the Americans Combat Individualism by Free Institutions” 206-10
II.II.5 “The Use That the Americans Make of the Association in Civil Life” 210-214
II.II.7 “Relationships Between Civil and Political Associations” 215-219
II.II.8 “How Americans Combat Individualism by the Doctrine of Interest Rightly Understood” 219-22
II.II.9 “How the Americans Apply the Doctrine of Interest Rightly Understood in Matters of Religion” 222-24
II.II.10 “The Taste for Material Well-Being in America” 224-26
II.II.11 “The Particular Effects That the Love of Material Pleasures Produces in Democratic Times” 226-228
II.IV.1 “Equality Naturally Gives Men the Taste for Free Institutions” 297-98
II.IV.2 “That the Ideas of Democratic Peoples Regarding Government Are Naturally Favorable to the Concentrations of Powers” 298-301
II.IV.3 “That the Sentiments of Democratic Peoples Accord With Their Ideas in Leading Them to Concentrate Power” 301-04
II.IV.6 “What Kinds of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear” 304-09
II.IV.7 “Continuation of the Preceding Chapters” 309-16
II.IV.8 “General View of the Subject” 316-319

Secondary Readings of Interest

The Declaration of Independence & Principles of the American Revolution
Michael P. Zuckert, The Natural Rights Republic (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996)

Equality, Slavery, and the Founding
Thomas G. West, Vindicating the Founders (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 1-36
Lance Banning, “Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: Case Closed?” Claremont Review of Books (Summer 2001)

The Articles of Confederation & the “Critical Period”

The Constitution
Herbert Storing, What the Anti-Federalists Were For: The Political Thought of the Opponents of the Constitution (University of Chicago Press, 1981)


Harvey C. Mansfield, “*The Case for the Strong Executive*,” *Claremont Review of Books* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2007)


Akhil Reed Amar, *The Bill of Rights* (Yale University Press, 1998)

**On The Necessity of a Bill of Rights**


**Religion and the Founding**


Donald Drakeman, *Church, State, and Original Intent* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

**Lincoln and the Civil War**


Harry V. Jaffa, “*The Speech That Changed the World*”


**The Progressives’ Critique of the Founding & The New Deal**

