Themes in American Political Thought

Description

Where do distinctly “American” values and beliefs come from and why are we so fiercely attached to them—even in the face of information that disputes them? Are there viable alternatives to the classic ways in which Americans tend to approach our social, economic, and political challenges? This course offers an exploration of these questions through the historical canon of American political thought, with an eye to two overarching themes: 1) the competing strains of Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian philosophy running through American political thought; and 2) political thought and critique from Native/indigenous peoples’ perspectives. Starting before the Founding and continuing to political thinkers of the present day, this seminar-style course will examine the broad strains of liberalism, radicalism, and conservatism—and the unique ways they intersect and collide—in American political speech and theory. Students will engage actively in class discussions, participate in roundtable discussions, take two exams, host a discussion of a set of readings for week 10, and write and participate in weekly Discussion Board conversations. You will be expected to come to class prepared and having done the reading. The course will help build out your knowledge in political theory and American politics, and can count for either subfield in the major.

Objectives

In this course, students will have the opportunity to:

- gain a broad introduction to both mainstream and dissenting traditions of American political thought, and some exposure to Native peoples’ perspectives on political community and settler colonialism;
- appreciate the competing strains of classical liberal, progressive, and conservative philosophy;
- understand the relationship between American state structures and popular movements as reflected by different political thinkers;
- learn about the influences of religion, social class, race, and gender on American political philosophy;
- improve critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and argumentation skills; and
- engage on written and verbal levels with complex philosophical texts.

Reading Material:


2. Non-textbook readings will be available on our course Canvas container or (rarely) by handout, as indicated in the course schedule.
Grading
Students’ performance is based on a combination of preparation, in-class and online discussion participation, two take-home exam that include a variety of types of questions (including short answer and essay), and one group teach-in of course materials.

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<tr>
<td>1. Attendance</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Preparedness &amp; in-class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>3. Quality of online engagement</td>
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<td>4. Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>5. Group Teach-In</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>6. Final Exam</td>
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While you will see points allocated on Canvas for each category, these are really place-markers for a formula I assemble when all scores are complete. The final grading formula will be calculated accordingly (with any extra credit opportunities being allocated to category #2):

\[
\text{Final Percentage} = \text{Sum (}} #1 \cdot 1 + #2 \cdot 1.15 + #3 \cdot 2 + #4 \cdot 2 + #5 \cdot 1.15 + #6 \cdot 20\]

Grade Percentages:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100 = A</td>
<td>78-79 = C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93 = A-</td>
<td>74-77 = C</td>
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<tr>
<td>88-89 = B+</td>
<td>70-73 = C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-87 = B</td>
<td>68-69 = D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83 = B-</td>
<td>64-67 = D</td>
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Assignment Guidelines

Reading
According to the 3-to-1 rule, which is part of DU’s academic expectations, students should expect to prepare 3 hours per each credit hour, per week (which equals up to 12 hours for a 4-credit course). Consistent with this, you can expect about 60 pages of weekly reading for this class. The reading varies from accessible to very difficult. Given this load, it is critical that you apportion the reading across the week. (60 pages equals only 12 pages per night, if you read 5 days a week.) I have set up Discussion Board posts in Canvas as a way to keep accountable to this.

Discussion Board Postings
I have found Canvas’s Discussion Board a helpful way to “check in” with what students are and aren’t understanding, and plan my agendas accordingly. You will be broken into 2 groups and post on your allocated day. Unless otherwise indicated, please post a thoughtful paragraph of 200 words or less about the reading by 10 a.m. on your allocated day. Most days you will have
several readings by different authors assigned. You may focus your postings on individual readings or on themes or problems raised by the readings. The point is for you to demonstrate some engagement with the readings, ask genuine questions about them, and, where possible, contribute to productive discussions in class.

**Exams**
There will be two “take-home” exams in this course, each essentially covering the reading from each half of the class. **Please allocate time in your calendar during those weekends now so you are not caught off-guard.** I will use Canvas to administer these. They are a combination of matching, short answer, short essay (1-paragraph), and longer essay (3-5 paragraphs). The final exam contains at least one cumulative question. Although you may use your textbook and notes, the exams require critical thinking and are harder than you might expect, so it will always be helpful to have good notes on the reading before you begin.

**Long Essays:** Please know that I expect your essays to be thoughtful, clear, reasoned essays in response to the assignments. If you already know your writing skills need improvement, please go to the writing center and get some help. Though I’d love to, I won’t have time to teach writing in this class other than through my feedback to your papers. You are welcome to talk to me about a paper you are planning in my office hours, in which case it is good to bring an outline and/or a draft to help you talk about your ideas. I don’t, however, read rough drafts.

**Discussion Leader Groups**
In groups of three, students will plan and facilitate the class discussion of a selection from the course reading once per quarter. In some cases, this may involve presenting a little additional background on an author or his/her historical context. Most importantly, leading discussion entails completing the reading beforehand and as a group coming up with a set of questions that can help us enhance our understanding of the reading or take our inquiry into deeper intellectual territory. You will have 30-40 minutes to lead discussion.

**Late and missing assignments:** Work handed in late will lose 1/2 grade per day. Work not handed in at all will receive a minus grade, which then will be averaged in with your other grades. If you face a legitimate emergency, contact me beforehand and perhaps an extension can be arranged.
Class Policies

Engaged reading is the heart of this class.

Your success, and the success of the class, depends on your active participation in discussions about the reading. Students are required to complete the assigned readings at the beginning of each topic or week. Canvas posting assignments will help you be prepared, but I highly recommend you take notes if they help your comprehension. They will certainly help you prepare for exams.

Respect the academic honor code.

I will search for and report any plagiarism—that is, writing that I suspect is not yours or that you have not cited as belonging to someone else. If I suspect or catch plagiarism I reserve the right to ask you to rewrite a paper, to fail you on the assignment, and/or in the class. You can find DU’s academic honor code at http://www.du.edu/studentlife/ccs/honorcode.html.

Attendance factors into your grade.

I will take attendance daily. Technically, you can miss 2 classes without an excuse—though making up the assignment or otherwise catching up is your responsibility. If you come to class less than 90% of the time, your grade will be impacted, not only in its own grading category, but also because it will affect in-class participation and group work.

I will post paper assignments on Canvas. If you have to be absent, it is your responsibility to find out what the assignment was and to keep up with the material. Please let me know about any emergencies or DU approved absences (e.g., for athletic obligations) as early as possible.

Under most circumstances, you will be penalized for late work.

If a legitimate, documented emergency prevents you from turning in an assignment, I need to know the relevant details as soon as possible and we can probably work out an arrangement. Otherwise, late individual work will be marked down a third of a grade for each day that it is late.

I will only allow incompletes or late exams under documented emergencies.

Group work matters.

We may do some discussion work, from time to time, in groups. Please don’t take this course if you don’t think you are able to carry your weight in a cooperative learning environment. “Free riders” (people letting others do the work) will be exposed and publicly flogged.

Classroom behavior is important.

I expect you to come to class well prepared to engage in the multi-directional learning/teaching process. Feel free to question and, at times, disagree with your peers, the reading, or the instructor regarding thoughts and feelings on particular issues. If you disagree with material presented, do so respectfully and with an aim to facilitating, rather than impeding, the learning process for others. If you are disrespectful, I reserve the right to dismiss you from class.
Classroom etiquette

- If you are disruptive in class, I reserve the right to dismiss you immediately. (Ringing cell phones, incidentally, are disruptive; please turn them off.)
- The class may raise provocative and/or emotional issues for some of us; please respect that we come from different perspectives and always avoid personal attacks when making a point.
- It is important that we respect a safe climate for debate and discussion. That also means taking the time to listen carefully to one another.
- Whenever possible, use evidence from the course material to make an argument or ask a question. This will enhance your credibility, and factor into your final grade.
- Try not to interrupt each other during discussion. In small groups, you may want to select a discussion facilitator to make sure that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak.
- If you tend to dominate discussion and have a lot to say, do hold back sometimes so that other people have a chance to jump in. Likewise, if you tend to be quiet, push yourself to engage more actively than you are used to doing. It’s all good for intellectual growth.

Students with Disabilities

I encourage students with disabilities, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury and attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, or other psychiatric disabilities, to see me within the first two weeks of class so that necessary accommodations can be made to facilitate the learning experience. See me either after class or during my office hours. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit the relevant letter from Disability Services Program early in the semester so that your needs may be addressed. For more information about disability services at DU, go to http://www.du.edu/studentlife/disability/index.html.
Course Schedule
The course schedule is subject to change – with notice – during the course of the semester, in which case I will post an updated schedule to the course website on Canvas. YOU are responsible for using the most updated schedule. Also please be sure to have an active DU email account that you check regularly for announcements, updates, etc. from me and let me know immediately if you have technical trouble with any of the readings on Canvas.

Part 1: From Founding to Constitution
* Note: Readings listed under each date are required for discussion on that date.

Week 1  What is Unique about American Political Thought?
(M): March 23
Course introduction and overview.

(W): March 25
- Excerpts by Winthrop, Williams (1644 not 1652), and Wise
- (Canvas) Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy

Group 1 online posts due by 10 a.m.: 

Week 2  The Revolutionary Experiment and Native Influences
(M) March 30:
From American Political Thought (APT):
- Ben Franklin: All but excerpts from Great Law of Peace (which we read last week)
- (Canvas) Franklin’s “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America”
- From Indian Roots: Essays by Jacob Thomas (p. 19), John Mohawk (30), and Daniel Usner (42)
- Take a look at some of the treaties under “Indian-Related Docs Supplement.” Extra credit for a 2-page write up on the relevance of these treaties to themes in the class. Due by Friday via upload.

Group 2 online posts due by 10 a.m.

(W) April 1
Early democratic theory (and undemocratic practice).
- From Indian Roots: Essay by Venables (51)
- Canvas: George Washington to James Duane, 1763

Group 3 online posts due by 10 a.m.
Discussion Leaders (DL) lead discussion of Venables and Washington.
Week 3 Constitutional Debates  
(M): April 6:  
For the new Constitution.  
☐ APT, pp. 67-96 (through Federalist 10). (You can skim through the Constitution, but try to refresh your memory)  
☐ From Indian Roots: Essay by Johansen (56)  
Group 1 online posts due by 10 a.m.  
DL Group: Johansen  

(W) April 8  
Debates and dissents.  
☐ APT, pp. 96-108 (through #51); and 124-137 (through Henry Lee’s letters).  
Group 2 online posts due by 10 a.m.  
DL Group: Dissent of the Pennsylvania Minority, and Letters from the Federal Farmer  

Week 4 Business Interests, Nation Building, and Early Republicanism  
(M): April 13:  
Hamiltonianism  
☐ APT, pp. 109-123 (Hamilton’s Federalist Papers).  
☐ APT, pp. 137-149 (Hamilton’s program)  
Group 3 online posts due by 10 a.m.  
DL Group: Any aspect of the Hamilton or Dickinson readings.  

(W) April 15  
Jeffersonianism  
☐ From Indian Roots: Essays by Schaaf (65) and Locklear (69)  
☐ (Bb) “Notes on Virginia,” “Reply to the Danbury Baptist Association,” and Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom”  
☐ APT, pp. 150-174.  
Group 1 online posts due by 10 a.m.  
“Take home” midterm (complete via Canvas), beginning at 6 p.m. Due April 19, by noon.  

Part 2: 19th Century Political Thought  
Week 5 Expanding Power and Dispossession  
(S): April 19: Midterm due by noon.  

(M): April 20 Needless to say…you are responsible for today’s readings despite last night’s midterm.  
☐ APT, pp. 175-192 (Washington’s farewell, and Introduction to Part II)  
☐ Canvas: Jefferson to Harrison, Feb 27, 1803  
No Canvas post due.
(W) April 22

*The Long Hand of John Marshall*
- APT, pp. 193-203 (Marshall decisions)
- (Canvas) *Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. McIntosh*
Possible guest speaker Peter Hanson.

**Group 2 online posts due by 10 a.m.**

**Week 6  Race, Gender, and the Civil War**  
**<M>: April 27**

*Thinking about race, class, and Manifest Destiny in the 19th C.*
- APT, pp. 203-231.
- From *Indian Roots*: Essay by Shenandoah (21)
- TBA: Selections from the DU John Evans report

**Group 3 online posts due by 10 a.m.**

**DL group: Cazneau (#20) and Shenandoah**

(W): April 29

*Slavery and early women’s rights.*
- APT, Readings by Stanton, Douglass (231-42); Debates about slavery amendments (294-301); Fitzhugh (255-62); and Lincoln’s First and Second Inaugural addresses (269-74; 277)

**Group 1 online posts due by 10 a.m.**

**DL group: Fitzhugh and pp. 294-301 (Civil War debates and Anthony)**

**Week 7  Pride, Discontents and Visions**  
**<M>: May 4**

*American class critiques*
- APT 301-325 (Sumner & Bellamy)

**Group 2 online posts due by 10 a.m.**

(W) May 6

*More social critiques, and rise of 20th C state.*
- APT, pp. 327-339 (Carnegie & Populism); 346-51 (Lloyd); 359-364 (Black Elk).

**Group 3 online posts due by 10 a.m.**

**DL group: Black Elk (include history and/or additional reading from Black Elk Speaks)**
Part 3: 20th Century Political Thought and Beyond

Week 8  Reconstruction and Industrialization
(M): May 11

Groundbreaking Radicals
☐ APT, pp. 365-73 (Section Intro); 374-86 (DuBois); and 386-99).
Group 1 online posts due by 10 a.m.
DL Group: Goldman

(W) May 13

New Rights Discourses and The Progressive Era.
☐ APT, pp. 399-431. (Debs, Croly, Progressivism)
Group 2 online posts due by 10 a.m.

Final Section: Student Teach-Ins

Week 9  20th Century Rights-Based Discourses
(M): May 18

The Meaning of Democracy and Community.
☐ APT, pp. 439-70 (Wilson, Dewey, FDR, Hughes)
Group 3 online posts due by 10 a.m.

(W) May 20

The Meaning of Democracy and Community.
☐ APT, pp. 471-509 (MLK, SDS, Alianza Federal)
DL Group: SDS

Week 10  New Polarizations, New Problems
(M): May 26

Neoconservatism.
☐ APT, pp. 537-50 (Reagan); 569-579 (Wolfowitz, Buchanan); 590 (Bush); 625-34 (Bacevich)

DL Group: Your choice among (or across) the set above

(W) May 28

The Extended Community?
☐ APT, pp. 515-526 (Leopold); 579-82 (LaDuke)
Final Exam assigned.

(W) June 3  Final Exam Due via Canvas.