

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT
CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
PSC 342
SUMMER 2020

Dr. Jeneen Hobby
Email: j.hobby@csuohio.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will cover the tradition in political theory known as American Political Thought. This tradition is different from others in that political theory in America is rooted in action and experience, as opposed to philosophers speculating on politics who are removed from it. From presidents to preachers, capitalists to suffragettes, political activists to environmentalists, the authors we will read here “get their hands dirty” in the workings of political life, and then are able to step back and reflect on the ideals, promises, achievements, shortcomings, and failures of life in America. In the process, we can begin to articulate what it is about this country that makes it unique. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French aristocrat writing about American society in the 1830s, held that Americans were not an intellectual people. They had a healthy regard for common sense and had created a civil society where differences could be tolerated, but they were not engaged in plumbing the deep philosophical and political ideas that Europeans were. De Tocqueville considered this trait—of Americans being a practical people—to be enviable, in many respects. We can ask if that is still the case, or if in the practice of shaping events, Americans do create their own kind of intellectual landscape.

In this course we will examine and discuss original documents from when the country was first founded, writings throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and into the present. For instance, we will have readings that span the ideological gamut, from Benjamin Franklin’s admonition to Americans to be thrifty, efficient, productive, timely, and hardworking—in service of what came to be the dominant capitalist economic system and business culture in America; to early abolitionists, black nationalists, and members of the Black Lives Matter movement, who articulate the history and legacy of slavery, and the long experience of segregation, discrimination, and violence against African Americans; to feminists, ranging from the founding period to present-day MacArthur Fellow and award-winning Nigerian-American novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who warns against the dangers involved in having a culture tell one single story or narrative about itself. It is very likely that in this class all of you will encounter one or more writers and actors who speak to you politically, culturally, and intellectually: hence you will be looking into a mirror. In turn, it is hoped that you will be presented with new voices you have never before heard: hence you will be looking into a black hole. These broad and varied readings therefore give all of you the ability to experience the joy of discovery and enlightenment involved in having your eyes opened. Such experiences have ramifications and effects that go beyond your life as an individual, allowing distinct, complex, and unique strands to be added to the collective fabric of what it means to be American.

In sum, the purpose of this course is for you to understand and engage with important American political theorists. They all grapple with fundamental questions of American politics and society: how should our political system be structured? How should political decisions be made? What should the role of ordinary citizens be in political decision making? What values should our government promote? What is the role of individuals versus the collective? What has been the role of women and minority groups in American politics and ideology? What does our future look like?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This is a text-based course. I want you to learn about important ideas in American political theory, but the ideas are inseparable from the texts which contain them. My colleague, Professor Charles Hersch, has described this phenomenon in the following way: You could read a summary of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," but you would miss the nuances as well as the poetry. Consider this summary of a classic text: "a boy and a girl from feuding families meet and fall in love. They secretly marry. At one point, the girl takes a drug which makes her appear dead. The boy finds her and, thinking she is dead, kills herself. She wakes up and, finding him dead, kills herself. The families end their feud in the wake of this tragic event." Recognize it? Of course: "Romeo and Juliet!" So now that you have the summary, you don't need to read it, right?

Lincoln's speeches, The Federalist Papers, and other readings for this course may not always be as poetic or beautiful as Shakespeare. But to get their full meaning and appreciate their brilliance and beauty, you need to read them. Some of them are difficult but by careful reading, answering study questions, and writing quote analyses, their meaning will become clearer. If you still have questions, I am available to help you by email. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these great readings with you.

I have divided up the syllabus as if it were an in-class course, with assignments Monday through Thursday. I call each one of these units a "class" even though no physical classes will be held. This is to help you pace yourself. It is also relevant in that you may do no more than one study question and quote analysis per "class."

There are no exams for this course, because I believe political theory is best learned by close and thoughtful reading and analysis rather than having to produce verbiage in a one or two hour period. This class contains more assignments than I give when I teach the in-class version. This may seem like a lot of work, but it actually substitutes for the time you would be normally be in class listening to lectures and participating in discussion. These daily and weekly assignments will steep you in the texts and help you understand them in lieu of that classroom experience.

There are four kinds of assignments to facilitate close reading.

- 2 papers (the first 5-7 pages, the second 7-9 pages)
- 20 study question answers (one paragraph; 3-4 per week)
- 15 quote analyses (one paragraph; 2-3 per week)
- 15 quote analysis responses (one paragraph; 2-3 per week)

1. Two Papers.

These are the kind of traditional paper you're used to. They ask you to explain the writers' ideas, compare and contrast them, and offer your own views and analysis. I will give you prompts from which you will choose one and write your essay. Papers need to be turned in via turnitin. This is done on Blackboard. The first paper will be 5-7 pages long. The second paper will be 7-9 pages long. They are not research papers, although secondary sources may be consulted. If secondary sources are consulted, they must be accurately cited according to the APA (American Psychological Association) Manual of Style. That includes material found on the Web.

2. Study question answers. 3-4 per week for a total of 20.

I would like you to answer one study question for 20 of the "classes." Choose whichever question out of each list you find most helpful or interesting. Your answer should not be longer than 5 sentences. I'm looking for a short paragraph. The study questions will alert you to the major themes in the reading. Only one will be graded per "class," but trying to answer others on your own will help you gauge how good your comprehension is. If you can answer all or most of them, you will know that you understand the reading. If you cannot answer most of the questions about a particular reading, contact me by email and we can have a conversation about that reading to make sure you understand it.

Note: some study questions contain a number of questions under one numeral. You do not have to answer all of them but they cover different aspects of a single issue and the more you can cover within the 5 sentence limit, the more complete your answer will be. Please indicate which question for that set of readings you are answering.

3. Quote analyses. 2-3 per week for a total of 15.

A quote analysis (QA) is a one paragraph assignment in which you choose a quotation of no more than three sentences from the reading and write about it. You may choose any quotation from the reading assigned for the class period in which the analysis is due; however, be sure to choose a passage addressing politics and the themes of the course. Find a quote that relates to the main themes of the particular reading at hand rather than a digression, no matter how interesting. That way, doing the QA will help you understand the main point of the reading better. In the first part of the paragraph explain the argument being made in the quotation. In the second part present a reasoned argument of your own supporting, expanding upon, or criticizing the thesis of the quotation. No more than one QA per class period/reading assignment.

NOTE: Your QA should not repeat material or ideas you've submitted as a study question answer.

4. Quote analysis responses (QAR). 2-3 per week for a total of 15.

This involves a one paragraph response to another student's quote analysis. Here you engage with the ideas presented in the student's QA. For your QAR you must comment and connect.

First comment on something the person said, being specific as possible, either agreeing or politely disagreeing, or both. If you agree do not simply say so or paraphrase what the person

said but add something of your own. “I share your criticism of Emerson’s notion of self-reliance, because he doesn’t see the way we are all interconnected.” If you disagree, present a reasoned argument as to why. “I do not agree with your rejection of Lincoln’s view of labor. He’s not condemning any government help to individuals but just saying that...” Second, connect with something the person wrote, either on a personal or more global level. “Your analysis reminds me of an incident that happened in a place where I worked ...” “Madison’s view of factions calls to mind current debates about political polarization ...” Of course, don’t just say that it reminds you, but how what you are reminded of is related to the quote and analysis. (Some of the ideas in this paragraph adapted from “Making Quality Comments following the ‘3C & Q’ Model” by Jenn Stewart-Mitchell.

http://transliteratedlibrarians.weebly.com/uploads/3/7/4/2/37427333/publishing_sharing_and_commenting2.pdf)

You may respond to another student’s QA, or you may respond to another student’s response to the QA. In either case, make sure you are engaged with the idea about the reading contained in the quote. I may also be involved in the conversation, so you may be responding to me. You may respond more than once in the same “conversation,” but you only get credit for one response per conversation.

NOTE: You may not respond to another student’s quote analysis until you have written a quote analysis for that “class.” Though QARs are technically due in a particular week, and you may do them any time (in response to another student’s QA) you have until the following Tuesday night at 11:59PM to do them (allowing you to respond to a student who has done a QA late in the week).

ADDITIONAL NOTE: Your QAR should not be a repeat of your QA. Your QAR should be a response to another student’s QA. If you want to add something and you have written about the same quote, make a point you did not make in your QA.

Our online classroom environment will maintain a climate of tolerance and peace, even though controversial or contentious opinions may be discussed. Such a practice of open communication is vital not only to the value of a university education, but to the intellectual and social well-being of citizens and their societies.

Your grade will be decided as follows:

First Paper	25%
Second Paper	35%
Study question answers	15%
Quote analyses	15%
Quote analysis responses	10%

Grading is explained in more detail in the “Grading Policy” area. Also, before you do anything else, read the policy on plagiarism in the “Grading Policy” area and, under Module 1, read “Plagiarism Explained.” Plagiarism rules are applicable to QAs and QARs as well as papers.

Honesty and integrity are values which are considered fundamental to academic institutions. Plagiarism is a form of cheating and your grade will suffer accordingly. According to CSU’s policy on academic misconduct, plagiarism is defined as “stealing and/or using the ideas or writings of another in a paper or report and claiming them as your own. This includes but is not limited to the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment.” According to university policy, a “minor infraction” is one involving an assignment of less than 25% of the course’s grade, while a “major infraction” involves an assignment worth 25% or more, or multiple minor infractions. A minor infraction will result in a grade of zero for the assignment involved; a major infraction will result in an F for the course and an entry on your permanent academic record indicating academic misconduct.

Since this is a WAC course, I grade on writing as well as content. There are handouts about common writing mistakes (including grammar and punctuation) on Blackboard under Syllabus and Course Information/Writing Handouts folder. If you have any questions about any of these things, please talk to me. Being able to write clearly and correctly is a great skill that will help you in getting and keeping a job, among other things.

This course meets the Writing Across the Curriculum Skill Intensive area. As such it requires students to write a minimum of 3,000 words in writing assignments, and the final version of the term paper should total at least 2,000 words. In order to receive a C or better in the course, a student must write at a satisfactory skill level (C or better). If the student’s writing is weak, but shows understanding of the course material, the student may be assigned a D, in which case WAC credit will not be received for the course. Assigned writing should be in English. Maxim enrollment for the course is 35.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- A 95–100 points
- A- 90–94 points
- B+ 86–89 points
- B 83–85 points
- B- 80–82 points
- C+ 75–79 points
- C 70–74 points
- D 60–69 points
- F below 60 points

Selected writings include:

John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” and “Little Speech on Liberty”

Benjamin Franklin, “The Way to Wealth,” “The Art of Virtue,” and “Information to Those Who Would Remove to America”

Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence,” “The Articles of Confederation,” “The Constitution of the United States,” and “The Bill of Rights”

Federalist Papers: Nos. 1, 10, 23, and 51, and George Washington, “Farewell Address”

Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,” “Notes on the State of Virginia,” “First Inaugural Address,” “Second Inaugural Address,” Letter to Reverend James Madison, Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington, Letter to William S. Smith, Letter to Elbridge Gerry, Letter to a Committee of the Danbury Baptist Assn., Letter to Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours

Andrew Jackson, “First Annual Message to Congress,” “Veto of Maysville Road Bill,” “Bank Veto Message,” “Farewell Address”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government,” and Walt Whitman, “Democratic Vistas”

Angelina Grimke, “Letter to Catharine E. Beecher,” and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions” and “Address to the New York State Legislature”

William Lloyd Garrison, “The Liberator,” “Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” and Harriet Beecher Stowe, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”

Frederick Douglass, “What are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” “Lectures on Slavery,” “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

Roger Taney, “Dred Scott v. Sandford,” and Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Peoria, Illinois,” “Speech on the Dred Scott Decision in Springfield, Illinois,” “Cooper Union Address,” “New Haven Address”

Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address,” “Address to Congress,” “Second Annual Message to Congress,” “Gettysburg Address,” “Second Inaugural Address”

William Graham Sumner—“What Social Classes Owe to Each Other,” “The Challenge of Facts,” and Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth”

Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For,” and Eugene Debs, “Speech to the Jury”

Victoria Woodhull, “On Constitutional Equality,” “The Principles of Social Freedom,” Susan B. Anthony, “Speech About Her Indictment,” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Women and Economics”

Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments; Henry Brown and John Marshall Harlan, “Plessy v. Ferguson,” Booker T. Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address,” W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk,” “The Talented Tenth,” and Marcus Garvey, “The True Solution of the Negro Problem”

William Apess, “Eulogy on King Philip,” Chief Joseph, “An Indian’s View of Indian Affairs,” and Chief Joseph, Crazy Horse, and Smohalla, “On Work and Property.”

Theodore Roosevelt, “New Nationalism” and Woodrow Wilson, “The New Freedom”

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Speech at Oglethorpe University,” “The Four Freedoms,” “A Second Bill of Rights”

Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Power of Nonviolence,” “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” SNCC, “Statement of Purpose,” Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” and Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation”

Betty Friedan, “The Feminine Mystique,” NOW, “Bill of Rights,” “Redstockings Manifesto”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “We Should All Be Feminists,” and “Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions”

Barack Obama, “Speech on Race”

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

The Movement for Black Lives, “Platform”

William E. Scheuerman, “Whistleblowing as Civil Disobedience: The Case of Edward Snowden”

Bill McKibben, “The World at War”