Course Description

This course will largely focus on issues relating to the Founding of the American Republic from the period of the American Revolution through to the Civil War, though we will take time toward the end of the semester to consider these issues in the context of contemporary American political thought. We will begin with the writings on the genesis of the American constitution, the correspondence between the Founders and their debates over the American Constitution, and the Federalist and Anti-Federalist papers. We will then follow the history of these issues and debates through nineteenth century America in the writings of Alexis De Tocqueville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Abraham Lincoln. An important thematic stress in the course will be on the nature of good citizenship in America, that is, what expectations did the Founders and their successors have for the kinds of citizens Americans could become, who could become citizens and why, could Americans be taught to be good citizens and, if so, how could citizenship be taught, and what is the nature of the contemporary American citizen when held up to the model of citizenship at the time of the Founding and beyond? Our course will conclude with speeches by Franklin Roosevelt and Barack Obama. Readings include the Founders, Tocqueville, Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Obama.

The most important questions we will explore through our readings are the following:

1. How, if at all, implicitly or explicitly, did the Founders and their successors define or conceptualize the American “people” and “citizenship” and what expectations did they have for the type of public and the kinds of citizens Americans could become?
2. Who made up the people and who could become citizens and why?
3. Could Americans be taught to be a good people and good citizens and, if so, how could such lessons be taught?
4. From the Revolutionary period through the Civil War, how capable were the American people thought to be? How intelligent, reasonable, reflective, receptive, moral, ethical, aesthetic, and political?
5. What is the nature of the contemporary American citizen and the American people when held up to the model of citizenship and the public developed from the time of the Founding through the Civil War?
Course and Learning Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to enable students to develop an in-depth theoretical understanding of the major issues that dominated American political thought from the time of the Founding of the American Republic until the first two decades following the Civil War. This time frame roughly corresponds to attempts on the part of the Federal Government to constitute the American Republic as a “Union,” that is, as a relatively unified political, economic, and cultural system. The issue to be taken up of greatest interest is the formation of the American people, its makeup, values, interests, aspirations, and capacities for citizenship.

Course Requirements and Grading

A student’s grade for POS 307, American Political Thought, will be based on a midterm and final examination (40% each of the final grade) and class participation (20% of the final grade). Examinations will revolve around the five questions posed above, which means that students can adequately prepare for the examinations by allowing their reading to be guided by the questions above. Moreover, students should prepare for each class by all using the questions above to guide their interpretation of the reading assignments.

Students are also expected to attend class and to participate on an on-going basis by posing questions, answering questions, contesting or arguing on behalf of the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. Unannounced quizzes on the week’s reading assignment may be given at the beginning of class. Students who are late for these quizzes or who miss class on the day the quiz is given will not be able to make up the quiz without appropriate documentation explaining or excusing the absence according to university guidelines (see below). Quizzes each count for 10% of the class discussion grade.

Classroom Etiquette

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class. No food is permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time. Each time students violate this rule 5 points will be subtracted from their final grade.

Students must arrive to class on time and be seated by 10:25 am. Students unable to arrive at class on time should not take this course, as the material missed in lecture cannot be made up and late arrivals interrupt class proceedings.

Course Readings

Required texts are available at Mary Jane Books and at Dropbox. As lectures will analyze readings and students can only follow these analyses with the readings in front of them, for Dropbox reading assignments students are required to print hard copies of reading material to bring to class or must have laptops on which readings are downloaded and can be referred to in class. Students must always bring either purchased texts or copies of Dropbox reading assignments to class.
Readings available at Mary Jane Books:

The Origins of the American Constitution, ed. Michael Kammens

Readings available on Dropbox are accessed with the following link:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vhmiuhvywkhzrtx/WDObXXBmrT

Tocqueville, Selections from Democracy in America, vol. II.
Emerson, “Experience,” “Self-reliance,” “The American Scholar”
Whitman, Democratic Vistas, “1855 Preface” to Leaves of Grass, “Song of Myself.”
Thoreau, “On Civil Disobedience,” “Slavery in Massachusetts.”
Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Second Inaugural Address,
Emancipation Proclamation
Roosevelt, Franklin, All Inaugural Addresses.
Obama, Barack. Selected Speeches, First and Second Inaugural Addresses.

Weekly Reading Assignments

Jan. 23 & 25.

Jan. 28, 30, & Feb. 1.
Kammens, Part Two, “Private Correspondence of the Founders,” pp. 51-122.

Feb. 4, 6, & 8.

Feb 11, 13, 15.

Feb. 18, 20, 22.

Feb. 25, 27, March 1.

March 4, 6, 8.

March 11. Midterm, part 1, on the American Constitution.
March 15-22. No class, spring break.
March 25 (3/27 & 3/29; no class, Western Political Science Association Meeting)  
Whitman, “1855 Preface” to *Leaves of Grass*.

April 1, 3, 5.  
Whitman, “Democratic Vistas.”  
“Song of Myself.”

April 8, 10, 12.  
Melville, *Bartleby*  
Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience.”  
“Slavery in Massachusetts.”

April 15, 17, 19.  
Lincoln, First & Second Inaugural Addresses  
Emancipation Proclamation

April 22, 24, 26.  
Roosevelt, Four Inaugural Addresses

April 29, May 1, 3  
Obama, Inaugural Addresses and Selected Speeches.

May 6 & 8. Review

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University Policy Guidelines for Missed Examinations  
From the Office for Undergraduate Education  
Undergraduate Academic Policy Reminders  
([www.albany.edu/undergraduateducation/policy_reminders.html#attendance](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduateducation/policy_reminders.html#attendance))

“Absences from Examinations:” Students are expected to attend all examinations, except for a compelling reason. A student who learns that he or she will miss a quiz, examination, or other evaluation must notify the instructor as soon as the conflict is noted. In cases where documentation is called for, appropriate documentation must be provided to the instructor or to the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education as soon as possible (see section below on Documentation and the Role of Undergraduate Education). All documentation must be presented before the end of the semester in question. Unless faculty have received a letter from the Office for Undergraduate Education stating that we have received appropriate documentation, you should ask to see original copies of medical excuses; do not accept photocopies.
Faculty Obligation to Provide Opportunities to Make Up Missed Work

i. If the cause of the absence is documented hospitalization, a death in the immediate family, a personal emergency, or a religious observance, the instructor must administer a makeup exam or offer an alternative mutually agreeable to the instructor and student.

ii. If the cause of the absence is a major academic conference at which the student has significant participation, a varsity athletic contest (excluding practice sessions and intra-squad games), a field trip in another course, or some other compelling reason, the student must notify the instructor involved well in advance. The instructor is expected to provide, if at all possible, an alternative by which the student will not be penalized as a result of the absence. Any conflicts between student and faculty in agreeing on the alternative may be presented for resolution to the chair of the department in which the course is offered. The resolution proposed by the chair is advisory, leaving the final decision to the faculty member.

Fraudulent excuses for missed examinations are considered violations of academic integrity and are grounds for academic and disciplinary penalties.

Documentation and the Role of Undergraduate Education: Instructors may, at their discretion, require or waive documentation of absences. Although we (the Office for Undergraduate Education) require students to discuss missed examinations and other penalized absences directly with instructors, we do, in some cases, serve as a central repository for any required documentation. For example, occasionally events such as hospitalization or a death in the family cause students to request that the Office for Undergraduate Education write a letter of excuse. This is most commonly done when a student faces an unexpected absence from the University and asks us to contact all course instructors simultaneously. It also allows students to maintain confidentiality regarding circumstances associated with personal or family emergencies. In these cases, the Office for Undergraduate Education will send a letter requesting that special consideration be given to the student, after proof is provided by the student in the form of documentation from, or phone consultation with, credible professionals or others. Although the Office for Undergraduate Education provides this service, we strongly encourage faculty to use their best judgment when students have appropriate documentation for legitimate absences and not to rely on our office when it is not necessary. It should be made clear that while the preceding paragraphs describe circumstances under which faculty are required or expected to provide opportunities to make up missed work, the burdens of promptly contacting the instructor and providing appropriate documentation rest with the student.”