

American Political Thought
POS 307 (6728), Spring 2019
Tues./Thurs. 10:15-11:35 HU 20

Professor M. Schoolman
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Office Hours

Main Campus, Humanities 016. Tues./Thurs. 11:45-1pm
Downtown Campus, Milne 218. Thurs. 3-5pm

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, Abraham Lincoln, and Frederick Douglass. Our course will conclude with speeches by Franklin Roosevelt, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Readings include the Founders, Tocqueville, Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, Lincoln, Douglass, Roosevelt, Obama, and Trump.

In the context of the 2016 American presidential election and since, two issues become especially important. On the one hand, we will be concerned with the definition of "citizen" in America, that is, what expectations did the Founders and their successors have for the kinds of citizens Americans should 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? Of obvious interest here is the current controversial status of the "immigrant." On the other hand, we will be concerned with how the "people" are understood in American political thought. What people do the "people" consist of; what sort of political force do the "people" represent; have the "people" lived up to the idea of the political force they represent and, if so, why, and, if not, why not?

Thus, the most important questions we will explore through our readings are the following, which we will formulate in various ways to highlight different issues:

1. How, 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 did the "people" include 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?

6. Are Americans, as Tocqueville claimed, willing to give up their constitutional freedoms for security?

7. What is the political significance of the American people?

8. What is the meaning of “democracy” as the Founders understood it and when, if ever, can we say it is not functioning properly or is broken?

Course and Learning Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to enable students to develop a 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 legal, 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 politics and citizenship.

Classroom Etiquette

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class. Food is not 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 10:15.

Course Requirements and Grading

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

Students are expected to participate on an on-going basis by posing questions, answering questions, contesting or arguing on behalf of their views and the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. The grading scale for exams and class participation will be as follows: A= 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, E=below 60.

Attendance, Exam, and Submission of Assignment Policies

Attendance in class, on time, is expected. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and students who arrive after attendance is taken will be marked absent for the day. Missing more than three classes without a documented excuse will be penalized by loss of three percentage points off your final grade for every class in excess of three missed classes that are unexcused. Taking examinations on their scheduled dates is expected; turning written assignments in on time is expected. Excuses for late papers or missed examinations will be accepted only for an adequately documented illness or emergency. The university's policy for health-related excused absences is available at this link: https://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicaexcuse.shtml

Course Readings

Required texts will be available to registered students on Blackboard on the first day of class. As lectures will analyze readings and students can only follow these analyses with the readings in front of them, it is strongly recommended that students print hard copies of reading material to bring to class or have laptops on which readings are downloaded and can be referred to in class.

Required Readings Available on Blackboard

Kammen, *The Origins of the American Constitution*
Tocqueville, Selections from *Democracy in America*, vol. II.
Emerson, "Experience," "Self-reliance"
Whitman, "1855 Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*, "Song of Myself,"
"Kosmos," "Give me the Splendid Silent Sun," "A Noiseless Patient Spider,"
"Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,"
Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience," "Slavery in Massachusetts."
Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Second Inaugural Address,
Emancipation Proclamation
Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*
Roosevelt, Franklin, All Inaugural Addresses.
Obama, Barack. Selected Speeches, First and Second Inaugural Addresses
Trump, Inaugural Address, various statements on Citizens & Immigrants

Weekly Reading and Written Assignments

Jan. 24 (Th). *Course Introduction*

Jan. 29 (T). *Open Discussion about the State of the Union 2019*

Jan. 31 (Th.) Kammen, Part One, "Genesis of the American Constitution, 1776-1787," pp. 1-25.

Feb. 5 (T). Kammen, Part One, "Genesis of the American Constitution, 1776-1787," pp. 25-50. Part Two, "Private Correspondence of the Founders," 1787-1788," pp. 54-76.

Feb. 7 (Th). Kammen, Part Two, "Private Correspondence of the Founders," 1787-1788," pp. 76-100.

Feb. 12 (T). Kammen, Part Two, "Private Correspondence of the Founders," 1787-1788, pp. 100-122.

Feb. 14 (Th). Kammen, Part Three, "Selected Federalist Papers," 1787-1788," pp. 125-157.

Feb. 19 (T). Kammen, Part Three, "Selected Federalist Papers," 1787-1788," pp. 157-193.

Feb. 21 (Th). Kammen, Part Three, "Selected Federalist Papers," 1787-1788," pp. 193-250.

Feb. 26 (T). Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selections), vol. II, pp. 1-33.

Feb. 28 (Th). Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selections), vol. II, pp. 35-38; 40-71.

Mar. 5 (T). Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selections), vol. II, pp. 71-87; 90-95.

Mar. 7 (Th). Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (selections), vol. II, pp. 95-100; 112-127; 143-147; 148-156; 170-178; 188-200.

Mar. 12 (T). Take-Home Midterm Handed Out In-class Only

Midterm Rules: Students are expected to write their own examinations, working independently and not together with any other student in or outside of this class. All University rules defining academic honesty apply.

Professor Schoolman cannot answer any questions by email, in office hour discussions, or in class or after-class discussions pertaining to the midterm after our discussion of the examination is concluded the morning of March 12.

Mar. 14 (Th). Take-Home Midterm Due (No Late Papers Accepted). To be Handed in By Each Student in Class and Sent to professor Schoolman online in addition to: mschoolman14@gmail.com by the beginning of class on March. 14.

Mar. 19 (T). Spring Break, No Class

Mar. 21 (Th). Spring Break, No Class

Mar. 26 (T). Emerson, "Self-Reliance," "Experience."

Mar. 28 (Th). Whitman, "1855 Preface" to *Leaves of Grass*; Whitman, "Song of Myself," verses 1-26.

April 2(T). Whitman, "Song of Myself," verses 27-52.

April 4 (Th). Whitman, “Kosmos,” “Give me the Splendid Silent Sun,” “A Noiseless Patient Spider,” “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.”

April 9 (T). Summary Discussion of Whitman.

April 11 (Th). Melville, *Bartleby*

April 16 (T). Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience,” “Slavery in Massachusetts.”

April 18. (Th). Lincoln, First and Second Inaugural Addresses, Emancipation Proclamation

April 23 (T). Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (read in entirety)

April 25 (Th). Roosevelt, First, Second, Third, and Fourth Inaugural Addresses

April 30. (T). Obama, First and Second Inaugural Addresses, First State of the Union.

May 2 (Th). Trump, Inaugural Address. Review since Midterm

May 7 (T). Last Class.

University Guidelines for the following can be found at the Web links below:

1. Policy regarding academic integrity expectations and regulations along with reference to policy and resources available (below). Specific clarification of course standards regarding student collaborations is encouraged.

https://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html

<http://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity>

2. Policy regarding assignment of incompletes (grades of I). See:

www.albany.edu/undergraduateeducation/grading.php

3. Policy Regarding Disabilities. See:

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 130, 518-442-5490, DRC@albany.edu). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.