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

In the context of the recent American presidential election 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? On the other hand, we will be concerned with how the “people” are understood in American political thought, that is, 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?

Thus, the most important questions we will explore through our readings are the following, which can be formulated in a variety of 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?

**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.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

A student’s grade for POS 307, American Political Thought, will be based on a midterm and in-class final examination (40% each of the final grade) and class participation (20% of the final grade). Examinations will revolve around the seven 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 using the questions above to guide their analysis 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 their views and 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 count for 10% student grades.
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 10:20. Students unable to arrive at class on time should consider another course, as the material missed in lecture cannot be made up and late arrivals disturb the class.

Course Readings
Required texts are available in our class Dropbox (link below). As lectures will analyze readings and students can only follow these analyses with the readings in front of them, for Dropbox reading assignments it is strongly recommended 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
All readings are available in Dropbox and are accessed with the following link, which students should copy into their browser.

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/q460t5qiwx3146e/AABPbnedlOWoKdy2eYovTwa?oref=e&n=97727068

Kammen, The Origins of the American Constitution
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 (to be added to Dropbox)
Trump, Inaugural Address

Weekly Reading Assignments

Jan. 23. Monday. Course Introduction


Jan. 30 (M). Kammen, Part Two, “Private Correspondence of the Founders,” 1787-1788,” pp. 54-76.

Feb. 3 (F). Kammen, Part Two, “Private Correspondence of the Founders,” 1787-1788, pp. 100-122.


Feb. 24 (F). No Class.


Mar. 6 (M) Review, Kammen and Tocqueville.


Mar. 10 (F) Midterm, question 2. Exam begins promptly at 10:25.

March 13-15-17 Spring Break
Mar. 20 (M) Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Mar. 22 (W). Emerson, “The American Scholar”

Mar. 24 (F). *Emerson*, “Experience”

Mar. 27 (M). Whitman, “1855 Preface” to *Leaves of Grass.*


Mar. 31 (F). Whitman, “Democratic Vistas” (continued)


April 7 (F). Whitman, “Song of Myself,” verses 36-52.

April 10 (M). Melville, *Bartleby*

April 12 (W). Passover, No Class

April 14 (F). Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience.”

April 17 (M). Easter, No Class

April 19(W). Lincoln, First Inaugural Addresses

April 21 (F). Lincoln, Second Inaugural Addresses
Emancipation Proclamation

April 24 (M). Roosevelt, First Inaugural Addresses

April 26 (W). Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Addresses

April 28 (F). Roosevelt, Third & Fourth Inaugural Addresses

May 1 (M). Obama, Inaugural Addresses

May 3 (W). Obama, State of the Union, and Selected Speeches (to be announced).

May 5 (F). Obama, Fairwell Address; Trump, Inaugural Address

May 8 & 10 (M & W). Discussion & Review classes.
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.