

American Political Thought

Political Science 34

Professor Dumm
Spring, 2008

Much of what is popularly considered as American political thought is associated with constitutionalism, law, and the vicissitudes of justice. Because those associations are addressed in other courses offered in the departments of Political Science, Law, Jurisprudence and Social Thought, and Philosophy, this course ignores or underplays documents such as Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, The Federalist, even Tocqueville's Democracy in America. Also, because the very question of what is called thinking is at stake in making claims for much of the material of this course, materials that relate to the question the constitutional organization of American society in ways that do not in the end devolve to questions of law -- if that is possible -- are what will be considered in this class. Put positively, our effort will be toward reaching a better understanding of the ideas of some American writers who have aspired to be thinkers. To engage in this process we will be reading intensively rather than extensively (though it may not always feel that way). Our aspiration is in part to gain a more thorough appreciation of the thought of these thinkers, and in part to learn more about how expression of particular thoughts contributes to the constitution and amendment of American political experience.

Evaluation

All relevant reading should be done before the class meeting devoted to its discussion. You will be given three essay assignments during the course of the semester. The final grade will be derived from the two best essays that you submit, as well as by your attendance and participation, in the following sense: if you are close to the next higher grade in final evaluation and I am able to note that you have come to class faithfully and contributed constructively to discussion, either by responding to questions or by appearing interested, I will be inclined to bump you to a higher grade. Participation is crucial to the success of a course such as this, and good discussion depends upon careful preparation of materials. Paper assignments will be distributed as we reach general consensus about where we are in the development of the course, but I have marked on the calendar anticipated dates of assignments.

Office hours are on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. and by appointment.

Materials

Books for purchase are available at Atticus Bookstore in downtown Amherst.

Tom Paine, Common Sense

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays and Poems (Library of America)

Henry David Thoreau, The Portable Thoreau (Viking Portable Library)

Abraham Lincoln, Speeches (Library of America)

W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folks (Bedford)

Walt Whitman, The Portable Whitman
William James, Pragmatism and Other Essays (Anchor)
Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country (Harvard)

Calendar

Week One

January 28: Introduction
Reading: No Reading

I. CONSTITUTING A POLITY

January 30:: Independence
Reading: Thomas Jefferson, draft of Declaration of Independence
<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/AMERICA/DECLAR.HTM>

February 4 Under a Tree
Reading: Tom Paine, Common Sense

February 6: A More Perfect Government
Reading: Original Constitution, selected Federalist Papers 10, 38)

February 11: States and Autonomy
Nullification Ordinance of South Carolina, November, 1832
<http://www.adena.com/adena/USA/cw/cw207.htm>
John Calhoun, "A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States"
<http://www.constitution.org/jcc/dcgus.htm>
John Calhoun, "The Southern Address"
<http://facweb.furman.edu/~benson/docs/calhoun.htm>

February 13: Lincoln and the Civil War, I
Reading: Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions (Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum, at Springfield, Illinois)," "'House Divided' Speech, at Springfield, Illinois," "Address at the Cooper Institute, New York City."

February 18: Lincoln and the Civil War, II
"First Inaugural Address," "Gettysburg Address," "Second Inaugural,"

FIRST PAPER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED: DUE, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25

II. EMERSON AND THE EXPERIENCE OF DEMOCRACY

February 20: Thinking America

Reading: Emerson, "The American Scholar"

February 25: Self-Reliance

Reading: Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

February 27: Aspiring to Presence, I

Reading: Emerson, "Experience"

March 3: Aspiring to Presence, II

Reading: Emerson, "Experience"

NO CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, March 5

III: THOREAU AND DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

March 10: Reckoning One's Self

Reading: Thoreau, Walden, Chapters One and Two

March 12: : Self-regard

Reading: Thoreau, Walden, Chapters Three through Seven

Spring Break

March 24: Sociality

Reading: Thoreau, Walden, Chapters Eight through Thirteen

March 26: Overcoming Resignation

Reading: Thoreau, Walden, Chapters Fourteen to Conclusion

III: SLAVERY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

March 26: Freedom, I

Reading: Emerson, "Fate"

March 28: Freedom, II

Reading: Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" and John Brown"

SECOND PAPER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED, DUE WEDNESDAY APRIL 11

March 31: American Apartheid, I

Reading: W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folks, Chapters I through VIII

April 2: American Apartheid, II

Reading: DuBois, The Souls of Black Folks, Chapters IX through "The Afterthought"

April 7: Civil Rights/Black Power

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

[Http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf)

Stokely Carmichael, "Black Power"

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html>

V. Romanticism, Pragmatism, and the Import of Experience

April 9: Democracy and Poetry

Walt Whitman, Introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, and excerpts

April 14: Democracy and Romanticism, I

Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas" Part One

Thomas Carlyle, "Shooting Niagara - And After?"

<http://eflm.bris.ac.uk/het/carlyle/shooting.htm>

April 16: Democracy and Romanticism, II

Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Part Two

April 21: Pragmatism as a Philosophy

Reading: William James, Pragmatism

April 23: Pluralism and Pragmatism

Reading: William James, Pragmatism

April 28: Identity Politics, I

Reading: Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country, First Half

April 30: Identity Politics, II

Reading: Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country, Second Half

May 5 and May 7 I am reserving for discussion and conclusion of course. If we are on schedule, there will be one more reading: Stanley Cavell, "Finding As Founding"