

**THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION (PLAP 2250)**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS  
Spring 2017

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Office Hours: Mon. 12-1, Weds. 1-2 in Gibson S163

Location: Pavilion VIII 108  
Meeting Time: MWF 9:00-9:50AM  
Guest Lectures: Jefferson Hall

### **I. Course Description**

This course will study the theoretical ideas that informed the creation and development of America's political system and consider some of the major contemporary challenges to the maintenance of American democracy. Topics to be treated include the political thought of the American Founders, the place of religion in public life, the nature of written constitutions, and the role of America in the world. The course will take place in a seminar setting limited to no more than twenty students. Emphasis will be placed on the discussion of important texts and documents. The course will be supplemented by occasional lectures by selected experts from inside and outside of the University, which will be held at the Jefferson Society Hall.

### **II. Texts**

Both texts required for this course are available at the University Bookstore. Students should purchase the following editions:

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. George Lawrence, Perennial Classics, 2000.
2. Hamilton, Madison, Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, Ed. Charles Kesler, Signet, 1999.

In addition, most of the readings can be found in a course packet that is available for purchase at NK Print & Design (on Elliewood Avenue, just across from Take It Away). These readings are also available on Collab.

### **III. Assignments and Grading**

1. Two separate 5 to 6 page papers (15% for first, 20% for second) due by 5 PM on Monday, February 20 and Monday, May 1.
2. Midterm Exam (20%) on Monday, February 27.
3. Final Exam (30%) on Friday, May 12, 2-5 PM.
3. Class participation (15%).

### **IV. Course Policies**

**Papers:** Students will receive paper assignments approximately two weeks before the due date. Papers shall be 5-6 typed (12-point font, double-spaced) pages. Failure to complete any assignment will result in an F in the course.

**Class Participation and Readings:** The centerpiece of our class meetings will be rigorous discussion of the assigned texts. Therefore, participation is of the utmost importance. Students will be expected to complete the readings and come prepared to discuss them in detail. The syllabus provides questions to guide your preparation of the readings. No laptops or electronic devices are permitted in class.

**Honor Code at Virginia:** All work completed for this course falls under the guidelines of the Honor System. The Pledge is a signed reaffirmation of your commitment to academic integrity. Accordingly, you must write out, sign and date the following pledge on all academic work: "On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received aid on this exam/assignment."

**Guest Lectures:** The guest lectures are a vital element of this course. They are typically given by a prominent scholar of the topic under consideration. Your attendance at the guest lectures is a mandatory part of your participation grade, and a sign-in sheet will likely be circulated during each lecture. Any or all of the materials covered in the lectures can appear on the exams. Unless otherwise announced, all guest lectures will be held in the Jefferson Society Hall.

## COURSE READING SCHEDULE

### UNIT 1: THE BASIC UNITS OF POLITICAL LIFE

#### Wednesday, January 18: Introduction

Pierre Manent, "The Question of Political Forms"  
Aristotle, selections from *Politics*

#### Reading Questions

1. What are the major political "forms" identified by Pierre Manent? What follows from each form?
2. How are different "forms" of political life influenced by economic, technological, and religious factors?
3. What is a political "regime" or "constitution"?
4. What are the different types of regimes as outlined by Aristotle?

#### Friday, January 20: The Regime, Cont.

Plutarch, "Life of Lycurgus"  
Montesquieu, selections from *Spirit of the Laws*

#### Reading Questions

1. How does Plutarch's "Life of Lycurgus" illustrate the idea of a regime? Would you like to live in Sparta? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Spartan regime?
2. What are the different kinds of regimes in Montesquieu's classification scheme?
3. How does Montesquieu's classification scheme differ from Aristotle's? What does he add to the ancient concept of the regime?
4. Does Montesquieu prefer an ancient republic like Rome or a modern, mixed regime like England?

#### Monday, January 23: Tocqueville's Regime Classifications

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 9-20; 30-47; 50-60 (preface, Puritans)

#### Reading Questions

1. How does Tocqueville's vision of the early communities in New England illustrate the idea of a regime? Would you like to live in a Puritan community?

#### Wednesday, January 25: Tocqueville's Regime Classifications

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 241-245; 503-508; 616-627; 690-695

#### Reading Questions

1. What does Tocqueville mean when he speaks of a shift from aristocracy to democracy?
2. What are the three different regimes (or governments) of modern times?
3. In what sense does Tocqueville consider modern despotic government to be democratic?

### UNIT 2: PHILOSOPHIC UNDERPINNINGS OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

### **Friday, January 27: The Social Contract**

John Locke, selections from *Second Treatise on Government* (1689)  
James Otis, "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved" (1764)  
John Dickinson, "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer" (1767)

#### Reading Questions

1. What was the basis of the colonists' objections to the British government and rule prior to the Revolutionary War?
2. What do these authors mean when they refer to a state of nature and natural rights?
3. Why is taxation without representations wrong? What does Dickinson mean by slavery?

### **Monday, January 30: The Social Contract**

Thomas Jefferson, "Minutes from a meeting of the Board of Visitors of UVA"  
Declaration of Independence (in *Federalist Papers*)  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Major John Cartwright," (1824)  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Henry Lee," (1825)  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Roger Weightman," (1826)  
Alexander Hamilton, "The Farmer Refuted"

#### Reading Questions

1. What were the grounds for declaring independence?
2. What does the Declaration mean by a "natural right to liberty"? By the truth that all men are created equal?
3. To what extent is the Declaration influenced by the political philosophy of John Locke?
4. What does Jefferson mean by society being founded on "nature" or "natural rights" rather than history (or revelation)?

### **Wednesday, February 1: Debates over Small vs. Large Republics**

*Federalist Papers*, No. 10, 51, 14 (last paragraph only, pp. 98-100)  
Brutus, "No. 1"  
Centinel, "No. 1"  
Federal Farmer, "No. 3"

#### Reading Questions

1. What type of citizen is necessary in the new republic?
2. Why is the "extended republic" of the Constitution an innovation?
3. What were some of the main objections to the Constitution?

### **Friday, February 3: Debates over Small vs. Large Republics**

Articles of Confederation (in *Federalist Papers*)  
U.S. Constitution, Articles I – IV (in *Federalist Papers*)  
Herbert Storing, selection from *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*  
*Federalist Papers*, No. 15, 23

#### Reading Questions

1. What were Publius's chief arguments against the Articles of Confederation?
2. Why study the Anti-Federalists?
3. Have the fears of the Anti-Federalists been borne out?

## **UNIT 3: RELIGION AND POLITICS**

### **Monday, February 6: The Puritan Communities**

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 287-301  
Mayflower Compact (1620)  
John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)  
Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641)

Reading Questions

1. How did the Puritans understand the role of religion in politics?
2. What difficulties emerge when religious law is the *direct* foundation of political law?

**Wednesday, February 8: The American Founders on Religion**

Patrick Henry, "A Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion"  
James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments"  
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query 17  
Thomas Jefferson, *A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom*  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Danbury Baptist's Association"  
George Washington, "Letter to Tauro Synagogue"  
George Washington, "Letter to Quakers"  
George Washington, "Thanksgiving Day Proclamation"

Reading Questions

1. What was the Founders' view of the relation between religion and politics?
2. What distinguishes the American political tradition regarding the status of religion in political life?

**Friday, February 10: Religion, Democracy, and the First Amendment**

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 442-449  
First Amendment (in *Federalist Papers*)  
*Lee v. Weisman* (1992)  
*Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972)

Reading Questions

1. Assess the decision in *Lee v. Weisman*. Would you have decided it differently?
2. Does the First Amendment affirm mere neutrality between religions or dictate a public stance with regard to religion vs. non-religion?
3. What should the status of the phrase "under God" be in the Pledge of Allegiance? Of "In God We Trust" on our coins?

**UNIT 4: CONSTITUTIONALISM**

**Monday, February 13: Debates over Short vs. Long Constitutions**

**\*\* Guest Lecture: John Dinan, Wake Forest University\*\***

Theodore Roosevelt, "Speech to the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1912"  
U.S. Bill of Rights  
Virginia Bill of Rights (1776)  
Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944 State of the Union Address  
Selections from Debates of the Maryland Constitutional Convention of 1967-1968

Reading Questions

1. Should a Constitution be short (limited to merely outlining the structure of government and prohibiting encroachments on fundamental rights), or long (such as including aspirational provisions, resolving issues in areas where elected officials have proven untrustworthy, and

- empowering or even requiring officials to take certain actions such as securing economic, labor, and environmental rights)?
2. What *should* be included in a written constitution?

### **Wednesday, February 15: Debates over Rigid vs. Flexible Constitutions**

U.S. Constitution, Article V, Amendments (in *Federalist Papers*)  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to James Madison," September 6, 1789  
James Madison, "Letter to Thomas Jefferson," February 4, 1790  
Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Samuel Kercheval," July 12, 1816  
*Federalist Papers*, No. 49

#### Reading Questions

1. What is a written Constitution? How did it revolutionize the relationship between government and the people?
2. Should a constitution be rigid (i.e. difficult to amend) or flexible (i.e. easily amendable, such as permitting amendments to be approved on a mere majority vote of the legislature and citizenry, empowering the people to initiate constitutional changes, and requiring a periodic popular vote on calling a revision convention, etc.?)

### **Friday, February 17: Who should interpret the Constitution?**

*Federalist Papers*, No. 78  
Selections from *Marbury v. Madison*  
Brutus, "The Problem of Judicial Review"  
Thomas Jefferson, "On Judicial Power"  
Andrew Jackson, "Veto of the Bank Bill"  
Abraham Lincoln, selections

#### Reading Questions

1. Should constitutional interpretation be the province solely of the judiciary, or do the executive and legislative branches also have a responsibility to engage in independent constitutional interpretation?
2. When should a decision on matters of constitutional interpretation be considered final? Should it ever be considered final?

### **Monday, February 20: NO CLASS**

**\*\*\* FIRST PAPER DUE BY 5PM\*\*\***

### **Wednesday, February 22: How should the Constitution be interpreted?**

William Brennan, "The Constitution of the United States: Contemporary Ratification"  
Antonin Scalia, "Originalism: The Lesser Evil"

#### Reading Questions

1. Make the case for the notion of a living constitution. What are some objections to it?

### **Friday, February 24: How should the Constitution be interpreted?**

*Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)  
*Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015)

#### Reading Questions

1. What is the difference between saying that something is constitutional and advocating a political position? Why does Justice Thomas defend the constitutionality of a law he dislikes?
2. How should a judge interpret the Constitution? What is the difference between interpreting it according to the original meaning of the Framers, or by more contemporary standards?

**Monday, February 27: \*\*\* MIDTERM EXAM \*\*\***

**UNIT 5: AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS**

**Wednesday, March 1: The Legislature**

*Federalist Papers*, No. 52, 53, 55, 62, 63  
 Benjamin Rush, "Letter on the Defects of the Pennsylvania Constitution"  
 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 84-86, 200-201

Reading Questions

1. What is the distinction between a representative democracy and a direct democracy?
2. What is the case for bicameralism, as opposed to having a single legislative assembly?
3. In what ways was the Senate designed to have a different character than the House of Representatives?

**Friday, March 3: The Executive**

John Locke, "On Prerogative Power," from *Second Treatise* (1689)  
*Federalist Papers*, No. 70  
 Neutrality Act of 1793  
 Helvidius-Pacificus Debates (1793)

Reading Questions

1. What is the relation of executive power to constitutional government or the rule of law?
2. To what degree do liberal democracies need energetic executive power?

**March 4 – March 12: SPRING BREAK**

**Monday, March 13: The Executive**

Abraham Lincoln, "Habeas Corpus Speech," July 4, 1861  
 Abraham Lincoln, "Letter to Albert Hodges," April 4, 1864  
 Benjamin A. Kleinerman, "Lincoln's Example"  
 Harvey C. Mansfield, "Law and the President"

Reading Questions

1. What does Lincoln's example show us about the relationship of executive power to the rule of law?
2. Did Lincoln violate the Constitution or uphold it? Were his actions justified?
3. By what standard do we judge when the exercise of executive prerogative is an unjustified violation of the rule of law?

**Wednesday, March 15: Federalism**

*The Federalist Papers*, No. 39, 46  
 Martin Diamond, "The Federalist on Federalism"

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 151-163  
Constitutional Convention of 1787, excerpts  
Hamilton in the New York Ratifying Convention (1788)  
James Madison to N. P. Trist (1830)

Reading Questions

1. What does federalism protect? What does it obstruct?
2. Does federalism still have value if we no longer identify as citizens of our states but as Americans?

**UNIT 6: THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY AND CIVIL RIGHTS**

**Friday, March 17: Slavery and the American Founding**

Benjamin Franklin, "An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery"  
Alexander Hamilton, "Letter to John Jay"  
Herbert Storing, "Slavery and the Moral Foundations of the American Republic"  
*Federalist Papers*, No. 54  
John C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Oregon Bill"  
Alexander Stephens, "Cornerstone Speech"  
Slavery provisions in the U.S. Constitution: Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3; Article 1, Section 9, Clause 1; Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3

Reading Questions

1. What status did slavery hold under the Constitution, and what reasons were advanced to account for its status? How did some of the Founders expect to see the problem of slavery resolved?
2. What were some of the early plans to advance abolitionism by Franklin and Hamilton? What was the logic of Hamilton's plan?
3. What were the "new" views on slavery of the Southerners? How did Calhoun and Stephens (the vice-president of the Confederacy) deal with the claims of the Declaration of Independence?

**Monday, March 20: Abraham Lincoln and the Crisis of the House Divided**

Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Holmes"  
Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Chicago"  
Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise"  
Abraham Lincoln, selections from Lincoln-Douglas debates  
Stephen Douglas, selections from Lincoln-Douglas debates

Reading Questions

1. What were the different positions of Lincoln and Douglas on the crisis of the 1850s? Is one closer to Jefferson's original opinion on the Missouri Compromise?
2. What were the different views of Lincoln and Douglas on the Declaration of Independence?

**Wednesday, March 22: Abraham Lincoln (cont.)**

Abraham Lincoln, "Lyceum Address"  
Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address"  
Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address"

Reading Questions

1. These latter two speeches of Abraham Lincoln are widely considered to be the greatest ever pronounced by an American political leader. What accounts for this judgment?

2. Does the Second Inaugural read as a speech that you would have expected, based on Lincoln's prior speeches? What "new" themes are found? How does his "political theology" change over time?

**Friday, March 24: NO CLASS**

**Monday, March 27: Slavery, Abolition, and the U.S. Constitution**

**\*\*Guest Speaker: Lucas Morel, Washington and Lee University\*\***

Frederick Douglass, selections from *Autobiography*  
 William Lloyd Garrison, "On the Constitution and the Union"  
 Frederick Douglass, "The Constitution of the U.S.: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?"  
 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 340-350

Reading Questions

1. How did Frederick Douglass view the Declaration and the Constitution? How did he see these two documents in relationship to the struggle for emancipation?
2. How did Douglass' view of the Constitution differ from that of some other abolitionists, who considered it "a pact with the devil?"
3. Why did Tocqueville think that race would continue to be a problem even after emancipation?

**Wednesday, March 29: Race in Post-bellum America**

Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address" (1895)  
 W.E.B. DuBois, selections from *Souls of Black Folk* (1903)  
*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)

Reading Questions

1. What positions did Washington and DuBois adopt in the quest for achieving racial equality?
2. What are the grounds of Justice Harlan's dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*?

**Friday, March 31: The Civil Rights Movement**

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"  
 Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream"  
 Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Reading Questions

1. How does MLK Jr.'s approach to civil equality differ from that of Malcolm X?
2. For MLK Jr., how should an individual deal with a law that he or she recognizes is unjust?

**UNIT 7: TOCQUEVILLE ON DEMOCRATIC POLITICS AND CULTURE**

**Monday, April 3: Democratic Politics**

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 62-70, 87-98, 196-201, 231-245, 250-256

Reading Questions

1. What are the chief threats that Tocqueville identifies to the health of American democracy?
2. Tocqueville admits that decentralized administration is often inefficient. Why then does he prefer it to centralized administration?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of democratic government and society as observed in America, compared to aristocratic government and society?



### Wednesday, April 5: The Democratic Mind

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp.429-436, 451-454, 459-468, 475-478, 509-517, also review 503-508

#### Reading Questions

1. Is Tocqueville right that the democratic mind tends to be *both* independent and conformist? How can it be both?
2. Considering what we've already read by Tocqueville concerning religion in America, what is the significance of his saying that "religion is strong"?

### Friday, April 7: Democratic Culture

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 525-546, 555-558, 627-632

#### Reading Questions

1. How do features of American democratic culture such as associations, restlessness, spirituality, taste for material well-being, and the pursuit of self-interest increase or decrease individualism? Which does Tocqueville want to encourage?
2. Explain the doctrine of "self-interest rightly understood", why it appeals to Americans, and why Tocqueville recommends it, despite his disagreements with it.

### Monday, April 10: The End of Democracy

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 671-678, 690-705

#### Reading Questions

1. What democratic trends contribute to the possibility of soft despotism? Is soft despotism our fate?

### Wednesday, April 12: Tocqueville Conclusion

NO ASSIGNED READINGS

## UNIT 8: PROGRESSIVISM, LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM

### Friday, April 14: Progressivism

Condorcet, selections from *Sketch of the Human Mind*

Theodore Roosevelt, "New Nationalism"

Woodrow Wilson, "What is Progress?"

(Review TR's Ohio Speech)

#### Reading Questions

1. What is the meaning of the idea that history progresses? Do you accept the proposition that things have gotten better? Does the record of the twentieth century provide evidence in favor or against the idea?
2. What, in terms of American politics, is progressivism?
3. What is the progressive's critique of the Founding? In what way was the Founding, especially the Constitution, inadequate?

### Monday, April 17: Liberalism

John Dewey, "The Future of Liberalism," from *Philosophy of Education*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "The Commonwealth Club Address" (1932)

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Second Bill of Rights" (1944)

Lyndon B. Johnson, "Great Society Speech"  
Sonia Sotomayor, "Schuette v. Coal. Defend Affirmative Action"

Reading Questions

1. Compare and contrast progressivism with liberalism. How do both inform contemporary partisan debates?
2. How does Dewey understand liberalism?
3. Is the liberalism of Sotomayor and Eaves consistent with that of Dewey and Roosevelt? If so, how?

**Wednesday, April 19: Conservatism**

**\*\*Guest Lecture: Yuval Levin, *National Affairs*\*\***

James Ceaser, "Four Heads and One Heart: The American Conservative Movement"  
Russell Kirk, "Ten Principles of Conservatism" (1993)  
Yuval Levin, "A Conservative Governing Vision" (2014)

Reading Questions

1. Is conservatism one thing or many? If one, what is its core principle? If many, what is their common denominator?
2. Is conservatism in danger of unraveling at the seams? If so, will one "branch" win out over time? Is there a viable alternative to conservatism today?

**Friday, April 21: Conservatism**

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962)  
Ronald Reagan, "First Inaugural" (1980)

Reading Questions

1. What do you think conservatism's future holds? Has the political landscape changed so fundamentally that conservatism itself will have to change in order to remain viable?

**UNIT 9: UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD; NATIONAL SECURITY, INTERESTS, AND AMERICAN PURPOSES**

**Monday, April 24: National Security**

Walter Russell Mead, selections from *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*

Reading Questions

1. What are the ends of American foreign policy? How have they changed over time?

**Wednesday, April 26: National Security**

George Washington, selections from "Farewell Address"  
Woodrow Wilson, "Fourteen Points"  
Atlantic Charter  
Dwight Eisenhower, selections from "Farewell Address"  
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 226-230

Reading Questions

1. Should our foreign involvements be limited only to our own security concerns, or do we have an obligation to further the cause of democracy abroad? In both cases, what means are permissible for the attainment of the goal?
2. What are the shortcomings of both an “isolationist” and “expansionist” foreign policy?

**Friday, April 28: Foreign Policy**

George W. Bush, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America”  
Thomas Friedman, “Iran and the Obama Doctrine”

Reading Questions

1. What sorts of arguments does President Bush put forward in favor of a doctrine of military preemption?
2. Is there such a thing as an “Obama Doctrine” concerning foreign policy? How would you describe it?

**Monday, May 1: Conclusion**

\*\*\* SECOND PAPER DUE BY 5PM \*\*\*

**FINAL EXAM: Friday, May 12, 2-5 PM**