Course description and aims

*O, let America be America again—*
*The land that never has been yet—*
—Langston Hughes (1938)

It is sometimes claimed that the greatest contribution that the United States has made to the history of political thought is the idea of America itself; however, the history of political thought in the United States is marked by ongoing political contention rather than consensus. In this course we will explore a selection of key texts that have helped shape and contest the political idea -- and the political ideals -- of America, texts that comprise the traditions and countertraditions of American political thought. Beginning with a sermon delivered at sea to Puritans on their way to the “New World,” and ending with a seminal twentieth-century debate over the viability of a democratic public, the course will emphasize how intellectual argument in America has shaped and been shaped by the larger political culture of which it is a part. We will study key historical texts that are not only rewarding to think *about* but also rewarding to think *with* in light of contemporary political dilemmas. With this in mind, we will also engage secondary readings that illuminate the historical context of our primary sources and their contemporary political resonance.
Course mechanics

This is an advanced political theory research seminar. Every student should come to class prepared to engage in lively conversation based on the week’s reading. In addition to bringing the pertinent texts to class, students will be asked to write weekly short (2 page!) reader responses. The responses should avoid summary, and instead critically and succinctly engage a particular question or theme relevant to the reading. Responses will be turned in at the beginning of each Tuesday class and will be counted as a part of the final participation grade (30% of the total). Each student will also be asked to help lead discussion during one class period. On the day the student leads discussion, he or she will deliver a 10-15 minute formal presentation on the readings. These presentations should be at once synoptic and evaluative: do not simply summarize the material, but highlight particular issues or problems raised by the readings. The purpose of these presentations is to provoke lively seminar discussions. These presentations should also draw on the recommended reading and will be graded (20% of total grade). A sign-up sheet will be provided the second week of class.

In addition to these short writing assignments and seminar participation, students will write a research paper (around 20 pages) due during finals week (see below). Students must submit a proposal of their research topic and a preliminary bibliography the ninth week of class. Papers will focus on a topic covered in the seminar while also drawing on additional research. The final paper (including the graded proposal) will be worth 50% of the total grade. There will be no final exam.

Books to purchase

Available at Cornell University Bookstore:

Terence Ball, ed., The Federalist Papers Cambridge UP
John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems Ohio UP – (Optional)
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected Essays Penguin
Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography Yale
Mason Lowance, ed. Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader Penguin
Walter Lippman, Public Opinion Free Press - (Optional)
Thomas Paine, Common Sense Prometheus
Herbert Storing, What the Antifederalists were For Chicago
Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience and Other Essays Dover
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America Penguin

Material marked “**” available on e-reserve or in online journal.
Material marked “****” on reserve in Government reading room (405 Olin).
Weekly Readings

Week 1: The Idea and Ideals of America: Consensus or Contention?

Tuesday, September 1st:

Required:

David Campbell, “Imagining America”*
Michael Rogin, “American Political Demonology: A Retrospective”*
Dorothy Ross, “Liberalism”*
Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America”*
Hegel, Lectures on World History (handout)

Recommended:

Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad***
John P. Diggins, The Lost Soul of American Politics***
Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom***
Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America***
Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition***
Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony of American History***
Richard Rorty, Achieving Our Country***
Judith Shklar, American Citizenship***
Robet H. Wiebe, Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy***
James P. Young, American Liberalism: The Troubled Odyssey of the Liberal Idea***

Week 2: Community, Theology, and Dissent in Colonial New England

Tuesday, September 8th:

Required:

John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)*, “The Antinomian Crisis” (1636)*
David S. Lovejoy, “Anne Hutchinson and the Naked Christ”*
Perry Miller, “The Puritan Way of Life”*
Anne Hutchinson, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newton.” (1637)*

Recommended:

Sacvan Bercovitch, The Puritan Origins of the American Self***
William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation***
The Book of Exodus: http://www.online-literature.com/bible/Exodus/
Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity***

Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop***

Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794***


**Week 3: Fashioning the Modern American Self: Franklin**

Tuesday, September 15th:

**Required:**

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* (1784-1788)

**Recommended:**

Alan Houston, *Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement***

D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature***


Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America***

Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic***

**Week 4: Revolution and “the People”**

Tuesday, September 22nd:

**Required:**

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776)

Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (1776)*

Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence”* 

**Recommended:**


Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence***

Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America***

Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* 


Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution***

Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People***


Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution***
**Week 5: The Constitution, Republicanism, and the New Science of Politics**

Tuesday, September 29th:

Required:


Recommended:

Douglas Adair, *Fame and the Founding Fathers***
Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination***
Lance Banning, *Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic***
Jason Frank, “Publius and Political Imagination,” *Political Theory* (February 2009)*
Isaac Kramnick, “‘The Great National Discussion’: The Discourse of Politics in 1787,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 45 (1988)*
Richard K. Mathews, *If Men were Angels: Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason***
Gordon Wood, *Creation of the American Republic* (esp. 593-618)***

**Week 6: Anti-Federalists and the Revolutionary Inheritance**

Tuesday, October 6th:

Required:

Herbert Storing, *What the Antifederalists were For*
“Essays of Brutus” included in Terence Ball’s edition of *The Federalist Papers* (1787-1788)

Recommended:

Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828***
Celia Kenyon, *Men of Little Faith***
Jackson Turner Main, *The Anti-Federalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781-1788***
Sheldon Wolin, *Presence of the Past***

**Week 7: Fall Break**

**Week 8: Democracy in America I: A New Political Science for a New World**

Tuesday, October 20th:

Required:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835-1840)

Recommended:

William Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization***
Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny***
Michael Rogin, “Liberal Society and the Indian Question”*

**Week 9: Democracy in America II: Democracy and Despotism**

Tuesday, October 27th:

Required:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835-1840)

Recommended:

André Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography***
Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life***

RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS.

**Week 10: Emerson and the Politics of Self-Reliance**

Tuesday, November 3rd:

Required:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays* (1836-1860)

Recommended:

Sharon Cameron, *Impersonality***
Week 11: Self-Reliance, Slavery, and the State: Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience

Tuesday, November 10th:

Required:

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (1849)

Recommended:

Hannah Arendt, *Crisis of the Republic***
Bob Pepperman Taylor, *America’s Bachelor Uncle: Thoreau and the American Polity***

Week 12: Radical Abolitionism and American Democracy

Tuesday, November 17th:

Required:

Mason Lowance, ed., *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*

Recommended:

Bernard Boxhill, “The Two Traditions in African-American Political Philosophy,” *Philosophical Forum* (Fall–Spring, 1992)*
Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition’s Public Sphere***
Jason Frank, “Frederick Douglass and ‘We the People,’” in Andy Schaap, ed. *Law and Agonistic Politics***
Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market***
Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland, eds. *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader***
James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics***
George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture***
John Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race***
**Week 13: Lincoln, Union, and Civil Religion**

Tuesday, November 24th:

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided***
Joseph R. Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln’s Political Faith***
Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg***

**Week 14: Nationalism and White Supremacy: DuBois**

Tuesday, December 1st:

**Required:**

Film Screening: D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)

**Recommended:**

Robert Gooding-Williams and Dwight McBride, eds. "100 Years of The Souls of Black Folk," *Public Culture* (2005)*
Adolph Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought***
Michael Rogin, “‘The Sword Became a Flashing Vision’”***
Shamoon Zamir, *Dark Voices; W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903***

**Week 15: Progressives and the Fate of Democracy**

Tuesday, December 8th (optional meeting during study week):

**Required:**
Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (1909)*
Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (1922)

Recommended:

Andrew Feffer, *The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism***
James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in American and European Social Thought***
Jeffrey Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890-1920***
Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920***
Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism." *Reviews in American History* (December 1982)*
Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy***

FINAL PAPER DUE DECEMBER 14TH AT 12:00 IN 307 WHITE HALL.