

**American Political Thought**  
**Political Science 252**  
**MW, 1:50-3:00; F: 2:20-3:20**

Professor M. Rogers  
Willis 415/ x7170

Spring 2007  
Office Hours: **By**  
**Appointment**

**Purpose**

This course surveys the very contentious terrain of American political and philosophical thought. In doing so, we will analyze recurring tensions within the ideological development of the United States. The large themes include America's seemingly entrenched realism and revolutionary idealism, its commitment to freedom and sustained affirmation of inequality, and its belief in democratic governance and tendency toward oligarchy and elitism. In doing so, we will examine secondary themes such as the relationship between individual rights and the common good, national identity, freedom and slavery, obedience and revolution. The concern is not exclusively with the particular events that constitute American political history. Rather, our concern is with the philosophical foundation of America's political identity.

**Required Texts**

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Barnes and Noble)  
Thomas Jefferson, *The Essential Jefferson* (Hackett)  
*The Federalist* (Hackett)  
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (University of Chicago)  
Mark Twain, *Pudd'n'head Wilson And Those Extraordinary Twins* (Oxford Classics)  
David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (Penn State)  
W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (W. W. Norton)  
Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Free Press)  
John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press)

**Strongly Recommended**

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1979)

**Course Requirements and Standards**

The most important requirement of the course is that you read all assigned texts carefully and before class. Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Paper1, April 12	5 page essay	25%
Paper2, April 24	5 page essay	25%
Final Examination, June 4		30%
Participation/Journal		20%

**Note: All papers are due on the day and time specified in the writing assignment. Papers that are late without permission will be penalized. Penalty: half a letter grade for each day the paper is late.**

## Participation

Because the course will not be driven exclusively by lectures, it is essential that you come prepared to discuss the material and move the conversation along. I will provide you with a set of guidance questions for each set of readings. These questions are meant to help you distill the distinct arguments being made in the reading assignments and to understand the connection among the readings. **You should not read merely to answer the questions, but to understand why they were asked. You should write down answers to the questions only after having gone through the reading.** You should then come to class prepared to offer your thoughts on the questions and the larger themes to which those questions are attached.

Assessing participation is difficult; it isn't a science. For this class participation is based on both **frequency** of participation and **quality** of comments made. Do you ground your reflections in the material? Are your comments substantively unhinged from the readings on which you rely in making your reflections? Do you thoughtfully engage the comments of your classmates? These are just some of the questions I ask myself as I think about participation grade.

## Journal Entries

- As you look at the syllabus there are 6 units.
- You are expected to write a journal entry for each unit.
- **Each** journal entry should be **2-3 double-spaced type pages**. They should be clearly marked as Unit 1, 2, 3, etc.
- You are expected to submit your journals 3 times throughout the term. That is 1 journal submission (consisting of 2 entries) for every 2 units.
- **Submission Dates:**  
Units 1 & 2: April 25: In the box outside my office no later than 5 pm  
Units 3 & 4: May 8: In the box outside my office no later than 5 pm  
Units 5 & 6: May 25: **In class**

**LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

## Thinking About Journal Entries

Your journal entries are **semi-structured**. I do not, for example, provide you with distinct questions that you must reflect upon as you write your journal entries. Yet, you are expected to use the guidance questions from the individual readings as a way to stimulate your reflections. Journal writing is an opportunity to develop your understanding of what is at stake for you in this course.

Your journal entries are important. They are considered as part of your overall grade and stand alongside participation. Although I will not provide you with a grade for each of the 3 journal submissions, I will provide comments. As I read your journals, I will be assessing the quality of your reflections. Are these journal entries a result of thoughtful reflection? Were they written the night before? Do they genuinely pursue a line of investigation that the author (you) finds important? **Unlike** your written papers, the journals are not assessed based on whether they are polished pieces of writing, although you should aim for clarity of thought and adhere to the basic rules of grammar. You are not expected, as you are in your essay assignments, to consistently appeal to the text in your reflections. You are not expected, as you are in your essay assignments, to make an argument and defend it doggedly. Instead, you should write clearly, consistently, and thoughtfully about what is important to you based on the readings. Do not write these

journals the night before; I will know.

### Reading Schedule

*Note: "e-rev" stands for e-reserve*

#### ***VISIONS OF AMERICA: DEMOCRACY, REPUBLICANISM AND LIBERALISM***

Mon., March 26:

Introduction

Wed., March, 28:

Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, selection [*all on e-rev*]

John G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, selection

Michael Sandel, Democracy's Discontents, selection

#### ***UNIT 1***

#### ***REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA AND THE RADICAL IMPULSE***

Fri., March 30:

Thomas Paine, Common Sense (1776), 11-55

Mon., April 2:

"Declaration of Independence" in The Essential Jefferson (1776), 18-27

*To Henry Lee, May 8, 1825* and *To Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826* in The Essential Jefferson, 267-68, 277-78

#### ***CONSTITUTIONALISM AND REDEFINING THE RADICAL IMPULSE***

Wed., April 4:

John Adams, "Thoughts on Government" (1776) [*e-rev*]

Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, The Federalist, # 1-2, 6, 9-10, 14-15, 23

Fri., April 6:

Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, The Federalist 39, 45-47, 49-51, 78, 81 (1787-88)

Gordon S. Wood, "The American Science of Politics," [*e-rev*]

#### ***CONSTITUTIONALISM AND CONSTRAINING THE RADICAL IMPULSE***

Mon., April 9:

Sheldon Wolin, "Tending and Intending a Constitution," in Presence of the Past [*all on e-rev*]

\_\_\_\_\_, "Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy"

John Gunnell, selections from Imagining the American Polity

## **UNIT 2**

### **SLAVERY, CITIZENSHIP AND THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN THREE PARTS**

#### Part I: Race and the Problem of Inclusion

Wed., April 11<sup>1</sup>:

Thomas Jefferson, Query XIV<sup>2</sup> & XVIII (1782) in The Essential Jefferson

*To Benjamin Banneker, Aug. 30, 1791 and To Henri Gregoire, Feb. 25, 1809* in The Essential Jefferson, 181, 205

David Walker, Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World (1829), 1-36

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America (1835), Vol. 1, Pt. 2, 302-07, 326-348

Fri., April 13:

David Walker, Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, 37-45

John C. Calhoun, Disquisition on Government (1851) [*e-rev*]

Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" (1852) [*e-rev*]

#### Part II: Lincoln's Public Theology and the Re-founding of America

Mon., April 16:

Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions: Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois" (1838) [*all on e-rev*]

Roger Taney, Opinion on Dred Scott V. Sanford (1857)

Lincoln, The Dred Scott Decision: Speech at Springfield (1857); "House Divided" Speech (1858)

Wed., April 18:

First Inaugural Address (1861); Emancipation Proclamation (1862); The Gettysburg Address (1863);

Address at Sanitary Fair (1864); Second Inaugural (1865) [*all on e-rev*]

Fri., April 20:

Gary Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg, chaps. 3-4 [*all on e-rev*]

Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln" (1876)

#### Part III: Race and Racial Science

Mon., April 23:

Mark Twain, Pudd'n Head Wilson (1894)

## **UNIT 3**

### **DEMOCRACY, EXCELLENCE AND EGALITARIANISM**

Wed., April 25:

*To John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813* in The Essential Jefferson, 214-19; Re-read Query XIV<sup>3</sup> in The Essential Jefferson

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy In America (1835), Vol. I, Pt. 2, 187-192

W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" (1903) [*e-rev*]

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<sup>1</sup> Heavy reading load, please plan accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> Give special attention to pp. 113-120

<sup>3</sup> Give special attention to pp. 121-124

William Graham Sumner, What Social Classes Owe to Each Other (1883), selections [*e-rev*]

**UNIT 4**  
**FREEDOM'S WAKE**

Fri. April 27:

Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Expositions Address" (1895); "Democracy and Education," (1896); "The Fruits of Industrial Training" (1907) [*all on e-rev*]

Mon. April 30:

**NO CLASS**

Wed. May 2:

W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), Forethought, chaps I-III,

Fri. May 4:

Du Bois cont: The Souls of Black Folk IV-VII,

Mon. May 7:

Du Bois cont: The Souls of Black Folk, VIII-The Afterthought

**UNIT 5**  
**DEMOCRATIC INDIVIDUALISM**

Wed. May 9:

Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, chaps. 1-4  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841) [*e-rev*]

Fri. May 11:

John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy" (1888), "Philosophy and Democracy" (1918) [*e-rev*]

Mon. May 14:

Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas (1871) [*e-rev*]

**UNIT 6**  
**UNCERTAIN DEMOCRACY**

Wed. May 16:<sup>4</sup>

Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (1922), chaps. 1, 6-8, 14, 16, 24

Fri. May 18:

Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877) [*All on e-rev*]  
Walter Lippmann, The Phantom Public (1927), chaps. 1-IV

Mon. May 21:

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<sup>4</sup> Heavy reading load, please plan accordingly.

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (1927), chaps. I-IV

Wed. May 23:

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, chaps. V-VI

Fri. May 25:

Review

May 28:           **NO CLASS**

### **Writing a Political Philosophy Essay**

#### **A.     The Purpose of the Assignment**

For this course, you write political philosophy papers to develop a number of fundamental skills. They include the following: (1) the ability to comprehend, reconstruct, and analyze complex, and at times, elusive philosophical arguments that have political and ethical implications; (2) the ability to argue persuasively for your own views; and (3) the ability to articulate your thoughts in a clear, concise, and organized manner. I am not interested in research papers. Please do not survey the literature out there on the topic you decide to address.

#### **B.     Adopting a Position**

You may believe that there are no right answers in political philosophy. I disagree, for while interpretation is a slow process of arriving at conclusions about a thinker's work, we are not precluded from believing that some interpretations are better than others. What makes some interpretations better than others has to do with the relationship that obtains between the argument being made by your essay and its connection to the internal dynamics of the texts under consideration, the historical milieu in which the text was written, and (dare I say) the biographical information of the thinker. The strength of this relationship, I believe, moves us closer to what is accurately going on within the text. Having said that you should feel comfortable adopting positions that challenge conclusions we have drawn during class sessions or on-line postings. For purposes of evaluations, I am concerned to see how you execute your argument, the extent to which it is **textually based**, and the level of originality and/or sophistication in the argument. As such, writing abilities (e.g. proper use of grammar and punctuation, and careful, yet lively construction of prose) will be assessed alongside your explication of the text under consideration.<sup>5</sup>

#### **C.     Format and General Pointers**

Please use 12point font, 1in margins, and double space the essay throughout. Please use in-text citations that provide author and pages in parentheses. For example: To be sure, Hobbes points out that it is competition for goods that "first, maketh men invade for Gain" (Hobbes, 88). If you quote more than four typed lines, the quotation should be distinguished from the rest of the text by indenting **1in from the left margin, without quotation marks, and singled space like so:**

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<sup>5</sup> For more on sentence construction and principles of composition please consult William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, The Elements of Style (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1979), chaps. I-II.

When a man reckons without the use of words, which may be done in particular things, (as when upon the sight of any one thing, we conjecture what was likely to have preceded, or is likely to follow upon it) if that which he thought likely to follow, follows not; or that which he thought likely to have preceded it, hath not preceded it, this is called ERROR; to which even the most prudent men are subject. But when we Reason in Words of generall signification, and fall upon a generall inference which is false; though it be commonly called *Error*, it is indeed an ABSURDITY, or senseless Speech. For Error is but a deception, in presuming that somewhat is past, or to come; of which thought it were not past, or not to come; yet there was no impossibility discoverable. (Hobbes, 33-34)<sup>6</sup>

Writing is a difficult and frustrating process, but it can also yield great enjoyment when you have found a comfort zone. Of course, essays must be written in Standard English, but I encourage you to write at a level that is most comfortable for you. Do not feel the need to employ some of the technical language of political philosophy that I may use in class. If for example the structure of a sentence gets too complex, I encourage you to reconsider it altogether. Do not delete it. Instead, try to figure out how to break it up or to restate the point in different terms.

Our usual understanding of philosophy pushes our writing toward lofty formulations and initial pontifications. I encourage you to reject all of this as you begin your paper. Your introductory paragraph should state very clearly your argument and give indication of how you will substantiate your thesis. This will require you to stick closely to the text as the foundation for the claims you will develop throughout your essay. Spend time with those passages in the text under consideration that you believe aid the development of your arguments and those that seemingly undercut the claims you wish to advance. Do not ignore those “bad” passages, those moments where a thinker seemingly goes in the opposite direction of your argument. You must make sense of those “bad” passages as well. Part of the reason why you address these passages is to make the reader feel confident that despite inconsistencies or contradictions within the text under consideration, your argument nonetheless captures the general tenor of what the text does or does not say. In this regard you may want to write an outline. (To be honest, I never write outlines.) After each paragraph you write, you should read what you have written thus far. This will allow you to achieve consistency, smooth transitions, and coherence. In this regard, you will come across key words or phrases, such as, “aristocracy,” “will,” “nature,” “race,” “authority,” “freedom,” “reason,” “democracy,” etc. Spend time with these words in the context of the writers under consideration and define them.

Make sure to proofread the draft. In doing this, you want to check that each paragraph moves the reader forward along a path that develops your argument. Here you want to reevaluate the analyses you will have offered for this or that particular passage or claim. Do not assume that the passage does the work of explanation. I expect you to explain in your own words how a particular passage fits into the context of the argument. You want to think at every stage of the reevaluation what kinds of counter-arguments can be made and whether or not you have anticipated and addressed them. At this juncture you may need to take a break from the paper, perhaps a couple of hours or a day. This will give you some critical distance to better assess the paper.

Once you feel comfortable at the end of the paper, you will need to proofread once more. Now you are checking for spelling or grammatical errors that may obstruct coherence or intelligibility. You won’t catch them all, but try to catch enough of them.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on using quotations please consult Strunk and White, Elements, chap. III.