Gene Davis, “Apricot Ripple” (1968)

Course Overview

Contemporary debates in American politics often revolve around a few basic questions: What are the greatest problems facing America? What does it mean to be an American? What are the principles of American politics? Americans often answer these questions by drawing upon seminal texts in American political thought. The aim of this course is to study several of these texts so that we may participate more thoughtfully and effectively in contemporary politics.

We begin with The Declaration of Independence (1776), Thomas Jefferson’s statement of America’s founding ideals. Then, we read The Federalist, the 1787-88 essays penned by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to outline the principles of the United States Constitution. Subsequently, we consider Alexis de Tocqueville’s epochal account of American individualism and civil society in Democracy in America (1835, 1840). Afterwards, we look at W.E.B. Du Bois’s The Souls of Black Folk (1903), a book that portrays the “double consciousness” of virtually all Americans. Next, we examine Anarchism (1917), a classic of American radicalism written by the anarchist-feminist Emma Goldman. Then, we study Leo Strauss’s Natural Right and History (1950), a guiding text for conservatives such as George Will and Paul Wolfowitz, and Milton Friedman’s Capitalism and Freedom, a source for libertarian political thought. Subsequently, we turn to A Theory of Justice (1971), John Rawls’s great work of Anglo-American liberal theory. We conclude with William E. Connolly’s Pluralism (2005), a book by one of the New Left’s greatest theorists.

Throughout the course, we test each author’s ideas by how well they help us grasp contemporary issues in American politics, including presidential elections, Social Security reform, property rights, immigration policy, the war in Iraq, the role of religion in politics, and sports and entertainment. Students are encouraged to follow current events in American politics by reading the New York Times, Washington Post, Financial Times, Economist, and other journals and newspapers.

Texts

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, The Federalist (Liberty Fund) 9780865972896
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (University of Chicago Press) 0226805360
Course Requirements

(1-2) Students will write and present a research paper comparing and contrasting two of the authors on the syllabus about a controversy in American politics. Students should write the essay as a potential submission to the Fordham Undergraduate Research Journal. For this reason, the essay should not be longer than 4500 words (approximately 15 pages). The paper will be due one week after you present to the class.

(3) The midterm, on February 20, is on Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Tocqueville, and Dubois. A week beforehand, I will distribute 6 essay questions, and on the day of the exam we will roll a die to determine 2 questions. Well-written essays should incorporate material from the lectures, readings, presentations, and your own thoughts. You may study in groups, but the exam is closed-booked. The exam is 1 hour.

(4) The final, on May, has the same format as the midterm, and is on Goldman, Rawls, Strauss, and Connolly.

(5) Class participation. Students are expected to come to class on time prepared to discuss the readings. I employ the Socratic method in the classroom, which means that I will often call on you even if your hands are down; be ready! Students are expected to read, listen, observe, and think actively rather than passively.

Grade Distribution

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<tr>
<th>Grade Distribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
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<td>Research presentation</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Class participation</td>
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Class Schedule

1. January 16 – “The Declaration of Independence”; The Federalist, 1, 9, 15, 23, 35, 84

2. January 23 – The Federalist, 10, 39, 51, 54, 55


5. February 13 – *The Souls of Black Folk*, The Forethought-Chapter VI

6. February 20 – Midterm

7. February 27 – *Anarchism and Other Essays*, “Anarchism,” “Patriotism”

8. March 6 – *Natural Right and History*, Introduction-Chapter IV

9. March 13 – *Natural Right and History*, Chapter V

10. March 27 – *Capitalism and Freedom*, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 6

11. April 3 – *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter III, Chapter I, §§1-4; Chapter IV §40; Chapter II, §§11-17


13. April 24 – *Pluralism*, Prelude, Chapters 1 and 2

14. May 1 – Student Presentations

May 8 – Final Exam