

American Political Thought

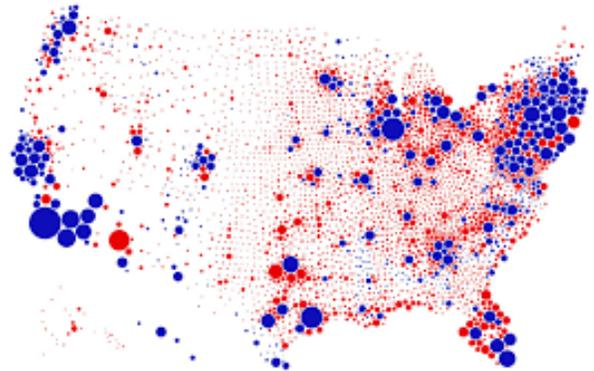
Professor Nicholas Tampio

Fordham University, Spring 2022, POSC 3404

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Class hours: MR 11:30 am-12:45 pm

Office hours: MR 1-2 pm



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.

Throughout the course, we test each author's ideas by how well they help us grasp contemporary issues in American politics, including presidential elections, pandemic response, property rights, immigration policy, 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.

Student learning objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Know the main contours of the history of American political thought.
- Be familiar with key arguments about, for instance, whether the founders envisioned the country as a democracy or a republic.
- Understand how to use the American political thought archive to intervene in a contemporary political debate.

Texts

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, *The Federalist* (Liberty Fund) 9780865972896

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (University of Chicago Press) 0226805360

WEB DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Norton) 039397393X

Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Free Press) 0684833271

John Dewey, *Public and its Problems* (Swallow Press) 0804011664

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press) 9780674000780

Course Requirements

(1-2). Students have a chance to write and present a research paper on one of the authors we discuss this semester. Early in the semester, I will assign students to a group. On the day your

group leads discussion, each student will turn in to me, and present to the class with a Powerpoint, a 2000 word research project on how the author helps us grasp contemporary politics. A good essay will include citations to recent news articles as well as a few scholarly sources.

(3) The midterm is on Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Wheatley, Apess, and Tocqueville. 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 close-booked. The exam is 1 hour.

(4) The final has the same format as the midterm, and is on DuBois, Lippmann, Dewey, Rawls, and Buchanan.

(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

Research paper	20
Research presentation	10
Midterm	20
Final exam	40
Class participation	10

To understand university policies on academic rights and responsibilities, sexual harassment, services for students with disabilities, and other important topics, please see the [undergraduate faculty handbook](#).

Class schedule

I. The Founding

1. January 20 - Jefferson's vision

- Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" in *The Federalist*
- Excerpts from Danielle Allen's *Our Declaration*

2. January 24 - Hamilton and a strong federal government

- Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*, 1, 9, 15, 23, 35, 84

3. January 27 - Madison and Restrained Power

- James Madison, *The Federalist*, 10, 39, 51, 54, 55

4. January 31 – Adams and the restraint of the oligarchy

- John Adams, Dr. Franklin <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/adams-the-works-of-john-adams-vol-4?fbclid=IwAR27agdVB2Fg6Uxi87oosmRkyAZI8JOXoKCFxewC1qlqyUppcut73W4PxVc>
- John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 9 July 1813
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0230#:~:text=your%20%E2%80%9C%E1%BC%84%CF%81i%CF%82%CF%84%CE%BFi%E2%80%9D%20are%20the%20most,Suffer%20themselves%20to%20be%20governed.>
- John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 2 September 1813
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6144>

5. February 3 – Phillis Wheatley on being brought from Africa to America

- “On Being Brought from Africa to America,”
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45465/on-being-brought-from-africa-to-america>
- Elizabeth Winkler, How Phillis Wheatley Was Recovered Through History, *New Yorker*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-phillis-wheatley-was-recovered-through-history>

6. February 7 – William Apess on broken treaties between Europeans and the Natives

- William Apess, “[Eulogy on King Philip](#)” (1836)

7. February 10 – Student presentations

II. Alexis de Tocqueville on American Mores

8. February 14 – On American Identity

- *Democracy in America*: Vol. I: Author’s Introduction, Part I, Chs. 2, 3

9. February 17 – On Democratic Republicanism

- *Democracy in America*: Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 9

10. February 22 – On American Individualism

- *Democracy in America*: Volume II, Part II (entire)

12. February 28 – Student Presentations

13. March 3 – Midterm

III. W.E.B. DuBois on the souls of black folk

14. March 7 – Double consciousness
 - *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Of our Spiritual Strivings”
15. March 10 – Who makes things right?
 - *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Of the Dawn of Freedom”
16. March 21 – Black leadership
 - *The Souls of Black Folk*, “Of the Training of Black Men”
17. March 24 – Student Presentations

IV. Lippmann and Dewey on Democracy and Expertise

18. March 28 – Thinking in Stereotypes
 - *Public Opinion*, Introduction, Parts 3, 6
19. March 31 – The Entering Wedge
 - *Public Opinion*, Part 8
20. April 4 – The Public
 - *The Public and its Problems*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 4
21. April 7 – The Role of Experts
 - *The Public and its Problems*, Chapters 5, 6
22. April 11 – Student Presentations

V. John Rawls and James Buchanan on the nature of justice

23. April 21 – John Rawls on the Idea of Justice as Fairness,
 - *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter I, §§1-4; Chapter IV §40
24. April 25 – The Original Position and the idea of reflective equilibrium,
 - *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter II, §§11-17, Chapter 3
25. April 28 – James Buchanan’s libertarian critique of Rawlsian liberalism
 - Review: Rawls on Justice as Fairness, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30022688>
26. May 2 – Student Presentations