

American Political Thought

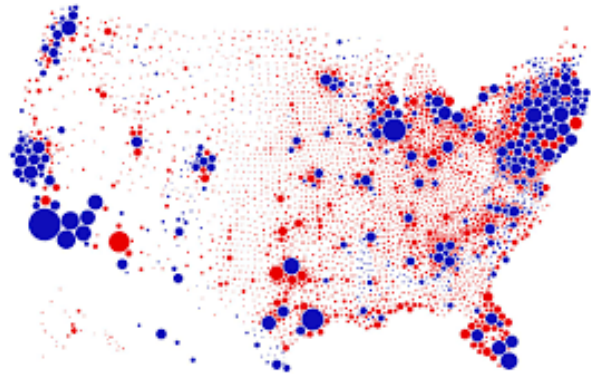
Professor Nicholas Tampio

Fordham University, Spring 2023, POSC 3404

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Class hours: Dealy Hall 206, TF 8:30-9:45 am

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

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

Malcolm X *Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (Grove Press) 9780802132130

The Radical King (Beacon Press) 0807034525

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

Many debates in American politics involve citing the founders and texts that articulate the country's ideals. Jefferson envisioned a republican form of government that combined popular rule and the protection of natural rights. Alexander Hamilton advocated a strong federal government leading the country on the global stage, and James Madison argued that the country could survive longer, and avoid democratic tyranny, with mechanisms such as checks and balances, federalism, and a bill of rights. John Adams identified a problem of wealthy people gaining even more power because of the esteem of the public, and he thought about how their power could be curtailed by

putting them in a weak senate. Finally, Phillis Wheatley and William Apess argue that America's founding ideals must extend to enslaved and indigenous peoples.

1. January 17 – Jefferson's vision

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

2. January 20 – Hamilton and a strong federal government

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

3. January 24 – Madison and Restrained Power

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

4. January 27 – Adams and the restraint of the oligarchy

- John Adams, [Dr. Franklin](#)
- [John Adams to Thomas Jefferson](#), 9 July 1813
- [John Adams to Thomas Jefferson](#), 2 September 1813

5. January 31 – William Apess on broken treaties between Europeans and the Natives

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

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

- "[On Being Brought from Africa to America](#)"
- Elizabeth Winkler, [How Phillis Wheatley Was Recovered Through History](#), New Yorker, July 30, 2020.

7. February 7 – No class. I'm at a conference.

8. February 10 – Student presentations

II. Alexis de Tocqueville on American Mores

The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in 1831-32 and then returned to France and wrote *Democracy in America*. The book explains how the United States differs from Europe because of its history, its laws, and its habits of the heart and mind (*mores*). Tocqueville also argues that the United States has solved the problem of individualism with a robust civil society that gives many citizens a chance to participate in self-governance.

9. February 14 – On what makes Americans distinct from Europeans
 - *Democracy in America*: Vol. I: Author's Introduction, Part I, Chapters 2, 3
10. February 17 – On the history, laws, and mores that make Americans democrats
 - *Democracy in America*: Vol. I, Part II, Ch. 9
11. February 21 – How America's combat individualism with free institutions
 - *Democracy in America*: Volume II, Part II (entire)
12. February 24 – Student Presentations
13. February 28 – Midterm

III. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

The United States cannot realize its egalitarian ideals if a group of people has less and is treated as less than other people. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, the Harvard-trained philosopher and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois argued that the country could benefit from integrating different communities, having the federal government take the lead in rebuilding the country after the Civil War, and training the Talented Tenth to lead the black community.

14. March 3 – Martin Luther King, Jr. on nonviolence
 - “Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi,” “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”
15. March 7 – Martin Luther King, Jr. on domestic and international politics
 - “Where Do We Go From Here?,” “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence”
16. March 10 – Malcolm X on violence
 - “Message to the Grass Roots,” “The Ballot or the Bullet”
17. March 21 – Malcolm X on domestic and international politics
 - “Letters from Abroad,” “Prospects for Freedom in 1965”
18. March 24 – Student Presentations

IV. Lippmann and Dewey on Democracy and Expertise

Democracy seems to assume that ordinary people are smart enough to make informed choices about the direction of the country. In *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippman argues that most people think in stereotypes and should let experts make the important political decisions. In *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey replies that people affected by policies can work with experts to actualize a democratic community.

19. March 28 – Thinking in Stereotypes

- *Public Opinion*, Introduction, Parts 3, 6
20. March 31 – The Entering Wedge
- *Public Opinion*, Part 8
21. April 4 – The Public
- *The Public and its Problems*, Introduction, Chapters 1, 4
22. April 11 – The Role of Experts
- *The Public and its Problems*, Chapters 5, 6
23. April 14 – Student Presentations

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

Many debates in American politics are about who gets what. The philosopher John Rawls thinks that the basic rules of society should be imagined by playing a game in which people don't want to end up disadvantaged. The economist James Buchanan argues that the same game will lead to people not wanting to lose much of their winnings. The debate between them will help us think about things like tax rates or whether the government is responsible for economic redistribution. The course ends with Susan Moller Okin arguing that justice requires making families more egalitarian.

24. April 18 – John Rawls on the Idea of Justice as Fairness,
- *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter I, §§1-4; Chapter IV §40
25. April 21 – The Original Position and the idea of reflective equilibrium,
- *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter II, §§11-17, Chapter 3
26. April 25 – James Buchanan's libertarian critique of Rawlsian liberalism
- Review: Rawls on Justice as Fairness, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30022688>
 - [Buchanan on Authentic Tax Reform](#)
27. April 28 – A feminist critique of Rawls
- [Susan Moller Okin, 'Forty acres and a mule' for women: Rawls and feminism](#) *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 4 (2):233-248 (2005)
28. May 2. Student Presentations

Final exam -

Friday, May 12, 2023	9:30 AM	11:30 AM
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