

Political Science 307: American Political Thought (online)
Montclair State University | Fall 2012
Instructor: Sarah Morgan Smith

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Please note, I generally only check my email once per day, Monday – Friday, and often do not check it at all on weekends. Do not be surprised, therefore, if it takes me 24 to 48 hours to respond to your message, and plan accordingly.

Office Hours: By Appointment

Since this is an online course, I will be happy to arrange to Skype or ‘chat’ with you in lieu of a face-to-face meeting to discuss any specific questions you have. Please email me to schedule such an appointment.



We will begin our course by discussing the ends of government as the American founders understood them, and considering how those ends informed the principles which they used in creating the United States as an independent nation. From there, we will examine the ways that the American people’s understanding and application of those principles to our political, social, and cultural life have developed over time. We will use both textual and visual materials in our study, focusing especially on the twin principles of equality and liberty.

Course Objectives:

1. Students should understand the central role of the principles of equality and liberty in American politics, including how differing individuals have used—and challenged—those ideas at different times in American history, especially in relation to debates over the nature of republican citizenship, and the proper duties and limits of government.
2. Students should be able to discuss ways in which American political thought reflects the inherent tension within the idea that men are created both free and equal.
3. Students will be able develop and apply their skills in both textual and visual analysis.

Course Organization:

If you have not taken an online course before, I recommend you familiarize yourself with the university’s “Guide to Becoming a Successful Online Learner”:

<http://frontpage.montclair.edu/tti/studentonline/index.html>

This semester runs from Wednesday, September 5 – Thursday, December 13. To take advantage of the flexibility of the on-line environment, this course will run asynchronously, which means that you can complete the work for each unit at your convenience within the guidelines listed below. For our purposes this semester, a “normal” week will start at 12:01AM on Monday and end at 5:00 PM on the following Saturday. The two exceptions to this rule shall be the first and last weeks; please check the syllabus for details.

The seminar format of the course will emphasize class discussion and critical thinking and writing. All members of the class will be expected to participate actively in the course by doing the assigned readings and visual analysis, contributing to online class discussions, and writing short critical “reaction” papers on the issues and themes under review.

Each week of the class will proceed as follows:

- 1) **Monday:** I will post lecture notes (in outline) and/or an audio lecture for the unit.
- 2) **Monday-Thursday:** discussion board open for comments. As this is an online class, timely and active participation on the discussion board each week will be important to refining your understanding the material. You can and should contribute to the online discussion of the material multiple times as it unfolds.
 - a. I will look in frequently during the week but may not be in the classroom every day, and at any rate, expect you to be engaging in a conversation with each other not only with me.
 - b. While these contributions will not receive an individual grade, taken as a whole they will count for **25%** of your final grade (see below). Please participate regularly and seriously.
- 3) **Saturday:** short response papers (2-3 pages) due by 5:00 p.m. (See detailed instructions below.) I will attempt to have written comments on your writing each week by Tuesday.

Requirements and Grading:

Discussion Board Participation — 30%

Preparation: Full participation for class entails not only reading all of the assigned texts, but thoughtfully reflecting upon and discussing them. In order to be prepared for this, you should take notes on the readings that identify key passages for discussion, or which you do not understand (including references to specific passages/page numbers).

Under each class meeting, I have listed one or two questions designed to guide your reading of the texts and which will appear on the discussion forum as a starting point.

Discussion Board Comments: On average, in order to ensure that it actually become a discussion forum rather than an isolated set of monologues, I ask that students make a minimum of one or two comments per week to the unfolding conversation.

Thoughtful questions to others count as a form of participation. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others’ views and opinions. Expect to be challenged, but look on it as an opportunity, not a threat.

Students should post arguments that directly reference the readings, including brief quotations and page numbers where applicable.

Note: readings listed in one unit may be referred to in other units.

Weekly Response Essays — 50% (10 essays, 5% each)

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to write a total of **ten** short response essays to the assigned readings, the prompts for which are listed in this syllabus. You should answer each question in 2-3 double spaced pages (12 point font, double spaced).

Read the instructions below carefully.

- You should not attempt to outline or laundry list every idea you have, rather choose one focused line of argumentation that brings a handful of the most important points you think support your case to bear on the subject. The best method of accomplishing this is to engage in a close reading of the text(s) and *Liberty and Freedom* – and marshal evidence from them to support your claims. Do not use any outside sources.
- Avoid editorializing. These essays demand careful textual analysis. I am looking for a sustained effort on your part in each to understand what these authors are saying and I am not at all interested in what you think about the merits or deficiencies of their arguments. So, unless I have specifically asked for your judgment about something in the question, do not waste the space and effort.
- Cite both direct quotes and all specific references to the text. By this, I mean: each and every time you use or refer to a specific passage to help develop your essay, you must use a citation (either line or page number) to tie this to the book. Failure to cite sources is plagiarism and will result in an automatic F on the assignment. Severe cases (any work simply copied without attribution) will be reported to the Dean of Students and result in an automatic final grade of F in the class.
- I will mark down all essays that deviate from the formatting requirements, and that are under or over the page limit; part of what I am testing here is your clarity of thought, and whether you can determine what really bears on the subject at hand and what does not.
- Yes, writing counts, so proofread your papers carefully. I will provide comments on grammar and style. If I ask you to see a writing tutor, please do so.

Each essay will be due by 5:00 pm on the Saturday of each week as noted on the syllabus via Safe Assign on Blackboard, and will be worth 5% of your final grade in the class.

There will be no revisions allowed. Late essays without verified medical excuse will be graded down one minus increment each day after the deadline. **This means you have a maximum of ten days before the assignment automatically counts as an F.**

Final Exam — 20%

You will be required to complete a timed exam on Blackboard at some point during the exam period, the exact date range TBD.

Academic Integrity

- ☞ Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course, and violations of academic integrity will be handled personally by the professor and prosecuted through the Office of the Dean of Students. See MSU's Definition and Policy on Academic Dishonesty (<http://www.montclair.edu/writing/firstyearwriting/academicintegrity.html>)
 - Please note that all your written work will be submitted via the Safe Assign system, which processes all student papers through an anti-plagiarism database. Be wise.
- ☞ I will be happy to answer any questions about plagiarism and citing sources you may have. Please note also the various resources available at the Center for Writing Excellence, including this guide to citing sources: <http://www.montclair.edu/cwe/dashboard-writing/citing-sources.html>
- ☞ In addition, I encourage you to take a look at this resource from the Rutgers University Library on taking and using notes for academic writing: http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml

Required Texts:

- ☞ David Hackett Fischer. *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (Oxford, 2004).
- ☞ All other materials for each week will be posted to Blackboard as indicated in the course schedule.
 - Note: I consider the “featured image” to be part of the week’s reading!

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus at any time, but will always give you at least a week’s notice of any change related to an assignment or due date.

∞ Course Schedule ∞

Unit 1 (September 5-8) Introduction to the Course; Methodology in Political Theory

Reading:

- ∞ Colburn and Uphoff, “Common Expository Problems in Students’ Papers and Theses,” in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 2012), pp. 291-297

Image:

- ∞ TBD – see PowerPoint Presentation on Blackboard.

Discussion Questions: (Comment by September 8—because this is a short week, the discussion will remain open for comments through Saturday night.)

- ∞ What does studying visual culture add to our understanding of political theory?

Unit 2 (September 10-15) Foundations and First Principles

Reading:

- ∞ *Liberty and Freedom*, pages 19-36, 50-60, 61-67, 107-112
- ∞ “The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved,” James Otis, 1763
- ∞ “A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,” John Adams, 1765

Image:

- ∞ *Magna Britannia*, Ben Franklin [Philadelphia, ca.1766]
- ∞ *Attempt to Land a Bishop in America* [London, September 1769]
- ∞ *The Alternative of Williams burg* [London, 1773]

Discussion Questions: (Comment by September 13)

What rights did the colonists believe were being infringed by the Parliament? What grounds do they offer for their resistance? How did Americans justify their critique of British policies?

Short Essay 1: (Due September 15)

How do the three images reflect the American understanding of their rights to liberty and freedom?

Unit 3 (September 17-22) Declaring Independence

Reading:

- ∞ *Liberty and Freedom*, pgs. 121-126, 175-178
- ∞ Declaration of Independence, 1776
- ∞ “Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825,” and “Letter to Roger Weightman, June 24, 1826,” Thomas Jefferson
- ∞ *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine

Image:

- ∞ *The Manner in which the American Colonies Declared themselves Independent of the King of England throughout the different Provinces, on July 4, 1776* [1776]
- ∞ *Wha Wants Me?* [1792]

Discussion Questions: (comment by September 20)

What are the grounds for declaring independence? What does the Declaration say is the purpose of government? How do the ‘self-evident truths’ work together to create one logical political argument? Where does the right and duty to resist tyranny come from? Explain the cartoon of Thomas Paine in light of your reading of *Common Sense*.

Short Essay 2: (due September 22)

Does the argument of Common Sense support the argument of the logic of the Declaration, extend it, or undermine it? Explain.

Unit 4 (September 24-29) The Constitution: Republican Government in Action

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, 189-202
- ☞ The Constitution of the United States
- ☞ *The Federalist* #47, 48, 49, 51, Publius, 1787
- ☞ “Essay I,” Brutus, 1787

Image:

- ☞ *The Looking Glass of 1787*

Discussion Questions: (comment by September 27)

In what ways is government created by the Constitution both national and federal? How is the separation of powers meant to work? What criticisms does Brutus have of the new Constitution, and how are these answered in the *Federalist* essays?

Short Essay 3: (due September 29)

Why is the legislative branch the one most to be feared in a republican government?

Unit 5 (October 1-October 6) The Constitution: Out of Many, One

Reading:

- ☞ The Constitution of the United States of America, 1787
- ☞ *The Federalist* #9-10, 39, Publius, 1787

Image:

- ☞ *Federal Superstructure*

Discussion Questions: (comment by October 4)

What is a faction and why is faction such a difficult problem to solve? Why is representative government, especially when extended over a large “sphere,” superior to democracy? How is an extended sphere made to be consistent with republican principles?

Short Essay 4: (due October 6)

Discuss the idea of an extended republic. What does an extended sphere contribute to good government?

Unit 6 (October 8-13) Religion and the Republic

Reading:

- ☞ “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments,” James Madison, 1785, and the Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, Thomas Jefferson, 1786
- ☞ The First Amendment
- ☞ “Second Inaugural Address,” Abraham Lincoln, 1865
- ☞ “I Have a Dream,” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Image:

- ☞ *Will it Pay?* [Chicago, c. 1876]
- ☞ *Women’s Holy War*
- ☞ *Martin Luther King, Preaching in Montgomery, Alabama*

Discussion Questions: (comment by October 11)

How can we reconcile the tension between the anti-establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment? What is the relationship between religion and reform in a republic? In his “I Have a Dream” speech, does King combine religion and politics in a way that upholds or subverts what has come to be known as the “wall of separation” between church and state?

Short Essay 5: (due by October 13)

What is religious liberty? How does it relate to republican citizenship?

Unit 7 (October 15-20) Republican Citizenship: Rights and Responsibilities

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, pages 203-212, 213-214
- ☞ “Little Speech on Liberty,” John Winthrop, 1645
- ☞ First Ten Amendments to the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights
- ☞ “On Property,” James Madison, 1791
- ☞ “The Moral Theory of Civil Liberty,” Henry Ward Beecher, 1869
- ☞ “What are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” Frederick Douglass, 1848

Image:

- ☞ *Patriotic Women*
- ☞ *The County Election*, George Caleb Bingham [1852]

Discussion Questions: (comment by October 18)

What rights are reserved to individuals in society that governments cannot take away? What responsibilities do individuals have? What is, or ought to be, the relationship between our rights and our responsibilities? What does Douglass’ stress on self-elevation indicate about his understanding of freedom?

Short Essay 6: (due October 20)

What does it mean to be a “self-governing people”?

Unit 8 (October 22-27) Civil Disobedience, and the Right to Resist

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, pages 249-262
- ☞ “The Despotism of the Majority,” William Leggett, 1837
- ☞ “Civil Disobedience,” Henry David Thoreau, 1849
- ☞ “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

Image:

- ☞ *Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man*, Philip Dawe [London, October 31, 1774]

Discussion Questions: (Comment by October 25)

How does public opinion function both positively and negatively in a republican government? How does the idea of knowable truth expressed in the Declaration of Independence relate to this issue? How can we appropriately respond when the government (or the majority) seems to be overstepping its bounds? What is the difference between the right to revolution (expressed in the Declaration) and the sort of civil disobedience advocated by Henry David Thoreau? How does King’s civil disobedience (or nonviolent resistance) against a particular law actually support obedience to the government and laws?

***** October 29-November 3 – Class Cancelled *****

Unit 9 (November 5-10) Nullification and Secession

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, 308-311, 312-314
- ☞ Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, 1798
- ☞ Counter-resolutions of Other States, 1799
- ☞ “Fort Hill Address,” John C. Calhoun, 1831
- ☞ “Disquisition on Government,” John C. Calhoun, 1851
- ☞ “First Inaugural Address,” Abraham Lincoln, 1861

Image:

- ☞ *Unite or Die*
- ☞ *Democracy, 1832 and 1864*

Discussion Questions: (comment by November 8)

Did the states retain a right to nullify federal laws and/or to secede under the Constitution? What does Calhoun mean by “interposition”? What does he mean by a concurrent majority and how is it related to secession? How does Lincoln explain the perpetuity of the Union?

Short Essay 7: (due November 10)

Explain why and how the claims of nullifiers and secessionists are incompatible with the vision of republican government enshrined in the American Constitution.

Unit 10 (November 12-17) Slavery and the Constitution

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, 274-289, 294-297
- ☞ Slavery clauses of Constitution: Art. I, sec. 2, cl. 3; Art. I, sec. 8, cl. 15; Art. I, sec. 9, cl. 1; Art. IV, sec. 2, cls. 1, 3
- ☞ "Slavery a Positive Good," John C. Calhoun, 1837
- ☞ "Speech on the Oregon Bill," John C. Calhoun, 1848
- ☞ "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," Frederick Douglass, 1852
- ☞ "The Constitution of the United States," Frederick Douglass, 1860
- ☞ "Corner Stone Speech," Alexander Stephens, 1861

Image:

- ☞ United States Slave Trade, 1830

Discussion: (Comment by November 15)

How does Calhoun deal with the claims of the Declaration of Independence? How does Douglass deal with them? What about Stephens? How are these competing claims related to Stephens' justifications for secession?

Short Essay 8: (Due November 17)

What status did slavery hold under the Constitution? [Be sure to consider both the Constitution itself, as well as the commentaries on the text provided by all this week's readings.]

***** November 18-24 Thanksgiving (No Classes) *****

Unit 11 (November 26-December 1) Identity, Difference, and Equality

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, pages 333-340, 355-361, 598-602, 603-607
- ☞ The Reconstruction Amendments to the US Constitution (13th – 15th Amendments)
- ☞ "The Atlanta Exposition Address," Booker T. Washington, 1895
- ☞ "Democracy and Education," Booker T. Washington, September 30, 1896
- ☞ "The Conservation of Races," W.E.B. DuBois, 1897
- ☞ "The Talented Tenth," W.E.B. DuBois, 1903

Image:

- ☞ *On To Freedom*
- ☞ *Employment of Negroes in Agriculture*, Earle Richardson [1934]

Discussion Questions: (comment by November 29)

What understanding of human nature informed Washington's policy of gradualism? Why does Du Bois seek to "conserve" the races? How would "the conservation of the races" help the future of the Negro race as well as the future of world civilization? What does he understand the purposes of liberal education to be? Is his understanding of liberal education compatible with his call for "the conservation of races"?

Short Essay 9: (due December 1)

How do Washington and DuBois each envision the destiny of African-Americans in the United States?

Unit 12 (December 3-8) Women's Rights

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, 263-268, 448-451
- ☞ "Declaration of Sentiments," Seneca Falls Convention, 1848
- ☞ Charlotte Perkins Stetson [later Gilman], "The Ballot as an Improver of Motherhood", NAWSA Convention (1896)
- ☞ "Why Women Should Vote," Jane Addams, 1910
- ☞ "The Fundamental Principle of a Republic," Anna Howard Shaw, 1915
- ☞ 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, 1920

Image:

- ☞ *The Women of '76: Molly Pitcher*
- ☞ *Official Program Cover: Women's Suffrage Procession* [1913]
- ☞ *Are You a Victory Canner?*

Discussion Questions: (comment by December 6)

What were the arguments in favor of suffrage? Are they primarily seeking 'freedom' or 'liberty' in Fischer's terms? What did the suffragettes imagine for women's future political participation?

Short Essay 10: (due by December 8)

How did the advocates for women's suffrage reconceive the relationship between the private and public sphere?

Unit 13 (December 9-13) Pragmatists, Progressives, and Liberals

Reading:

- ☞ *Liberty and Freedom*, 410-417, 421-424, 481-487, 553-558
- ☞ "Socialism and Democracy," Woodrow Wilson, 1887
- ☞ "The Moral Equivalent of War," William James, 1906
- ☞ "What is Progress?" Woodrow Wilson, 1913
- ☞ "Commonwealth Club Address," Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932
- ☞ "State of the Union Address," FDR, 1944

Image:

- ☞ *Ours to Fight for....Four Freedoms*, Norman Rockwell, 1943
- ☞ *Tenement Flats*, Millard Sheets, 1943

Discussion Questions: (due December 13)

What principles did the Progressives think were outdated, or inadequate to deal with the circumstances of their day? How did Progressivism attempt to fulfill the demands of an ethical or moral imperative? How did the ethical basis of Progressivism inform the vision of a potentially ideal society? What is the argument of the Commonwealth Club Address? Does FDR seek to replace or revise the original social contract?

December 14-20: **Examination Period – Exam Due Date TBD**