

N POT 4204 American Political Thought, Spring 2010
Thursdays, 5:30-8:15 p.m., 51/152
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We begin by interrogating the phrase “American Political Thought.” By thought, of course, we mean ideas. But by employing the singular instead of the plural, do we mean to suggest that there is one coherent body of thought that qualifies as “American”? What does it mean to say “American,” anyway? Is it simply that those thinkers who contributed to it were born in this country? If so, does it mean that the cogitations on politics on the part of any “natural born” thinker (the constitutional requirement for president), qualify as “American”? Or does “American” refer to certain principles? But if that’s the case, just what are those ideas? Why are they “American”? Is “American” something entirely *sui generis*, having emanated from a particular people of a certain culture in response to given political circumstances at a specific point in time? If so, is “American Political Thought” something of historical interest only, a curiosity of no relevance for today? After all, circumstances have changed, in significant ways so has our culture, and time has passed. We have “moved on,” as the current cliché has it. Or is “American Political Thought” something that has contemporary value? And if so, is this value only on offer in the United States, where it arose, or does it have purchase in other countries and cultures? Finally, if by “American Political Thought” we mean a coherent set of ideas, the main contours of which were delineated at the time of the founding of the United States of America that may or may not be relevant today, does it mean that even in this country there are or have been people, even people elected to office, that have or do espouse ideas that are un- or even anti-American?

These are among the questions that arise upon reflection on the title of this course. You may think of others. It is doubtful that we will develop good answers for all or most of them in the course of this semester, but at least they will serve as catalysts for the exploration of our subject.

Requirements

You are required to attend class faithfully and, having read the assigned reading beforehand, to contribute to the class either in person or on the discussion forum. Based on your contributions in both arenas, you will receive a weekly “preparation and contribution” grade (P&C for short) on a scale of 0 to 100. This will be computed as follows: For every day you are in class from start to finish, you will earn 80 points, unless in response to my questions it is evident that you did not read the assignment, in which case you will earn only 65 points. (If you leave after the break, you will earn only 50 points.) You can earn an additional 20 points during the week depending on the *quality* of your contributions, either in class or in the e-learning forum, which of course have to be rooted in the readings and videos for watching assigned). Talking off the top of your head, or talking a lot without saying anything meaningful, won’t earn you any points. (In fact, in such cases I would have to admonish you to restrain yourself.) By

quality, I mean thoughtful questions or comments that go to the heart of the matter at hand, particularly those that give insight into one or another reading or, even better, that identify parallels or contrasts among thinkers.

Grading. As well as P&C, which makes up 15% of the final grade, you will take four tests and write an essay. The first test will count for 25%. The remaining 60% is distributed equally among the remaining three tests and the essay. A format for the essay will be posted in due course.

Texts. Almost, although not quite all material on which you will be tested will draw from assigned readings in Kenneth M. Dobleare and Michael S. Cummings (Eds.), *American Political Thought* (6th edition), the autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass (both in the Dover Thrift Editions), and from a number of video-taped lectures by professors from around the country.

Integrity

It goes without saying, but it bears repeating anyway, that anyone enrolled in this course makes a commitment to act with integrity. As the home page of the Department of Government puts it, this means “conducting ourselves honorably, conspicuously refraining from lying or cheating about our work. There can be no phony excuses for failing to complete an assignment, no turning in another’s work as one’s own, no plagiarism.” Anyone found to have plagiarized is subject to being assessed a penalty up to and including being assigned an F in the course and reported to university authorities for additional measures.

Regarding the last-named offense, here is UWF’s plagiarism policy: “The UWF Student Handbook, Code of Student Conduct, Academic Misconduct, states: ‘Plagiarism. The act of representing the ideas, words, creations or work of another as one’s own.’ Plagiarism combines theft with fraud, and the penalty is correspondingly severe: failure for the assignment and, in some cases, for the entire course. At the instructor’s discretion, she/he may recommend that the student be suspended from the university. Ignorance of the rules about plagiarism is no excuse for it, and carelessness is just as bad as purposeful violation. Students who have plagiarized have cheated themselves out of the experience of being responsible members of the academic community and have cheated their classmates by pretending to contribute original ideas.” (For additional information on plagiarism, go the UWF’s home page, click on keyword search, and enter “plagiarism policy” (in quotation marks), which allows you to download a word document several pages long.)

Just to be sure there remains no doubt in anyone’s mind what plagiarism is, I require *everyone* to take the Library’s Tutorial on Plagiarism, *and* to pass a test, missing no more than 1 question. If you miss more than one, you need to retake the test as many times as needed until you miss no more than one question. You will need to e-mail me the results no later than Monday, January 11th, at 11:45 p.m. *Failure to comply will be penalized with a 0 in P&C for every day that the test result is not turned in.* The module and test are available at

http://library.uwf.edu/eli2/new_tutorials/module_plagiarism/outcomes.shtml

Student Conduct

It is the students' responsibility to read the Student Code of Conduct, available at <http://www.uwf.edu/judicialaffairs>. Please know that anyone violating its provisions may be penalized by expulsion from a course or the university.

Disability Services

Students with special needs who require specific examination-related or other course-related accommodations should contact Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director of Disabled Student Services (DSS), dss@uwf.edu, (850) 474-2387. DSS will provide the student with a letter for the instructor that will specify any recommended accommodations.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments through First Test Only
(The schedule is subject to revision at instructor's discretion, with notice.)

January 7

Antecedents

Watch the following videos (see the links on the e-learning page):

"The Uniqueness of the West," by Bruce Thornton

"England, an Elegy," by Roger Scrutton

"Magna Carta and Its Lasting Relevance on American
Freedom," by Andrew Roberts

January 14

Puritan Beginnings

The Mayflower Compact (see link on e-learning page)

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.1. John Winthrop

I.2. Roger Williams

I.3. John Wise

De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Ch. 2

Watch the following video:

"Did America Have a Religious Founding?," by Dr. Barry Alan
Shain et al.

January 21

The Founding

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.4. Benjamin Franklin

I.5. Samuel Adams

I.6. Benjamin Rush

I.7. Thomas Paine

I.16. George Washington

Watch the following videos:

"Ben Franklin and the Traditions of American Diplomacy,"
By Harvey Sicherman

"George Washington: Father of His Country," by Richard
Brookhiser

January 28

The Founding (continued)

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 1, 2, 7-9, 19

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.8. Declaration of Independence

I.9. The Articles of Confederation

I.10. The Constitution of the United States

Watch the following video:

"Democratic Greatness in the American Founding," by
Harvey C. Mansfield

February 4

The Founding (concluded)

Federalists

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.12. In Favor of Adopting the Constitution

Other (TBA)

Anti-Federalist Papers

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.13. Against Adopting the Constitution

Other (TBA)

Hamilton vs. Jefferson

Dolbeare and Cummings:

I.14. Alexander Hamilton's Program

I.15. Thomas Jefferson: Principles and Programs

Watch the following videos:

1. "The American [Founding Vision](#) and the Trajectory of the Western Civilization," by Bradley C. S. Watson.

2. "Moved: The [Anti-Federalists](#) Were Right to Oppose the Ratification of the US Constitution" by Gary L. Gregg II

Suggested, not required (see link on e-learning page):

"Jefferson vs. Hamilton Redux. The Debate Over ObamaCare Brings to Mind an Old Dispute," by A. G. Cuzán

February 11

Test I (25%)

Tentative Schedule of Remaining Topics, Tests, and Essay

February 18 Crisis of the House Divided

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, by Frederick Douglass.

Re-read Benjamin Rush, "An Address to the inhabitants of the British Settlements in America Upon Slave-Keeping," in Dolbeare and Cummings, pp.44-46.

Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision," "Letter to Boston Republicans," and excerpt from "Cooper Union Address," in Dolbeare and Cummings, pp. 263-268.

February 25 Crisis of the House Divided (concluded)

Abraham Lincoln, in Dolbeare and Cummings, 268-277

13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution

Watch the following videos:

"The Lincoln Legacy: Proclamation and the End of Slavery" by Allen C. Guelzo

"Lincoln and the Promise of the Founding Toward a More Perfect Union" by Herman Belz

March 4 Test II (15%)

March 11 SPRING BREAK

March 8 Populism

Dolbeare and Cummings, #29, 30, and 31 (pp. 317-339)
Wm. Jennings Bryan "Cross of Gold" speech, at
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5354/>

March 25 Progressivism

Dolbeare and Cummings, #40, 41, 43, and 44.

April 1

“New Deal”: Franklin D. Roosevelt

Note: if the links don't work, go to AmericanRhetoric.com and search for the speeches. You shouldn't have any trouble finding them.

Dolbeare and Cummings, #45

Read and *listen* to

“[First Inaugural](#) Address,” March 4, 1933.

What is known as the “[Four Freedoms](#)” speech, an address to congress on January 6, 1941.

“Pearl Harbor [Address](#) to the Nation,”

April 8

“Neo-Conservatism”: Ronald Reagan”

Dolbeare and Cummings, #55

Read and *listen* to

“A Time for Choosing,” what is known as “[The Speech](#),” October 27, 1964.

“[Remarks](#) at the Branderburg Gate,” June 12, 1987.

“[Farewell](#) Address,” January 11, 1989.

April 15

Last class session. Ahead of time, watch "Teaching America's Founding Principles in Higher Education," by Richard Epstein

This will be our last class session, although the discussion forum will remain open for another week. We will only meet for half the class period. We will discuss the video, administer the end-of-semester questionnaire, then remove ourselves to the Fine Arts auditorium to listen to Judge Napolitano, who will speak on the First Amendment. I hope that at least the bolder members of the class will ask him questions.

April 23

Essay Due at 8:00 a.m. (20%). No late submissions accepted, no excuses allowed.

April 30

Test III due at 8:00 a.m. (20%). No late submissions accepted, no excuses allowed.