POLI 280: American Political Thought
Spring Term 2021
MWF, 9:05-9:55 AM
Online only - Synchronous

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Virtual Office Hours via Zoom: MWF 11:00AM-12:00PM and by appointment.

Course Description

This course is a broad survey of the main themes, controversies, and debates of American political thought from the colonial period to the present. Along the way, we will read and wrestle with a variety of arguments, from a wide variety of perspectives, on the fundamental questions of American politics and American identity. It has been said before that the United States is a nation of contradictions; this course will introduce you to many of those contradictions.

Before we begin, we should clarify what is meant by "American Political Thought." I am well aware that there were plenty of people on these continents before European settlers, and that the United States doesn't encompass all that is "America." However, this is a course on political thought that has to do with the United States of America, and the colonies that immediately preceded it. Every course of study has its boundaries, and those are ours.

With a satisfactory working definition of "American" in hand, we can proceed to the latter part: "political thought." Now, you may have heard the terms "political theory" or "political philosophy" before—and perhaps you've taken a class in one of these disciplines. Each of these terms describes a *method* of thinking about politics—in each case, a formalized, highly theoretical method that aims at precision in both thought and writing. "Political thought"—at least as I conceive of it—is a much broader category. Political thought is, quite simply, the product of thinking about politics. And, as it turns out, a lot of people spend a lot of time thinking about politics. Some think well, some think poorly; some produce useful or compelling or provocative "political thought" and others do not.

The history of American political development is, in many ways, the history of clergymen, poets, musicians, lay citizens, and yes, politicians thinking about what it means to be an "American" or to live in America, or what American society should look like. We'll examine a wide variety of these perspectives. Over the course of this term, my hope is to both widen your own horizons as you critically engage with the history of American thought, and to give you ample inspiration and equipment to articulate your own thoughts about our shared home.

Course Schedule

This course is organized into three units, corresponding to three main aeons in American history. Unit I will focus on the founding period of the American republic, from its colonial roots to the American Civil War. Constitutional organization, political articulation, self-government, and the

adoption of an American political culture make up the central themes of this period. Unit II follows the consolidation of federal authority, nation-building, and questions of race, identity, and expansion from the Civil War to the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II. Each of these units will be organized in largely chronological fashion, addressing specific issues as they become central in the American political imaginary. In Unit III, we will turn to a largely topical organization, with each week covering major developments and disputes in American political thought from World War II through the present. During this period, we will continue to talk about the issues of race, gender and sexuality, foreign policy, and the environment (among many others). A more detailed course schedule, including reading assignments, may be found on Sakai.

Course Requirements and Grading

Your course grade will be determined by your satisfaction of the following requirements, and weighted as listed below. I have outlined in some detail each dimension of the course grade.

Assignment Weights
Participation: 10%
Unit I Exam: 10%
Thesis Defense Paper (Paper I): 10%
Unit II Exam: 15%
Interpretive Paper: 15% (Paper II)
Critical Paper (Paper III): 25%
Unit III Exam: 15%

Participation and Effort
Our class will meet for 50 minutes, from 9:05-9:55 AM EST on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Meetings will be hosted on Zoom. On certain days, I may pre-record a video lecture in lieu of our meeting, which you may watch at your convenience before the next scheduled meeting. It is absolutely essential that you make an effort to attend every scheduled meeting and to participate in a way that will foster your own learning and that of your classmates. Attendance is mandatory, and is more than just joining the meeting. You should come to class having read the assigned readings, considered any discussion questions posted on slack, and prepared your thoughts. You should plan to be present both virtually (camera on) and mentally (focused, taking notes, and engaging). I know that teleconferencing can be taxing, and that a host of distractions threaten to take your attention away from our conversation. I am asking you to do your level best to minimize those distractions—please keep your phone out of your hands and stay off of non-course related sites, even if you know I can't see it.

Participation in this class may take many forms, and I am generally open-minded. Below is a short and non-exhaustive list of ways you can participate in our class and contribute to a productive learning environment:

Synchronous:

- Raising your hand and asking questions or responding to discussion questions during Zoom meetings.

- Visually responding and engaging during Zoom sessions (smiling, nodding, thumbs up, using the built-in reactions).
- Asking questions using the Zoom chat.
- Speaking with me during office hours.

Asynchronous

- Asking questions (via email or Slack) about the readings, assignments, or American political thought in general.
- Participating regularly in our Slack workspace—sharing your thoughts on readings, engaging with and responding to others, sharing resources, articles, links, etc.

Reading

Political theory is a reading-intensive discipline. While I have done my best to limit the length and difficulty of assigned readings, you should be prepared to spend a significant amount of time completing the assigned readings prior to attending class. I almost exclusively assign primary source documents, and many of these are dense, difficult or written in an unfamiliar style. Reading well will require long periods of time uninterrupted by your technology or circumstances. I recommend reading in a well-lit place with a pencil in hand and a notebook nearby to record any questions, comments, or areas that require clarification. Do not expect to skim the readings once and understand it fully; I have read each of these texts many times and still find myself learning new things with each visit.

Exams

There will be three exams, each one following the completion of a course unit. The first exam is worth 10 percent of your grade, the latter two are worth 15 percent each. These assessments are designed to measure your knowledge of the readings assigned and discussed in class, as well as other course concepts. Exams should be completed in one sitting, and are open book and open note (though not open internet or open-classmate). In other words, you may access your notes and books, but no other resources will be permitted.

Papers

You will write three papers for this course. Each paper will help you develop a new skill of analysis and argumentation, and will build on the previous paper. Together, the papers are worth 50 percent of your grade—so please take them seriously! Producing any type of writing is a process of drafting, sharing, redrafting, and revising. In this course, I highly recommend you begin thinking about your paper as soon as you receive the prompt. These papers are your primary opportunity to develop your interpretive and critical skills.

An excellent paper will be stylistically elegant and almost entirely free of errors, show a good understanding of assigned readings and course content, and contain a significant amount of original critical content. A summary or outline of the paper without a critical argument is *not* adequate and will not receive a good grade. *Failure to submit three papers will result in failure of the course.*

The bulk of your paper grade will be based on your demonstrated understanding and critical analysis of the text, your response to the prompt, and your clear, error-free, and elegant use of the English language. You may, however, be penalized for failing to adhere to the following guidelines.

Paper Guidelines

Submission: Papers must be submitted by the deadline marked on the prompt. Upload your completed paper to the 'Drop Box' folder on the course Sakai site. This is a private, secure folder that only you and I can access. I will return your graded paper via Drop Box. Your file should be named '[LastnameFirstname] I', '[LastnameFirstname] II', or '[LastnameFirstname] III' (for example, my first essay would be named 'YoungMatthew I'). and saved as a .doc or .docx file format.

Formatting and Length: Papers must be typed in a 12-point serif font such as Times New Roman, Georgia, or Garamond, with 1-inch margins. Please place page numbers on all pages and keep first-page assignment info (my name, course numbers, etc.) to a minimum. Your word count (excluding bibliographic entries and assignment info) should be clearly typed at the top of the paper. Papers should fall within the length specified within the assignment (for example, 800-1200 words. Papers shorter than the minimum length will have a multiplicative penalty of length/minimum applied, while papers longer than the maximum will have a multiplicative penalty of maximum/length applied. Roughly speaking, this means that if you submit a paper that is only 75 percent of the required length, you can earn at most 75 percent of the available credit.

Works Cited: You should include a works cited page at the end of your paper if you reference any works other than those assigned. I do not care what bibliographic style you use, so long as I can track down the source. You *must*, however, include specific page number citations (either parenthetic or as footnotes) when you reference or quote a text.

Lateness: All students will be given one 'grace day' for their papers. You may turn in one paper, one day (24 hours) late, without penalty. After that, late papers will be assessed a 10 percent penalty for each day late.

Grading Scale:

All letter grades will be given according to the following scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	60-66
F	0-59

Technology and Classroom Behavior

You will need a computer with a working microphone and webcam to participate in this course. Otherwise, your cell phones and other electronic devices should be silenced and put away. Pedagogical studies suggest that material is better processed and retained when students take notes by hand—so even though you will be using your computer to be "in" class, I still recommend that you come to our class meetings online with the hard copy of the text in front of you and a notebook. Think of your computer as a portal to our classroom.

Of course, I cannot guarantee your own attention during class (or your honesty in completing assignments), and I categorically refuse to use the modern surveillance tools that have become popular on our campus, as I consider them a violation of your privacy and of my trust in you. I can only guarantee you that I put considerable effort into being prepared for class and your questions, and will always do my best to make our discussions engaging and interesting. I ask that you do the same. Together we can make this a pleasant and productive experience. It should go without saying that standard rules for classroom etiquette do not fail to hold simply because our classroom is virtual. If you would not sleep, multi-task, or goof off in a face-to-face classroom, you should not do it on Zoom.

Civility and Intellectual Engagement

In this course we will frequently discuss ideas, theories, and concepts that may be divisive or contentious. I expect the highest standard of civil discourse and mutual respect from, and for, all participants in this class. For my part, it is not my goal to persuade you to see politics through any particular lens, or to convince you of my political positions. As I will explicitly remind you throughout the term, my aim is to help you appraise and examine the various positions we encounter with charity, integrity, and rigor. Some of the ideas we encounter may be similar to convictions that you or others you know hold. Other ideas may be hostile to your own deeply held religious, ethical, or political commitments. In all, I expect you to react with academic integrity, maturity, and civility.

There are a number of issues particular to the content of this course that may make civil discourse and critical engagement difficult. The diversity of thought within American political history guarantees that you will encounter arguments and ideas within this class that are written from a very different perspective than your own. Further, you will encounter viewpoints with which you have deep, profound, and intractable disagreements. We will read works that articulate views that I myself find morally repugnant and deeply loathsome. The same will be true for you. So why do we read such things? There are three main reasons. First, this is a course in the *history* of political thought—and history is full of people who held views we now broadly condemn. Changes are, at least some of the views you and I hold today will be condemned by our children and grandchildren. Faithfully teaching history requires understanding and discussing views that were common and influential historically, even if we disagree with them. It is impossible to grasp the multifaceted history of a people if we only study the good and commendable parts of that history. Second, there are many ideas that, though wrong, contain some element of the truth. Likewise, there are ideas that are largely correct, yet still contain errors. Almost everything we will read fall into these categories. Our own moral lives are improved and strengthened by drawing them into contrast with

other ways of thinking. A good question to ask, when reading for this class, is "What *might* be right about this?" An equally helpful question is "What doesn't seem right about this?

So what about the ideas that we are absolutely certain are incorrect? We'll read some things this term that fall into this realm—arguments that you find not only misguided or mistaken, but deeply and indisputably objectionable on a moral level. What is there to be gained by reading such things? Well, our ability to competently understand, articulate, and defend our own views is improved by contrast and dispute. When you read something of this sort, please do not shut down! If you need to, step back from your books or computer, take a walk or a few deep breaths, and talk to me, your classmates, or someone else about it. But do return. And when you do return, follow your best instincts. Think deeply about *why* such a view is incorrect—not simply that it is. Take it as an opportunity to hone your analytic abilities, and improve your own convictions. I believe that a commitment to civil engagement and critical analysis will better enable us all to analyze and respond to such views when we encounter them outside the classroom. I am aware that this is a difficult and challenging task, and I hope that you trust me to be a fair and considerate guide as we navigate the muddy waters of American political thought.

I must add one final word. Some of the texts we will read, unfortunately, apply epithets, slurs, or inappropriate language to people on the basis of their sex, gender, race, ethnicity, or religious identity. In some cases, the language used was not considered offensive at the time, but is certainly off-limits today In other cases, the authors intentionally used incendiary or derogatory language. Neither I nor the editors of our anthology have censored these words or phrases. Every work is a product of its time, and I prefer to let historical texts stand for analysis as they were written. However, it goes without saying that you should not use any sort of derogatory, discriminatory, or uncivil language in our classroom. There is some debate, though, about whether it is permissible to repeat such language when referencing or reading the words of others. I would prefer that all epithets, slurs, and inappropriate language remain outside of our classroom. Put simply, there are words that I prefer to neither speak nor hear, even when used in the context of historical documents. If you are reading aloud from a text or referencing the words of a historical figure, you may pause or substitute a more appropriate word or phrase of your choosing. In the context of your written work—exams, papers, etc.—you may choose to either render the quote verbatim, to omit the term with a note in brackets (ex., "He was a [racial epithet]") or to substitute more appropriate language (ex. "He was [an immigrant]").

Communication

There are four means of communication open to you: Zoom, Sakai, Slack, and email. I'll explain each option below:

Zoom: for class meetings, office hours, and appointments. Zoom is best used for long questions or consultations.

Sakai: I will use Sakai for posting assignments, any course readings not contained in the book, and announcements for the entire course. Announcements will be duplicated on Slack.

Slack: I've opened a Slack Workspace for our class. We'll talk more about how to use Slack, but this will be your hub for discussion and conversation surrounding the class. You should use Slack

for responses to discussion questions, quick short questions directed to me, questions about assignments, papers, or readings that you think other students might share, reactions to and discussions of the readings or class discussions, and chatting about American political thought with your classmates. Regular participation on Slack counts towards your participation grade.

Email: You should use email for any communication that should remain private, including questions about grades, requests for extensions, explanations of absences, etc. My email address is mhyoung@live.unc.edu

I strive to be prompt in responding to your communications, regardless of the medium. However, you should note that I strive to keep normal work hours and as such may not immediately answer messages that arrive late at night or during the weekend. I do not, as a rule, read or respond to emails or messages on Sunday.

Course Texts

Required: You should rent or purchase print copies of the texts listed below.

1. *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology*. Eds. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi.

First Edition ISBN: 0393928861. Second Edition ISBN: 0393655903

You may use either the first or second edition—whichever is cheaper. This book is fairly expensive, but contains almost all of the readings required for the course in one place. Used copies of the book may be much cheaper, and available on Amazon, Thrift Books, or your favorite purveyor of books. Copy and paste the ISBN number to easily find the text.

2. A compact/pocket edition of the Constitution of the United States.

I don't care which version you purchase, but it will be a handy reference tool throughout the term. There are dozens of available options, such as this popular edition available for only $1 via Amazon:

Recommended: While not required, you may find a short history of the United States helpful. This is a course in the history of American Political Thought, and many of the assigned readings deal with historical controversies and conflicts. While there are many good histories of the United States, Paul S. Boyer's *American History: A Very Short Introduction* is lively, considerate, cheap, and very brief. At under 100 pages of content, you could read it in an afternoon to refresh yourself regarding U.S. history. For now, this book is available to read online through the UNC Library.

Academic Integrity and Accommodations

Academic Integrity

Students and faculty at UNC are governed by the Honor Code. Academic dishonesty will absolutely not be tolerated. Any student who is caught presenting someone else's work as their own, making inappropriate use of resources, or behaving dishonestly in any manner will be strictly penalized, reported to the relevant authorities, and may be subject to Honor Court proceedings.

For additional information about academic dishonesty and plagiarism, please see http://www.lib.unc.edu/plagiarism.

Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Services Office. See the ARS Website for contact information: https://ars.unc.edu