

American Political Thought

Colgate University

Instructor

Rachelle Walker, PhD.
rwalker@colgate.edu

Office Hours:

Mon & Weds: 10:20-11:20 &
1:20-2:20 in Spear House,
room #5, or by appointment.



Class

POSC 382
Spring 2020

Room: Alumni 109

Time: TR 1:20-2:35

Course Description

No other nation can be like America, Margaret Thatcher once observed, because all other nations “are the product of history and not of philosophy” (Speech at the Hoover Institution, 1991). The American Founding, in other words, was a philosophic creation: the Founders may have borrowed from history, but they established a regime rooted in “the laws of nature and nature’s God,” which they believed revealed self-evident truths of human equality, and the fundamental truths of human nature. The American Founding was an *idea* far more than a tradition – and though we progress and change and move forward into history, that idea never quite lets us go. This course is a study in the themes and cycles of this philosophic regime between the time of the Founding and the dawn of our own era in the 1960s. We will look at the American Founders who left us the spirit of both reform and liberty, a tension that came to shape all subsequent American politics. We will study the development of that tension in the Antebellum and Civil War eras, and the response from Abraham Lincoln in his attempt to recover the principles of the Founding when they fell into great doubt. We will look at the subsequent Gilded Age and Progressive Era with the rise of social Darwinism and the new emphasis on administrative government over capitalism. We will then examine concepts of American identity – the rise of “Americanism,” the possibilities envisioned in social engineering, the nature of racial tension, and the women’s movement. Lastly, we will consider the origins of radicalism and the new liberalism of our own time, and the conservative response.

Required Texts

The following texts are required (in the order we’ll be reading them):

Lincoln, Abraham. *Great Speeches*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. New York: Dover Publications, 1996. (Originally published in 1888)

Sumner, William Graham. *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*. Caldwell: Caxton Press, 2003. (Originally published by Harper & Brothers, 1883.)

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Minola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994. (Originally published in 1901.)

Kirk, Russell. *The American Cause*. Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009. (Originally published in 1957.)

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Participation and Reading Questions (10%).** Come to class every day and be prepared to discuss the texts based on the weekly reading questions.
- **Essay I (30%).** This is an essay on the first part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Essay II (30%).** This is an essay on the second part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Final Exam (30%).** This is a comprehensive exam on the texts and general themes of the class. There will be a study guide.

Academic Integrity

Needless to say, plagiarism (the use of someone else's work—a couple of sentences or a whole paper—without giving them explicit credit) will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of F on any piece of class work. See the Student Handbook for details. Similarly, cheating on an exam will receive an immediate F and a referral to the Dean. Avoid the need to cheat by contacting the professor for help ahead of time.

Learning Services

If you have a disability that prevents you from doing as well as you could in this class, be sure to contact Lynn Waldman, Director of Academic Support and Disability Services, to discuss your specific needs and set up arrangements with the professor. Lynn's office is in the Center for Learning, Teaching and Research, and you can email her at lwaldman@colgate.edu, or call her at 315 228 7375.

Classroom Etiquette

At all times, please act with respect toward the professor and toward your classmates. *Mentally set aside the entire class period as a time for pursuing greater knowledge of this subject.* Please do not use cell phones or other nifty electronic devices.

Class Schedule

I. The Early Republic

Week 1 – Founding Statesmanship

January 21

Reading Packet – George Washington

January 23

Reading Packet – Alexander Hamilton

Week 2 – A Classical or Modern Republic

January 28

Reading Packet – John Adams

January 30

Reading Packet – Thomas Jefferson

Week 3 – Founding Pragmatism

February 4

Reading Packet – James Madison

February 6

Reading Packet – James Madison

Week 4 – Democracy in the Republic

February 11

Reading Packet – John Calhoun, Slavery as a Positive Good (1837); Speech on the Oregon Bill (1848); William Lloyd Garrison, “No Compromise on the Evil of Slavery” (1854); Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (1848)

February 13

Reading Packet – Stephen Douglas, Homecoming Speech (1858); Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – House Divided Speech

Week 5 – Lincoln’s Greatness

February 18

Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – Lyceum Address; Address at the Cooper Institute

February 20

Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – First Inaugural Address; Gettysburg Address; Second Inaugural Address

II. The State and the Free Market

Week 6 – American-Style Socialism

February 25

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

February 27

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

Week 7 – Social Darwinism

March 3

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

March 5

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

Essay I – Due Friday, March 6

Week 8 – Social Darwinism (continued)

March 10

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

March 12

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

III. American Identity

Week 9 – Engineering Americans

March 24

Readings – Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life* (1900); Readings – Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922)

March 26

Lucretia Mott, *Discourse on Woman* (1849)

Week 10 – Race

March 31

Readings – Booker T. Washington, Atlanta Speech; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

April 2

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Week 11 – Race (continued)

April 7

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

April 9

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

IV. American Cultural Dissent

Week 12 – Radicals!

April 14

Readings – The Port Huron Statement; Mario Savio, *An End to History* (1964); Jerry Ruben, *The Yippie Manifesto*;

April 16

Readings – Stokely Carmichael, “*Toward Black Liberation*”; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

Week 13 – Conservatism

April 21

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

April 23

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

Week 14 – Conservatism (continued)

April 28

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

April 30

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

Final Exam – Tuesday, May 7, 9-11am
--