

PLPT 305: American Political Thought
University of Virginia, Spring 2008
CAB 318: M, W, 2-3:15

Professor M. Rogers
Cabell Rm. 147/x.4-3614

Spring 2008
Office Hours: W,
3:30-5

Purpose

This course surveys the very contentious terrain of American political and philosophical thought. In doing so, we will analyze recurring tensions within the ideological development of the United States. The large themes include America's seemingly entrenched realism and revolutionary idealism, its commitment to freedom and sustained affirmation of inequality, and its belief in democratic governance and tendency toward oligarchy and elitism. In doing so, we will examine secondary themes such as the religious foundation of American identity, the relationship between individual rights and the common good, national identity, freedom and slavery, obedience and revolution. The concern is not exclusively with the particular events that constitute American political history. Rather, our concern is with the philosophical foundation of America's political identity.

Required Texts

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Barnes and Noble)
Thomas Jefferson, *The Essential Jefferson* (Hackett)
The Federalist (Hackett)
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Perennial)
Mark Twain, *Puddn'head Wilson And Those Extraordinary Twins* (Oxford Classics)
David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (Penn State)
W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (W. W. Norton)
Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Free Press)
John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press)

All readings marked with an [*] can be found under the materials section of toolkit.

Course Requirements and Standards

The most important requirement of the course is that you read all assigned texts carefully and before class. Your grade will be calculated as follows:

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|---|--------------|-----|
| Paper1, Friday, Feb. 8 th , 5. p.m. | 5 page essay | 15% |
| Paper2, Friday, Feb. 29 th , 5. p.m. | 5 page essay | 20% |
| Paper3, Friday, Mar. 14 th , 5. p.m. | 5 page essay | 20% |
| Final Essay Exam | TBD | 30% |
| Participation | | 15% |

Note: All papers are due on the day and time specified in the writing assignment. Papers that are late without permission will be penalized. Penalty: half a letter grade for each day the paper is late.

Participation

Because the course will not be driven exclusively by lectures, it is essential that you come prepared to discuss the material and move the conversation along. I have provided you with a set of guidance questions for each set of readings. These questions are meant to help you distill the distinct arguments being made in the reading assignments and to understand the connection among the readings. **You should not read merely to answer the questions, but to understand why they were asked. You should write down answers to the questions only after having gone through the reading.** You should then come to class prepared to offer your thoughts on the questions and the larger themes to which those questions are attached.

Assessing participation is difficult; it isn't a science. For this class participation is based on both **frequency** of participation and **quality** of comments made. Do you ground your reflections in the material? Are your comments substantively unhinged from the readings on which you rely in making your reflections? Do you thoughtfully engage the comments of your classmates? These are just some of the questions I ask myself as I think about participation grade.

Paper Drafts

I will read at least 1 draft of each paper if asked. In this instance, draft means the following: either a completed introduction with thesis statement or a completed paper.

Excuses

Assignments are due on the dates outlined in the syllabus. Although there may be times when something arises and you cannot turn in an assignment on time, these should be rare circumstances. You will have plenty of time, however, to prepare accordingly for your assignments. Nonetheless, things sometimes happen unexpectedly, and I am willing to work with you if a situation beyond your control arises.

Disability Statement

All students with special needs requiring accommodations should present the appropriate paperwork from the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (LNEC). It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and follow up with the instructor about the accommodations being offered. The LNEC is located in the Department of Student Health and can be contacted at 243-5180/5181.

Reading Schedule

Wed., Jan, 16:

Introduction

Mon., Jan, 21: MLK DAY- NO CLASS

ERRAND IN THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS AND THE ORIGINAL FOUNDING

Wed., Jan 23

John Winthrop: "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630)*

Jonathan Edwards, "The Latter-Day Glory Is Probably to Begin in America" (1743)*

Guidance Questions:

1. What does Winthrop mean by Christian Charity?
2. Given that Winthrop opens the sermon with the fact of Divinely sanctioned inequality, how does he justify the necessity of charity?
3. What kind of politics, if any, do you think follows from a commitment to Christian Charity?
4. Why is America compared to Israel? What is the significance of this comparison?
5. How does the imagery of wilderness function in Edwards' "The Latter Day Glory of God Is Probably to Begin in America"?
6. What is the significance of Edwards including "probably" in the title?

AMERICA AND THE RADICAL IMPULSE

Mon., Jan 28:¹

- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), pp. 11-55
- "Declaration of Independence" in *The Essential Jefferson* (1776), pp. 18-27
- Jefferson To Thomas Law, June 13, 1814; To Henry Lee, May 8, 1825; To Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826 in *The Essential Jefferson*, pp. 222-25, 267-68, 277-78
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Author's Introduction, pp. 9-20, Vol. 1, Pt. I, chap. 3, pp. 50-57

Background Reading

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1689), Chapters 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9*

Guidance Questions:

1. In Paine's view, why is the identity of the author of *Common Sense* unimportant? What is the implication of this for understanding the argument?
2. Why does Paine make a distinction between society and government?
3. Paine begins *Common Sense* with an analysis of the principles of government and an attack on hereditary rule and the validity of monarchy. What arguments does he advance against these systems of rule?
4. In what sense are the colonists the true descendants of the Israelites, and not the English? In this regard, what other appeals to religion does Paine employ to make the case for revolution?
5. Paine worries about America identifying itself with England. Why?
6. What does Jefferson mean by "laws of nature and of nature's God?"
7. What are the differences between Jefferson and Locke?
8. In Jefferson's view, what is the legitimate basis of government?
9. How should we understand the relationship between the official and unofficial version of the Declaration of Independence, especially given that the latter denounces slavery? Does this omission undermine the universal egalitarian claim of the official document?
10. What does Jefferson mean by "moral instinct"?

¹ This is a heavy reading day. Please take note and prepare accordingly.

CONSTITUTIONALISM AND REDEFINING THE RADICAL IMPULSE

Wed., Jan. 30:

- John Adams, “Thoughts on Government” (1776)*
- Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, The Federalist, (1787-88), #1-2, 6, 9-10, 14-15, 23

Mon. Feb. 4:

- Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, The Federalist, #39, 45-47, 49-51, 78, 81
- Gordon S. Wood, “The American Science of Politics”*

Guidance Questions:

1. What are the primary concerns of the Federalists? What institutional proposals do they recommend to address these concerns?
2. What does Hamilton mean when he says: “Jealousy is the usual concomitant of violent love, and that the noble enthusiasm of liberty is too apt to be infected with a spirit of narrow and illiberal distrust” (p.3)? And how can this lead to despotism?
3. What do the Federalists think of republican political thought? How do they see themselves improving upon the tradition?
4. The problem of factions animates the Federalists. How does Madison understand this problem and what is his solution?
5. What do Madison, Jay and Hamilton mean by human nature? What is the relationship, if any, between the account of human nature on display and the proposals offered?
6. The Federalists constantly draw a distinction between what they are offering and the ancient or classical democratic models that once existed. What is their primary criticism of democracy? Given their worries, is it appropriate to describe the United States as a democracy?
7. In Wood’s historical analysis, “the entire government had become the limited agency of the sovereign people” (599). What does this imply about those parts of the federal government most removed from the people?
8. Wood speaks about how the American constitution transformed the contractual basis of government in the 18th century. What precisely does he mean?
9. In Wood’s view, what is the difference between the American system of government and the classical notion of mixed government?

CONSTITUTIONALISM AND CONSTRAINING THE RADICAL IMPULSE

Wed., Feb. 6:

- Sheldon Wolin, “Tending and Intending a Constitution,” in Presence of the Past, “Norm and Form: The Constitutionalizing of Democracy”*

*****FRIDAY, FEB. 8TH, 5 P.M., PAPER 1 DUE*****

Guidance Questions:

1. Why does Wolin believe that the Ratification of the American Constitution (1787-1788) meant that the colonists were leaving “civil society” for a “state of nature”? Do you agree with his argument?

2. How does Wolin understand the politics of “tending”? If accepted, what would it mean for our current system of government?
3. Do you agree with Wolin’s analysis of constitutionalism?
4. Would Wolin disagree with the account offered by Wood? If so, why?

CITIZENSHIP AND THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM

Part I: Race, Gender and the Problem of Inclusion

Mon. Feb. 11:

- Paine, “African Slavery in America” in Common Sense and Other Writings (1775)
- Jefferson, Query XIV² & XVIII (1782) in The Essential Jefferson
- Jefferson To Benjamin Banneker, Aug. 30, 1791; To Henri Gregoire, Feb. 25, 1809 in The Essential Jefferson, 181, 205
- David Walker, Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World (1829), pp. 1-36
- Tocqueville, Democracy In America, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, 316-20, 340-363

Guidance Questions:

1. Jefferson makes a distinction between the intellectual and moral endowments of blacks. What is the source of these distinctions for him? When examining the letters to Banneker and Gregoire, do you find that Jefferson changed his mind on these issues?
2. Jefferson advocates emancipation and deportation. Why argue for deportation?
3. How does Jefferson understand the effects of slavery on the customs and manners of Americans?
4. Does Jefferson’s stance on blacks, their intellectual and moral endowments, undermine the integrity of his political views? Or, should he be excused as a man of his time?
5. Walker consistently describes God as a political agent, intervening in secular time to save black Americans? But how does Walker envision the role of blacks in their own salvation?
6. At the core of Walker’s analysis is an analogy that likens the situation of blacks to the Israelites. What are the implications of this argument? Why does he insist on certain differences between the two? If he does not intend to undermine the suffering experienced by the people of Israel, why insist on these differences?
7. What does Walker intend when he says the following of Jefferson’s analysis of blacks: “I do not know what to compare it to, unless, like putting one wild deer in an iron cage, where it will be secured, and hold another by the side of the same, then let it go, and expect the one in the cage to run as fast as the one at liberty” (12)?
8. What reason does Walker give for engaging Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia?
9. Walker argues that whites were not as “barbarous” when they were heathens, but “being Christians, enlightened and sensible, they are completely prepared for such hellish cruelties” (19). What does this imply about Christianity? How can Walker reconcile his positive appeal to Christianity in condemning slavery, and yet criticism of Christianity to explain the actions of white Americans?
10. In the preface to his analysis of race in America, Tocqueville argues that the issue of slavery merely touches on his study of democracy, but does not enter it (303). What does he mean?

² Give special attention to pp. 113-120

11. In what ways is slavery unique in America when compared to the system in ancient times?
12. What, on Tocqueville view, are the obstacles to improving the black/white relationship in America? Do you think his reasoning is valid today?
13. Does Tocqueville's pessimistic analysis of race in America provide additional support for Walker's inflammatory Appeal?

Wed. Feb. 13:

- David Walker, Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, pp. 37-45
- John C. Calhoun, "Speech in the U.S. Senate" (Feb., 1837)*
- Frederick Douglass, "Speech at the Anti-Slavery Association" (1845), "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" (1852)*

Guidance Questions:

1. Calhoun uses the word "enemy" to describe those who petition for the abolition of slavery. What is the significance of using this word? How do we usually understand or conceive of those we label as our enemies?
2. Why is Calhoun opposed to entertaining the very idea of abolition?
3. What justification does Calhoun offer for sustaining slavery?
4. What does Calhoun mean when he uses the word "fanatics" to describe those in favor of abolition? Is there a positive relationship, if any, between fanaticism and political and moral transformation? How might Douglass answer this question?
5. What is the significance of Douglass recounting the story of America's independence?
6. What does Douglass mean when he says: "Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future" (195)?
7. Douglass does not believe it necessary to defend the humanity of blacks. Why? In connection with this question, why does he believe the moment demands "scorching irony, not convincing argument" (196)? What is the implication of this statement?
8. What is Douglass' criticism against the various churches of America? Is he in agreement with Walker's earlier indictment of the preachers? What are the implications of their criticism for understanding the political relationship between Church and Society?

Mon. Feb. 18

- Jefferson to Anne Willing Bingham, May 11, 1788*
- Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1840), vol. II, Pt. 3, chap., 8-12, pp. 584-603
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Address to the Legislature of New York, Albany" (1854); "Address to the Legislature on the Women's Right of Suffrage, Albany" (1860); "Address to the Tenth National Women's Rights Convention on Marriage and Divorce" (1860)*

Guidance Questions

1. How do democracies understand the family when compared to aristocracies?
2. For Tocqueville, in what ways are the sexes equal in America?
3. The importance Tocqueville attaches to the role of women in shaping the character of their children specifically, and society more generally is undermined in the description provided by Stanton. How so?

4. How does Stanton understand or envision womanhood?
5. What is the principle(s) upon which Stanton bases her argument for equal rights for women?

Part II: Lincoln's Public Theology and the Re-Founding of America

Wed. Feb. 20:

Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions" (1838)*

Mon. Feb. 25:

- Roger Taney, Opinion on Dred Scott V. Sanford (1857)
- Lincoln, The Dred Scott Decision: Speech at Springfield (1857); "House Divided" Speech (1858); "Fragment: On Slavery" (1858); "Fragment: On Slavery, Pro-Slavery Theology" (1858); "First Inaugural Address (1861); Emancipation Proclamation (1862); The Gettysburg Address (1863); Second Inaugural (1865)*

Wed. Feb. 27:

- Gary Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg, Chapters 3-4*
- Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln" (1876)*

Guidance Questions:

1. What does Lincoln mean by "political religion"? What purpose does it serve?
2. What is Lincoln's criticism of Stephen Douglas? How does he use Douglas' own views on President Jackson's handling of the Supreme Court against him?
3. What is Lincoln's criticism of Chief Justice Taney's opinion? How does he prove that "colored persons" were "included into the body of the people of the United States," to which the Constitution referred?
4. How does Lincoln understand the Declaration of Independence with respect to equality? Are you convinced by his reading? Would Jefferson agree with this reading?
5. How does Lincoln try to ease the worry of those in the South?
6. Lincoln makes it clear that the "Union of these States is perpetual." What is the implication of this claim?
7. How do Lincoln's arguments in the First Inaugural regarding national sovereignty and constitutionalism rearticulate and extend the arguments of the Federalist?
8. How does Wills want us to understand Lincoln's handling of the slavery issue?
9. In Will's view, how did Lincoln re-found the American republic? Do you agree?
10. What does Douglass mean when he says: "It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man" (618)
11. Would Douglass agree with Wills' assessment of Lincoln?

*****FRIDAY, FEB. 29TH, 5 PM: PAPER 2 DUE*****

*****Spring Recess: March 1-March 9, 2008*****

Part III: Race, Character and the Limits of Science

Mon. March 10:

Mark Twain, Pudd'n Head Wilson (1894)

DEMOCRACY, EXCELLENCE AND EGALITARIANISM

Wed. March 12:

- Jefferson To John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813 in Essential Jefferson, pp. 214-19; Re-read Query XIV³ in Essential Jefferson
- Tocqueville, Democracy In America (1835), vol. I, pt. 2, 196-207
- W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" (1903)*
- William Graham Sumner, What Social Classes Owe to Each Other (1883), selections*

Guidance Questions:

1. What does Jefferson mean by "natural aristocracy"?
2. Can we reconcile Jefferson's fervent defense of democracy with his belief a "natural aristocracy"?
3. What does Du Bois mean by the "talented tenth"?
4. What are the reasons, on Tocqueville's view, for why the best do not achieve political prominence? How does this undermine Jefferson and Du Bois' arguments?
5. On Tocqueville's view, when do political geniuses emerge?
6. What, if anything, do the social classes owe to each other?
7. What reasons does Sumner offer for inequality? What, if anything, is missing from consideration that might have otherwise changed his conclusions?
8. Who is the "Forgotten Man"? How do reforms aimed at helping working classes hurt the "Forgotten Man"?
9. How does Sumner think of the contractual basis of society? What do you make of his conclusions?
10. What does Sumner mean by "plutocracy"?
11. Why read Sumner's defense of economic inequality alongside Jefferson and Du Bois' account of the relationship between political excellence and democracy?

*****FRIDAY, Mar. 14TH, 5 P.M., PAPER 3 DUE*****

FREEDOM'S WAKE

Mon. March 17:

- Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Expositions Address" (1895); "Democracy and Education," (1896); "The Fruits of Industrial Training" (1907)*
- W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), Forethought, Chapters I-III

Wed. March 19: ***OUT OF TOWN—CLASS CANCELLED***

³ Give special attention to pp. 121-124

Guidance Questions:

1. What is Booker T. Washington’s program for blacks? What is the rationale behind it? Are you convinced?
2. What does he mean by “industrial education?” Why does he believe this form of education is most beneficial to black people?
3. In “Democracy and Education,” what message does Washington convey with his story of the black cadet?
4. What connection does Washington draw between democracy and education?
5. What does Du Bois mean by “double-consciousness”? What are the implications of this concept for understanding the conditions of black Americans? Is the concept of “double-consciousness” meant to apply to Du Bois as well?
6. What were the aims of the Freedmen’s Bureau? What was the source of its failure on Du Bois’ view?
7. What are Du Bois’ criticisms of Washington? Do you agree with his portrayal/criticism of Washington?

Mon. March 24:

Du Bois, Souls, IV-X

Wed. March 26:

Du Bois, Souls, XI-The Afterthought

Guidance Questions:

1. What is the aim, in Du Bois’ view, of university education? Who should have access to it? How does his appeal to university education inform/color his analysis in chapters 5 and 6?
2. In discussing the black family in chapter 8, Du Bois argues that the “greatest moral danger” for blacks is “easy marriage and easy separation” (93). What is the source of this danger and how does he think it should be addressed?
3. In chapter 9, Du Bois discusses the obstacle to cultivating sympathy among the races. What is the source of these obstacles?
4. Why does Du Bois tell us that his son’s death is an escape? What has his son escaped from?
5. What message is Du Bois attempting to convey with chapter 13, “Of the Coming of John?”

DEMOCRATIC INDIVIDUALISM

Mon. March 31:

- Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, Chapters 1-4
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (1837); “Self-Reliance” (1841)*

Wed. April 2:

Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas (1871)*

Mon. April 7:

John Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy” (1888); “Philosophy and Democracy” (1919)

Guidance Questions:

1. What does Tocqueville mean by “individualism”? Why does it threaten democracy?
2. For Tocqueville, what is the relationship between free institutions and individualism?
3. What does Emerson mean when he says: “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist”?
4. What does he mean by “self-reliance”? Is this what Tocqueville worries about?
5. What is Dewey’s defense of democracy against Sir Henry Maine? Are there any problems that attend Dewey’s defense?
6. What is the relationship between philosophy and democracy? What might Emerson say of Dewey’s analysis?
7. How does Whitman envision America? What, for Whitman, is America most in need of?
8. Whitman often sounds as if America needs a cultural foundation on which to ground itself. Is this a correct analysis of what Whitman is suggesting?
9. What does Whitman mean by “lump character”? What does he mean by “individualism”?
10. What is the relationship, if any, between his description of “individualism,” the one offered by Tocqueville, and Emerson’s conception of “self-reliance”? Does Whitman extend and refine Emerson’s arguments?
11. What does Whitman mean when he says: “For I say at the core of democracy, finally, is the religious element” (220)?
12. What is the relationship between democracy and individuality? What implication from this analysis does Whitman employ in his defense of national sovereignty?

UNCERTAIN DEMOCRACY

Wed. April 9⁴

Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (1922), Chapters 1, 6-8, 14

Mon. April 14:

Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion, Chapters 14, 24; The Phantom Public (1927), Chapters 1-IV

Wed. April 16:

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems (1927), Forward, Chapter I

Mon. April 21:

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, Chapters II-IV

Wed. April. 23:

John Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, Chapters V-VI

Guidance Questions:

1. What does Lippmann mean when he says: “The fiction is taken for truth because the fiction is badly needed” (p. 12)? Do you agree?
2. How does Lippmann understand the relationship between experts and representative government?

⁴ Heavy reading load, please plan accordingly.

3. Is Lippmann's use of the term "experts" another word for Jefferson's "natural aristocracy" and Du Bois' "talented tenth?" Why or why not?
4. What does Lippmann mean by "stereotypes?"
5. In the essays by Lippmann, he challenges an unrealistic or optimistic description of democracy. What is this description of democracy? And why does he find it problematic?
6. What connection is there, if any, between Peirce's notion of fixing belief by tenacity or authority and Lippmann's discussion of stereotypes?
7. Dewey consistently speaks of "the public," suggesting a homogenous political arena. Yet his description of the public defies this reading. How, then, should we understand his description of the public?
8. What is the relationship between the public and state?
9. How does Dewey understand the emergence of modern liberal democracy?
10. Why has the public been eclipsed? What is his solution to reinvigorate the public?
11. What is the relationship between experts and the lay public? How does Dewey differ in this regard from Lippmann?

Mon., April 28:

Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy"*