

Understanding America: The Role of Ideas and Leaders in Shaping U.S. Politics

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Overview:

This course will help students unlock the secrets of the American domestic and foreign policy decision making process. We accomplish this goal by promoting a deeper understanding of the power of ideas on American political culture and the influence of certain leaders on the political process.

We begin with a survey of the foundations of American political thought from the founding of the Republic to the present day. Initial focus is on the ideas and forces which drive domestic politics in the United States. We discuss how these ideas have clashed with reality in the face of divisions on race, gender, economic inequality and the role of the state in the economy.

We then turn our attention to the major trends in American political thought and culture that exert a powerful influence on foreign and national security policy. In each stage of inquiry we review how various leaders met these challenges.

After having developed a framework from which to gain a deeper understanding of the traditions and political forces at work in shaping U.S. politics and policy; we conclude with a review of the courses of action likely for the next American President and informed predictions for future action. Students will participate in a simulation in which they will play important roles in US politics in a “national crisis simulation” that will test their knowledge as well as their understanding of the American policy decision making process.

Keywords:

American politics, US liberalism, conservative movement, Ronald Reagan, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, libertarian

Teaching Method

Lecture and discussion. Students will be encouraged to engage with the instructor and colleagues. There will also be an opportunity for a decision making scenario in which students will play important roles in US politics in a national crisis scenario.

Course Requirements:

Reading- Students are expected to complete the reading before each class.

E-Mail response- After each day, students must send a brief e-mail concerning a question or idea posed by the Professor. Send these to Professor Bates at scottbates1966@gmail.com

Participation in Class- Part of the student's evaluation will be based on their active participation in classroom discussion

Paper- There will be one short paper of no more than 300 words to be presented in the seminar on a topic mutually agreed upon by the professor and student.

Grading will be based on class participation which includes time in class and e-mail responses. Papers will also be taken into account.

Readings:

Students are required to read a book by Arthur Schlesinger entitled "The Vital Center". They are also asked to read selected pages from two other texts,

"Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World" by Walter Russell Mead

and

"American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology", by Isaac Kramnick and Theodore Lowi

Students are also encouraged to review the website www.politico.com on a daily basis during the course to become current on US politics. They should also visit the websites for leading ideologically based think tanks www.americanprogress.org , www.heritage.org, www.cato.org

Technology in the Classroom

To facilitate active engagement of everyone with the material, communication technology such as laptops, iPads and iPhones are not allowed during lectures. We will review the policy during the course.

SCHEDULE:

July 29

#1, Introduction

#2, Foundation of a Nation

Kramnick and Lowi, *"American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology"*

Thomas Paine, "Common Sense", p.131-148

Declaration of Independence, 151-154

Federalist Papers, 191-243

Patrick Henry, Debate in Virginia Ratifying Convention, 266-274

July 30

#3, Age of Jackson and Manifest Destiny

American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology

Andrew Jackson "Bank Veto Message; Farewell Address, p.427-443

#4, Civil War and a New Birth of Freedom

American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology

Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on Dred Scott Decision; New Haven Address; Addresses to Congress, Gettysburg Address, Second Inaugural Address" p. 654-660, 667-668, 676-685

July 31

#5, The Rise of the Progressives And Democratic America

American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology

Sumner "What the Social Classes Owe Each Other p.703-719

Lodge, "Speech on a Literacy Test" p. 910-915

Bryan, "Cross of Gold Speech" p.809-815

Woodrow Wilson, "The New Freedom" 1102-1113

FDR, "Commonwealth Club, Oglethorpe Speech, Four Freedoms" 1164-1179, 1187-1191

You Tube video

John F. Kennedy Speech on Civil Rights June 11, 1963

Lyndon Baines Johnson State of the Union War on Poverty

August 3

#6, The Republican Reaction

American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology

Barry Goldwater, "The Conscience of a Conservative", p.1256-1263

You Tube video

Ronald Reagan Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech July 17, 1980

Ronald Reagan Presidential Re-Nomination Acceptance Speech August 23, 1984

#7, Hamiltonians: Free Trade and Free Seas

Walter Russell Mead, "Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changes the World"
P. 3-30, 99-131

August 4

#8, Woodrow Wilson: America the Missionary

Special Providence
P.132-173

#9, Jacksonians: The Frontier Fighters

Special Providence
p. 218-263

August 5

#10, Jeffersonians: America the Virtuous

Special Providence, p. 174-217

#11, The Vital Center: Challenge to America

Arthur Schlesinger, "The Vital Center"
p. 1-130

August 6

#12, The Vital Center: A Fighting Faith

The Vital Center
p. 131-257

#13, America Today: Rise and Retreat of the New World Order

Special Providence
p.264-309

August 7

#14, National Crisis Simulation

#15, National Crisis Simulation