

Sul Ross State University - Rio Grande College
American Political Thought

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course meeting times: this is a web course and does not have scheduled meeting times.

Course Description: This course covers such topics as: the evolution of American democracy; ideas of important American writers and public figures who have contributed to our political heritage; civil rights leaders; critics of American democracy, capitalism and society and contemporary controversies in American public life.

Required Texts:

*Kenneth M. Dolbeare and Michael S. Cummings, Editors, *American Political Thought* (Sixth Edition). (ISBN 978-0-87289-972-8)

Primary Learning Objectives:

At the successful conclusion of this course, through performance on short reading summaries, a paper and a final examination, the student will be able to

- Demonstrate knowledge about the key topics and influential figures in the history of American political thought from the founding of the republic to the present day;
- Exercise critical thinking skills and demonstrate informed judgment in evaluating issues and answering questions relating to the topics listed above;
- Improve and build on sound writing skills.

*To complete the requirements of this course successfully, you must have a Sul Ross Blackboard account and be able to access documents attached to this course. See below for further details

Distance Education Statement: Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul

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Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

Course requirements, course objectives, and course grade breakdown:

* Short Written Assignments (50%): Reading selections follow below. A set of questions correspond to each reading assignment. You will be expected to type your answers to these questions. These need not be formal writing exercises, and they will not be evaluated based on writing style or elegance. Their primary purpose is to allow students to be comfortable in writing about the course subject matter in an informal (but serious) setting. (You should not expect the cumulative length of your answers to exceed approximately 2 pages per assignment.) A total of **ten** short writing assignments are required to receive credit for this component of the course.

*Paper (25%): The paper will require you to select from one of the short writing assignment topics (or a topic at your discretion) and to produce a fully elaborated argument concerning this topic. The paper must make use of *both* the appropriate reading selections and at least two works of peer-reviewed scholarship (e.g., journal articles, book chapters, appropriate on-line resources, etc.) The paper is expected to be approximately 4-5 pages in length. (I am willing to entertain more substantial efforts). A successful paper must observe the conventions standard to upper division level writing in the liberal arts and the social sciences, including those pertaining to grammar, style, analysis and citation. (APA, Chicago style or the Modern Language Association formats are all acceptable.) I am more than happy to review rough drafts of the paper in advance of the due date. Plagiarism will result in expulsion from the course, a failing course grade and disciplinary action from the university. The paper will be graded based on a rubric. The rubric is attached to this syllabus. I reserve the right to request modifications to papers before granting final credit for the course.

Final Examination (25%): The final examination will consist of 100 multiple choice questions. The questions will be distributed in advance. You will be responsible for finding the answers to these questions through whatever means are available to you. You will be given two opportunities to take the test. On the first opportunity, I will indicate which questions you answered incorrectly. You will then have a second opportunity to answer the questions correctly.

Due Dates: All work for this course must be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m., Friday, July 1.

Grading methodology: The 10 short assignments will be evaluated on a 20-point scale (200 points total). The research paper and final examination will be graded on a 100-point scale as follows

90-100 (A) 80-89 (B) 70-79 (C) 60-69 (D) <60 (F)

Reading Selections (a total of **10** short assignments are due for the course)

Topic: Faith in Early American Public Life

Reading: Introduction to Part 1, pages 1-10; Part I, Selections 1-3 (John Winthrop, Roger Williams, John Wise)

Short Writing Assignment: What role did religious faith play in the settlement of England's Atlantic colonies during the 1600s? What were the competing ideas concerning the role of faith in public life, or the relationship between church and state during this period?

Topic: The American Revolution

Reading: Introduction to Part I, pages 6-13; Part I Selections 4-8 (Ben Franklin, Sam Adams, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Paine, The Declaration of Independence)

Short Writing Assignment: What were the most significant reasons why the American Revolutionaries called for independence?

Topic: The Constitution

Reading: Introduction to Part 1, pages 3-14; Selections 9-13 (The Articles of Confederation, writings from John Adams, the Constitution, "In Favor of Adoption of the Constitution," "Against Adoption of the Constitution")

Short Writing Assignment: Our first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, went into effect in 1781. In 1787, just six years later, the "founders" of our republic felt compelled to write a *new* constitution. Why? Be sure to explain the reasons for supporting the Constitution and the reasons for opposing the Constitution.

Topic: Hamilton vs. Jefferson

Reading: Introduction to Part II, pages 184-186; Part I, Selections 14-16 (Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington)

Short Writing Assignment: Describe the differences between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. What were the primary reasons for their disagreements? In the history of the early republic, whose vision won out?

Topic: Civil Disobedience

Reading: Selections 21 and 48 (Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Short Writing Assignment: What was Henry David Thoreau's attitude towards government? What was his theory of civil disobedience? What impact did his theory have on the twentieth century civil rights movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. in particular?

Topic: Slavery

Reading: Introduction to Part II, pages 189-190; Part II, Selections 18, 23, 25 and 26 (William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, George Fitzhugh, Abraham Lincoln)

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Short Writing Assignment: What were some of the important arguments against slavery? What were some of the important arguments in favor of slavery?

Topic: Capitalism and its Supporters

Reading: Introduction to Part III, pages 281-290; Selections 28, 30, 42 (William Graham Sumner, Andrew Carnegie, Frederick Taylor)

Short Writing Assignment: Very briefly, describe capitalism. Why did Andrew Carnegie, William Graham Sumner and Frederick Taylor support capitalism?

Topic: Capitalism and its Critics

Reading: Introduction to Part III, pages 284-290; Introduction to Part IV, pages 366-369; Selections 29, 31, 33, 34, 38 (“Anarchism: What it really Stands For”) and 39 (Edward Bellamy, Populism, Henry Demarest Lloyd, Ambrose Pierce, Emma Goldman, Eugene V. Debs)

Short Writing Assignment: Why were some Americans critical of capitalism? What political (or ideological) options were available to critics of American society, economy and politics around the turn of the twentieth century? Your essay should use and demonstrate some understanding of the following words: populism, socialism, and anarchism.

Topic: Capitalism and its Synthesizers

Reading: Introduction to Part IV, pages 370-373; Selections 40, 41, 43, 44, 45 (Herbert Croly, Progressivism, Woodrow Wilson, John Dewey, Franklin Roosevelt)

Short Writing Assignment: How did prevailing views concerning the relationship between the national government and the American economy and society change in the early twentieth century, and particularly during the New Deal starting in 1933? How did important national leaders like President Franklin Roosevelt seek to preserve capitalism, but at the same time put in place important safeguards under the watchful eye of the state?

Topic: American Imperialism?

Reading: Selections 16 (pay particular attention to President Washington’s comments starting at the bottom of page 181), 20, 28 (“The Conquest of the United States by Spain”), 35, 58, 59, 63, and 69.

Short Writing Assignment: What have been the typical arguments in favor of American expansionism in the world? What have been the arguments against American expansionism? Is the United States today an expansionist power? Why or why not?

Topic: African Americans and Civil Rights

Reading: Introduction to Part IV, pages 369-370, Introduction to Part V, pages 475-476; Selections 37, 46, and 48 (W.E.B Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr.) and the following selections found at <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org>.

Booker T. Washington, “Speech at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition” (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/speech-before-the->

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[atlanta-cotton-states-and-international-exposition/](#)); and Malcolm X “The Ballot or the Bullet” (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-ballot-or-the-bullet/>)
Short Writing Assignment: Starting with the end slavery (1865) and leading into the 1960s, what did prominent African American civil rights leaders want? What were the important points of conflict concerning segregation and confrontation with white society?

Topic: Liberalism, the Age of Consensus and the Emergence of Countercultures

Reading: Introduction, Part V; Selections 47, 49, 53 (“The Culture of Narcissism”) (John F. Kennedy, Students for a Democratic Society, Christopher Lasch) and the following document from the Internet, Karen Asbley, et al., “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows” (1969) (you don’t need to read the entire document; read selectively)

(https://archive.org/stream/YouDontNeedAWeathermanToKnowWhichWayTheWindBlows_925/weather#page/n0/mode/2up)

Short Writing Assignment: In the context of post-1945 American history, what did Liberalism mean? What did it mean to be “on the Left?” What was the “New Left” (starting in the 1960s) and what did it want?

Topic: Feminism

Reading: Introduction to Part II, Page 188-189; Selections 10 (Correspondence with Abigail Adams), 22, 27, 38 (“The Tragedy of Women’s Emancipation”) and 51 (Abigail Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Emma Goldman and Betty Friedan)

Short Writing Assignment: What is a feminist? In the context of American history, what have feminists wanted? What were their important points of agreement and disagreement?

Topic: The Mexican-American in American History

Reading: Selections 50 and 61 (La Alianza Federal de Mercedes and Rudolfo Anaya)

Writing Assignment: What have been the special concerns and aspirations of the Hispanic community in the United States?

Topic: The Rise of American Conservatism

Reading: Introduction to Part VI, Selections 55-59 and 63

Writing Assignment: What is conservatism? What historical factors explain the rise of conservatism in American politics? What special challenges does conservatism face today?

Topic: Environmentalism

Reading: Introduction to Part V, Pages 476-477; Selections 36, 52, 60, 68 (Black Elk, Aldo Leopold, Winona LaDuke, Al Gore)

Writing Assignment: What is an environmentalist? What does the environmentalist movement want?

Topic: A Real Change?

Reading: Introduction to Part VI; Selections 64-71 (Read at your discretion; you do not need to read all of them.)

Writing Assignment: Did the election of Barack Obama in 2000 represent a real change in American political life? Are the traditional terms, “Right,” “Left,” “Conservative” and “Liberal” still relevant? Why or why not?

Writing Rubric

Student:
Class: American Political Thought
Term: Spring 2014
Assignment: Paper

	Inadequate (<14)	Adequate (14-15)	Good (16-17)	Excellent (18-20)
Thesis/Argument				
Development: Reasons & Evidence				
Organization				
Grammar and Mechanics				
Research/ Documentation In-text citation				
Total				

	Inadequate	Adequate	Good	Excellent
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	1	2	3	4
Thesis/ Topic	No clear thesis/topic, or thesis/topic doesn't relate to purpose & audience.	thesis/topic is not stated early; it is unconvincing because it is too broad/vague/unrelated to purpose/audience.	Thesis/topic is good and relates to purpose, although it could be revised to be more precise.	Thesis/topic is precise and clear and related to purpose; it is original and challenges reader's thinking.
Development: Reasons & Evidence	The essay does not offer clear reasons and evidence to support thesis/topic. It may offer only reasons unsupported by evidence	The paper lists reasons & evidence but they are unconvincing &/or undeveloped. Lack of critical discussion of evidence.	The paper offers reasons and evidence that support thesis/topic; but more supporting details & other kinds of evidence would have demonstrated mastery.	Reasons and evidence are accurate, precise, and relevant. Thesis/topic is fully and convincingly developed.
Organization of entire paper and of paragraphs	An overall logical structure is lacking. Paragraphs lack cohesion. No transitions.	Overall logical structure is evident, but paragraphs may lack cohesion and transitions may be lacking.	The paper is supported with adequate overall structure and paragraph cohesion; there are some transitions; sequence of ideas or transitions could be improved.	The paper is logically structured so thesis & reasons are effectively communicated. Paragraphs are coherent & unified, & connected with effective, eloquent transitions.
Style, Vocabulary, Grammar & Mechanics	The reader cannot understand the paper because of distracting patterns of error in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and usage.	The often must reread because of distracting patterns of error in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, & usage.	The writing successfully communicates ideas through effective grammar & mechanics, except for one or two patterns of error in word choice, grammar, or usage.	The writer chooses words aptly, creates sophisticated and effective sentences, and observes the conventions of written English (correct grammar and usage).
Documentation -In-text citations & bibliography page (MLA & APA) - footnotes or endnotes (CMS)	Author does not cite in-text sources or the bibliography at the end of paper.	Author does not cite in-text sources accurately or consistently and/or does not format bibliography at end accurately/consistently.	Author documents sources consistently with one or two minor inconsistencies or mistakes that do not damage writer's ethos.	Author documents sources accurately and consistently.
QEP Score:				