

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT to 1865
Rutgers University-New Brunswick
Fall 2020

POLS 790:375

Mondays and Wednesdays
3:55pm to 5:15pm
RAB 207

Saladin Ambar

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Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays
11am – 1pm and by appointment

“The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty.” – Abraham Lincoln, 1864

What are the foundational ideas that inform American political history – and who are its most influential thinkers? In this course we will explore the origins, development, and complexities of American political thought through the Civil War. We will pay particular attention to conceptualizations of freedom and national identity, including those expressed in American literature, religion, political speech, and film. Students will be asked to become familiar with the historic paradoxes and ongoing debates about the nation’s foundational documents and their meaning. Over the course of the semester we will grapple with the diversity, changes, and continuities found in American political thought from the Puritan founding to 1865.

Required Materials

Saladin Ambar, *Reconsidering American Political Thought: A New Identity* (paperback, Routledge, 2019)
ISBN-13: 978-1138343894

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Bartleby and Other Stories*, (Penguin, 2016) ISBN-13: 978-014310760

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Isaac Kramnick and Harvey C. Mansfield, eds.)
(paperback, Penguin, 2000) ISBN-13: 978-0226805368

Attendance Policy and Academic Integrity

Students are expected to attend all synchronous Zoom-based classes and be active, full participants in discussion. Please consult the class site on Sakai for updates to course delivery and assignments. The final grade in the course will be based upon the following, as adjusted for class attendance:

Reaction Paper #1	15%
Reaction Paper #2	15%
Midterm Essay Exam	30%
Final Essay Exam	40%

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a learning or other disability for which you are, or may be requesting accommodations, please contact me as early as possible in the semester, so I can arrange for the appropriate accommodations.

Student Rights re: Discrimination and Harassment

Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. The University strongly encourages all employees to report information about discrimination and harassment to the University. For more information about your options at Rutgers, please visit endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu

Course Outline (Note: all readings will be posted to Sakai unless otherwise stated)

Week I (September 2) Introduction to American Political Thought

Wednesday

Mark Twain, "A Fable"

Louis Hartz, "The Concept of a Liberal Society," in *The Liberal Tradition in America*

Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America"

Week II (September 7 and 9) Colonial Legacies

Monday

James Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, chapters 1, 2

John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"

Wednesday

Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenet of Persecution"

Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth" and "The Art of Virtue"

Week III (September 14 and 16)

Monday **Literary Visions of the Puritan Founding**

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery"

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (CS)

Film: *Rosemary's Baby*

Wednesday **Preview for Final: Contemporary Vistas in American Political Thought**

Film: **Stanley Kubrick**, *Eyes Wide Shut*

Saladin Ambar, "The Women of Kubrick and Hawthorne and Kubrick's Dreams: A Gendered Critique of Young Goodman Brown and Eyes Wide Shut," in *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film*

Week IV (September 21 and 23)

Monday

Saladin Ambar, Chapter One, *Reconsidering American Political Thought*

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Wednesday: **Revolution and Order**

Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*

Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence"

Garry Wills, "The Transcendental Declaration," in *Lincoln at Gettysburg*

Week V (September 28 and 30)

Monday

Hannah Arendt, "The Meaning of Revolution," in *On Revolution*

Benjamin Banneker and Thomas Jefferson, an exchange of letters

Video Clip: **Huey P. Newton, William F. Buckley, Jr.** On the American Revolution (*Firing Line*)

First essay exam due.

Wednesday

US Constitution

Federalist Papers 10, 51

Wilson Carey McWilliams, "The Anti-Federalists, Representation, and Party"

Week VI (October 5 and 7)

Monday

Federalist Papers, 68, 70

Jack Rakove, “The Madisonian Moment,” in *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*

Wednesday

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part One, chapters 2, 3, 5

Judith Sargent Stevens Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes”

Week VII (October 12 and 14)

Monday

John Adams, “A Defence of the Constitutions of Governments of the United States of America”

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part One, chapters 2, 4, 7

Wednesday

Saladin Ambar, Chapter Two, “Revolution and Order” in *Reconsidering American Political Thought*

Patrick Henry, Virginia Ratifying Convention Speech

Second essay exam due.

Week VIII (October 26 and 28) Empire and Liberty

Monday

Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*

{Final research paper topics, bibliography due}

Wednesday

Herman Melville, “The Whiteness of the Whale,” in *Moby Dick*

Week IX (November 2 and 4)

Monday

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions”

Wednesday

Abraham Lincoln, “Young Men’s Lyceum Address” and “Our Republican Robe is Soiled”

John C. Calhoun, “On the Importance of Domestic Slavery”

Week X (November 9 and 11)

Monday

Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Saladin Ambar, Chapter 3, “Empire and Liberty,” in *Reconsidering American Political Thought*

Wednesday

David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*

Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July”

Week XI (November 16 and 18) Fracture and Reunion

Monday

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg, Second Inaugural Addresses

Drew Gilpin Faust, “To Lay Down My Life,” in *This Republic of Suffering*

Wednesday

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I., Part One, chapter 10

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Reparations”

Week XII (November 23)

Monday

Chapter 4, “Fracture and Reunion,” in *Reconsidering American Political Thought*

Frederick Douglass, Freedmen’s Monument Speech (1876)

Third essay exam due.

Week XIII (November 30 and December 2)

Monday

Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener, A Tale of Wall Street”

Film, “Wall Street,” **Oliver Stone**

Wednesday

“**Emily Dickinson**,” in Harold Bloom, *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and the American Sublime*

Week XIV (December 7 and 9)

Monday

GK Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*

Wednesday **Reflections on American Political Thought**

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part One, chapter 10 (conclusion); Vol. II., Part One, chapters 5, 8; Vol. II., Part Two, chapter 11; Vol. II., Part Four, chapter 6

Film, “Gangs of New York,” Martin Scorsese

Final Exam (due date TBA)

Choose one early American political thinker (1630-1865) and one contemporary work of art (film, painting, novel, piece of music, etc.) to address the following question in a 10-page essay: How is American political thought reflected in contemporary society and politics? How are vestiges of a given political thinker, or their work(s) evident in a more recent and popular form of art or communication? Provide evidence of the contemporary work’s connections to the thinker/political thought or philosophy. Be sure to cover the following:

1. The nature of the political thought being expressed or addressed.
2. Evidence of early American political thought/thinker present in the contemporary work.
3. How the contemporary work critiques, challenges, or upholds the earlier thinker’s work/thought.

Be sure to provide proper citations and a bibliography.