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Office: Rice 232  
Office Hours: MWF 11:00-12:00 and 1:00-2:30

POLT 233

American Political Thought

This course will be an exploration into the development of American political thought since the colonial era. We will explore strains of American political thought from the Puritans through the present day. We will discuss whether American political thought is a distinct area, the various movements throughout American history and how contemporary American political culture has been shaped by intellectual trends. While there is no pre-requisite a working knowledge of American history would be very beneficial for students.

American political thought is characterized by continuity and change. Concepts such as individual rights to life, liberty and property have coincided with systematic denials of basic human rights on the basis of race, gender and sexuality. While early documents of the colonial and founding moments bear similarities to present day political rhetoric, we will explore some of the important differences in the way conceptions of liberalism, individual freedom and democracy have been conceived.

American political thought considers some of the most important questions raised throughout American history. Many of the selections in the course will be by our elected representatives, which differentiates American political thought from other political thought and political theory courses where the readings are primarily by academics and philosophers. In addition, this course will show that the quick linear progression that sometimes characterizes impressions of American political thought, development and culture is inaccurate and that from the founding moments conflict and dissent have been the norm rather than the exception.

Learning Goals and Objectives

Students completing this course will:

1. Acquire knowledge in the area of American political thought.
2. Improve their knowledge of how discourse shapes American politics and policy development, in particular the contested nature of American political culture.
3. Enhance their ability to conduct close readings and conduct textual analysis.
4. Develop their written and oral communication skills.
5. Gain the ability to take an informed and critical approach to American political thought and the politics that it influences.

Assignments

1. Participation (20%)- Students will be expected to come to class prepared and participate actively. Both the quantity and quality of student participation will be assessed, however differences in student learning styles and ways of communicating will be taken into consideration.

2. Discussion Leadership (10%)- Each student will be expected to lead one class discussion. Students should provide a handout with 8-10 discussion questions prepared for the class. The student leading discussion will post a list of questions on Blackboard and provide copies for the class. The student will begin the leadership process with a brief introduction and then engage the students and the instructor in a discussion. On days when students are not presenting, the instructor will post a list of questions on Blackboard to help guide the discussions.

3. 5 Page Papers (45%, 15% each) Three short papers will be written. The instructor will distribute a list of topics several weeks prior to the due date.

4. Take Home Final (20%) On the last day of class students will receive a take home final due during the time of the final exam.

Course Policies

1. The assignments are all due on the dates explained in the syllabus. No extensions will be given except in extraordinary circumstances such as documented medical emergencies. Students who do not turn in the short paper and midterm on the due date will be penalized one full letter grade for each class period following the assignment due date. Students who do not turn in the final on time will be penalized one letter grade for each day the final is not turned in.

2. Use of laptop computers and portable internet devices should be minimized.

3. Students are reminded to consult the College honor code which is available at http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/11-Policies-Honor.pdf.

4. Any student with a documented disability should consult the instructor to arrange appropriate accommodation.
Grading

The grading scale for the course will be as follows:

A: 93-100%
A-: 90-92%
B+: 88-89%
B: 83-87%
B-: 80-82%
C+: 78-79%
C: 73-77%
C-: 70-72%
D: 60-69%
F: 59% and Below

Schedule

(Please note that some readings are included in both books ex. A portion of John Winthrop’s “Little Speech on Liberty” is including in the Sargent book and as Dolbeare #1).

(All web links will be made available on Blackboard).

M 2/7. Introduction

W 2/9. Is there an American Political Thought?

Dolbeare, Introduction

Sargent, pp. 1-29

F 2/11. A City on a Hill: Puritans

Sargent, pp. 30-43

Dolbeare, #1, 2, 3

M 2/14. Benjamin Franklin and Colonial American Thought
Sargent, pp. 43-48
Dolbeare, #4
W 2/16. Revolution and Its Discontents Part I
Sargent, pp. 49-62
Dolbeare, #5, 7
F 2/18. Revolution and Its Discontents Part II
Sargent, pp. 62-73
Dolbeare, #10
M 2/21 The Constitution Part I
Sargent, pp. 74-96
Dolberare, #11
W 2/23 The Constitution Part II
Sargent, pp. 96-146
Dolbeare, #12, 13
F 2/25. Hamilton and Jefferson
Sargent, pp. 151-162
Dolbeare, #14, 15
M 2/28 A Developing Power: Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democracy and Racial Discontents
Sargent, pp. 162-167
Dolbeare, #17

Andrew Jackson 1832 Bank Veto Address Available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/ajveto01.asp

Andrew Jackson Farewell Address Available at: http://www.nationalcenter.org/Jackson'sFarewell.html
Short Paper 1 Due

W 3/2. Transcendentalism
Sargent, pp. 210-222
Dolbeare, #21

F 3/4. Minorities in Ante-bellum America
Sargent, pp. 167-180
Dolbeare, #22

M 3/7. The South and Its Critics
Sargent, pp. 181-209 (top)
Dolbeare, #23, 24, 25

W 3/9. Lincoln
Dolbeare, #26

F 3/11. Reconstruction Part I
Sargent, pp. 237-275

Sargent, pp. 276-311
Dolbeare, #28

W 3/16. Radical Voices: Race, Anarchism and Socialism
Dolbeare, #37, 38, 39

F 3/18 Herbert Croly: Connecting Hamilton and Jefferson
Dolbeare, #40

Sargent, pp. 312-322, 326-335,
W 3/23 The Progressives Part II
Sargent. Pg. 339-341
Dolbeare, #41

F 3/25. John Dewey
Sargent, pp. 322-325
Dolbeare, #44

**Short Paper 2 Due**

M 4/4 . Wilson and World War
Sargent, pp. 341-357
Dolbeare, #43

W 4/6 A Return to Normalcy: Calvin Coolidge and the 1920’s


F 4/8. Roosevelt and Depression
Sargent, pp. 358-382
Dolbeare, #45

M 4/11. Desegregation and McCarthyism
Sargent, pp. 383-388 and 397-404

W 4/13 The Civil Rights Movement
Dolbeare, #49

M 4/18. Feminism
Sargent, pp. 404-406
Dolbeare, #51
W 4/20. The New Left
Sargent, pp. 412-418
Dolbeare, #49
F 4/22 Liberation Movements
Dolbeare, #51
Stonewall Documents, Provided by Instructor
M 4/25 The Rise of Contemporary Conservatism
Barry Goldwater 1964 Acceptance Speech, Available at http://www.nationalcenter.org/Goldwater.html
Dolbeare, #55

**Short Paper 3 Due**

W 4/27 The Unreported Resistance
Dolbeare, #60, #61
F 4/29 The Third Way: Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council
Dolbeare, #65
M 5/2 The Politics and Policies of George W. Bush
Dolbeare, #63
W 5/4 Barack Obama: Audacity of Hope?
Dolbeare, #71
Barack Obama 2011 State of the Union Address to be posted on Blackboard
F 5/6 A New Movement?: An analysis of the Tea Party

Armey and Kibbe, *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto*, Excerpts to be distributed by the Instructor through Blackboard

M 5/9 Who are we?: The Future of American Political Thought

Readings to be distributed by instructor

TERM PAPER DUE in lieu of final exam to be distributed during the final class. The term paper will be due at the end of the regularly scheduled final for the course.