

## AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT GOV-658

Regent University  
Robertson School of Government  
Fall 2006  
Public syllabus

### PROFESSOR:

Jeffrey H. Morrison, Ph.D.  
RH-318, (757) 226-4309  
[jeffmor@regent.edu](mailto:jeffmor@regent.edu)

### COURSE SUMMARY:

American Political Thought GOV-658 is an in-depth examination of early American political thought from the colonial through the antebellum periods. Special attention is paid to the founding period and the intellectual and cultural underpinnings of the American order. The class culminates in a field trip to a relevant historical site in Virginia.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What were the political theories and practices that underlay the Constitution and our federal government? Was there a continuity between the colonial period and the so-called “founding” of the late eighteenth century? What led to the American Revolution? Did the founders intend to create a “Christian nation”? What were their intentions regarding church and state? What led to the “Second American Revolution,” the Civil War?

In order to discuss these and other questions, we will begin at the beginning--in 1607 with the earliest permanent English settlement at Jamestown. The American political tradition is long (it began a century and a half before independence was declared) and varied. We will examine American political thought and culture from the colonial period through the eve of the Civil War, or from the Mayflower Compact of 1620 to the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. In our discussions of the founding period we will emphasize several of the large commitments of the American republic, including: constitutionalism or limited government; federalism; separation of powers; and republicanism or popular government. We will also devote some time to examining the role of religion in American political thought. Our readings will be heavily weighted toward primary material such as The Federalist, although we may make use of some of the more penetrating observers of American political thought, like Alexis de Tocqueville.

Throughout this course we will be operating on the assumption that a better understanding of the history of American political thought can help shed new light on contemporary problems, such as whether and how the Constitution is an evolving document, and what role the Supreme Court should play in American politics.

Throughout this course we will be operating on several assumptions. (1) That all truth is God's truth. (2) That Christians of good will can disagree over matters of politics, just as they do over matters of faith and practice. (3) That a better understanding of the history of American political thought can help shed new light on contemporary problems.

### **CONNECTION TO THE PROGRAM OF STUDY:**

American Political Thought GOV-658 is an elective course in the Robertson School of Government ("RSG") but is open to any Regent University student with an interest in the American founding and constitutional principles. The course may be of special interest to current or future law students. It explores in greater depth some issues raised briefly in American Government GOV-611 and others not touched upon at all in GOV-611.

### **INSTRUCTION:**

This course is a traditional graduate course that will meet once per week for three hours of lecture and discussion. Student participation is welcomed and expected. The course will culminate in a field trip to a local site with history relevant to early American political thought. Prior classes have visited Jamestown and Colonial Williamsburg; other options might include Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, George Washington's Mount Vernon, George Mason's Gunston Hall, or Richmond, Virginia.

**Distance education students** will complete all assigned readings and papers, and will participate in a virtual classroom via the on-line Blackboard medium, in weekly Discussion Board postings. These postings will consist of responses to professor-initiated discussion questions as well as responses to postings by other students.

### **TEXTS:**

#### **REQUIRED:**

Dreisbach, Daniel L., Mark D. Hall, and Jeffry H. Morrison, eds. The Founders on God and Government. Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. ISBN 0-7425-2279-2.

Frohnen, Bruce, ed. The American Republic: Primary Sources. Liberty Fund, 2002. ISBN 0-86597-333-4.

Hamilton, Alexander et al. The Federalist Papers. Ed. Clinton Rossiter. Penguin, 2003. ISBN 0-451-52881-6.

The Holy Bible [any commonly used version]

Kendall, Willmoore and George W. Carey. The Basic Symbols of the American Political

Tradition. Rev. ed. Catholic University of America Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8132-0826-2.

Madison, James. Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787. Ed. Adrienne Koch. W. W. Norton, 1987. ISBN 0-393-30405-1.

Storing, Herbert J., ed. The Anti-Federalist. University of Chicago Press, 1985. ISBN 0-226-77565-8.

**SUPPLEMENTAL:**

Kurland, Philip B. and Ralph Lerner, eds. The Founders' Constitution. 5 vols. University of Chicago Press, 1987; <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders>. [Note: this edition is entirely on-line and requires no book purchase.]

**CAVEAT EMPTOR:** In addition to the assigned texts, additional readings may be supplied. The professor reserves the right to add or subtract readings as we proceed throughout the semester. In a course that encourages discussion, it is often beneficial to be flexible, depending upon the direction and depth of discussions.

**ASSESSMENTS:**

Your grade will be determined by the quality of your written work and your discussion. Written work will include several short papers and one major, research paper due at semester's end.

**Distance education** students will fulfill their discussion requirement through on-line postings in Blackboard, to include responses to questions posted by the professor and responses to postings by other students.

The approximate grade calculus (subject to change) will be as follows:

15% Participation  
35% Short papers (total)  
50% Final Paper  
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100%