

## **Power & Politics: Political Theory and the American Founding**

**Government 100.1 (Spring 2007)  
Freshman Writing Seminar  
Cornell University  
Tuesday/Thursday 10:10-11:25 White Hall 114**

**Instructor: Jason Frank  
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Office Hours: W 10:00-12:00 (and by appointment)**

### **Course description and aims**

This course will introduce students to some of the central theoretical and political debates of the American Revolution and Constitutional Founding. Drawing on a wide variety of material – pamphlets, newspapers, treatises, autobiography, correspondence, and literary work – the course will examine both the political culture of late eighteenth-century America and the complicated inheritance of that culture for contemporary American politics. We will explore this topic through a close and sustained engagement with original sources. Topics covered will include 1) the relationship between “liberalism” and “civic republicanism”; 2) the justifications of revolution; 3) competing theories of political representation and popular sovereignty; 4) American identity and the politics of exclusion; 5) democracy and the U.S. Constitution; 6) politics and the public sphere. Since this course is a writing seminar, we will also focus special attention on different styles of writing, genre, modes of persuasion, and the determinations of audience. Other themes may emerge and develop in our discussions over the course of the semester, but these will provide us with provisional orientation.

### **Course mechanics**

This is an introductory writing seminar that will include both occasional short lectures by the instructor on historical background and context as well as open seminar discussion on the readings. We will also spend a substantial amount of time discussing writing assignments. Students should come to class prepared to engage in lively conversation based on the week’s reading and also be willing to share and critique one another’s writing. In addition to bringing the pertinent texts to class, students will be asked to write weekly reader responses (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced). These responses should be short but thoughtful engagements with a particular problem or question raised by the reading. They might answer one of the study questions distributed in class or they might focus on a close reading of an important (or importantly problematic) passage. It’s up to you. All responses should include direct citation from the text with page numbers in parenthesis. They should avoid summary and instead stake a claim, make a point. If appropriate, you may also draw from these responses when writing your longer papers. Responses will be turned in at the beginning of each Tuesday class and counted

as a part of the final participation grade (25% of the total). Late responses will not be accepted.

In addition to these short writing assignments, students will be asked to write five (4-6 page, typed, double-spaced) papers over the course of the semester. Each paper will be worth 15% of the total grade. A list of paper topics will be distributed in class one week before each paper is due. All papers must include direct textual citations and footnoting. These papers will follow different guidelines and several will go through revision. The details of the different paper assignments will be discussed in class. The due dates are listed below. *Save all of your assignments (with my comments), as they will be turned in as a complete writing portfolio at the end of the semester.*

Finally, if you unfamiliar with Cornell's plagiarism policies, please familiarize yourself: [HTTP://WWW.ARTS.CORNELL.EDU/STU-ADV/INTEGRITY.ASP](http://www.arts.cornell.edu/stu-adv/integrity.asp). The bottom line is, don't do it.

### **Books to purchase**

Available at University Book Store:

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*

Terence Ball, ed. *The Federalist Papers*

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*

Thomas Jefferson, *Political Writings*

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists were For.*

Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*

Material marked “\*” on reserve.

### **Class schedule**

#### **Week 1: Allegory and Revolution**

January 23 - Introduction

January 25 - Nathaniel Hawthorne, “My Kinsman, Major Molinieux”\*

First paper due in class.

#### **Week 2: Revolutionary History**

January 30 – Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, 1-88

Reader response due in class.

February 1 - Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, 91-166

### **Week 3: What is an American? I: Crèvecoeur**

February 6 - J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1-82

Reader response due in class.

Second paper due in class.

February 8 - J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 151-65; 187-217

### **Week 4: What is an American? II: Franklin**

February 13 - Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, 43-131

Reader response due in class.

February 15 - Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, 133-60

Third paper draft due in class.

### **Week 5: The Rights of Englishmen: Revolutionary Pamphlets 1**

February 20 – James Otis, “The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved” \*  
Bernard Bailyn, “The Literature of the American Revolution”\*

Reader response due in class.

February 22 – James Otis, “The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved” \*

Third paper due in class.

### **Week 6: The Rights of Man: Revolutionary Pamphlets 2**

February 27 – Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Reader response due in class.

March 1 – Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Fourth paper draft due in class.

## **Week 7: Declaring Independence**

March 6 - Thomas Jefferson, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America"  
"The Declaration of Independence"

Reader response due in class.

March 8 - Library Orientation: Early American Newspapers Online  
<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive>

Fourth paper due in class.

## **Week 8: Newspapers in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century America**

March 13 – Robert Allen Rutland, "The First Great Newspaper Debate: The Constitutional Crisis of 1787-88." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 97 (1987)\*  
Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*. 2 Volumes. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1947.  
Look up and photocopy entries on your assigned newspapers.

March 15 – No Class  
Assigned newspaper reading

## **Week 9: Spring Break**

## **Week 10: Political Theory and the Problem of Founding**

March 27 – Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*, 1-47  
Assigned newspaper reading

Reader response due in class.

March 29 – Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*, 48-76  
Assigned newspaper reading

## **Week 11: The Constitution and its Discontents**

April 3 – Anti-Federalists ("Brutus")  
Assigned newspaper reading

Reader response due in class.

April 5 - Anti-Federalists ("Brutus")

Assigned newspaper reading

**Week 12: Publius' Republicanism**

April 10 – *The Federalist Papers* (#1-14)  
Assigned newspaper reading

Reader response due in class.

April 12 – *The Federalist Papers* (#1-14)  
Assigned newspaper reading

**Week 13: Publius and the *Novus Ordo Seclorum***

April 17 – *The Federalist Papers* (#40, #49-51)  
Assigned newspaper reading

Reader response due in class.

April 19 – *The Federalist Papers* (#62-63, #78, #85)  
Assigned newspaper reading

**Week 14: Political Theory in the Public Sphere**

April 24 – Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article”  
Student reports on assigned newspapers.

Fifth paper draft due in class.

April 26 – Student reports on assigned newspapers.

**Week 15: Revolution, Founding, and Political Freedom**

May 1 - Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (215-282)

Reader response due in class.

May 3 - Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (215-282)

Fifth paper and writing portfolios due 12:00, May 8<sup>th</sup>.

To understand any country's political system, it is helpful to know something of the history of the nation and the background to the creation of the (latest) constitution. But this is a fundamental necessity in the case of the American political system. Unlike Britain but like most nation states, the American political system is clearly defined by basic documents. The great benefit of this system is that power is spread and counter-balanced and the 'founding fathers' - the 55 delegates who drafted the Constitution - clearly wished to create a political system which was in sharp contrast to, and much more democratic than, the monarchical system then in force in Britain. Martin Gilens is Professor of Politics at Princeton University (mgilens@princeton.edu). His research examines representation, public opinion, and mass media, especially in relation to inequality and public policy. Professor Gilens is the author of *Afluence & Inuence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (2012, Princeton University Press). He is currently engaged in a large collaborative project to study Economically Successful Americans and the Common Good. For helpful comments the authors are indebted to Larry Bartels and Jeff Isaac, to the anonymous reviewers from *Perspectives on Politics*, and to seminar participants at Harvard University and the University of Rochester. *Perspectives on Politics*. Political theory thus conceived is a conceptual scheme which deals with a restricted set of primary variables and their interrelations, which are to be found operating in all concrete parts of social systems. These variables are, however, subject to parametric conditions which constitute the values of other variables operating in the larger system which constitutes the society. Secondly, following on this, I assume that the empirical system to which political theory in this sense applies is an analytically defined, a "functional" subsystem of a society, not for example, put of power, though many political theorists (e.g. Friedrich) treat both leadership and, more broadly collective organization. In this case also the.