

Spring 2021

STS 325-102: The American Political Experiment

Ocean Gibson

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The American Political Experiment (STS 325)

Spring 2021, Thursdays from 6:00-8:50pm

Webex Room: <https://njit.webex.com/meet/ogg2>

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Office Hours: In-person (Thursdays by appointment) and Online (Monday-Friday by appointment)

Course Description: What inspired the formation of the American political experiment? What are its philosophical underpinnings, and who are its prophetic figures? What concerns shaped the construction of its institutional arrangement, and how does this arrangement compare to other systems in the world? Is it intended to be democratic, or something else? What are its guiding ideals, and how could it evolve in the future? We will explore these questions through a combination of primary source documents, key texts in political philosophy, and the occasional court case.

Course Aims: The course is structured as an introductory political science course with seminar-style elements. As such, it will be a hybrid between a lecture and a small discussion class. It will be concept-based, and assess your grasp of key ideas covered in the course readings, lectures, and discussions. The overall aim is to give you an opportunity to get acquainted with some of the major political themes of American democracy, and to critically engage with the material in a community of fellow students, citizens, and thinkers.

Assignments: Active reading of the assigned texts for each class; weekly multiple choice quizzes on the assigned readings (the lowest may be dropped); engagement in class discussion; one presentation on a reading; a midterm and a final.

Grading:

Presentation: 5%

Quizzes: 25%

Midterm: 35%

Final: 35%

Academic Integrity:

“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of

F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu”.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken at the start of every class. In keeping with NJIT policy, attendance does not constitute a basis for grading by itself; however, it will be factored into the overall participation grade and will of course have an impact on your ability to engage in discussion and stay up to speed.

Required Text:

Colin Woodard, *American Character: A History of the Epic Struggle Between Individual Liberty and the Common Good* (2016)

*PDFs of the rest of the course readings will be made available on Canvas.

Date	Topic	Readings Due
Week 1 1/21	Course introductions Individual Liberty Vs. The Common Good	Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i> , Preface, Ch. 1-2
Week 2 1/28	American Nations	Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i> , Ch. 3 John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” Thomas Jefferson, “Religion...my views of it...” An act for suppressing outlying slaves (1691)
Week 3 2/4	The Revolution	Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i> , Ch. 4 (pg. 85-93) Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence John Adams, “Thoughts on Government” Abigail Adams, “Remember the Ladies” Nicholas Street, “The American States Acting Over the Part of the Children of Israel”
Week 4 2/11	The Constitution I: The Realism of the Founders	Alexander Hamilton, Federalist 1, 6, 23, 85 John Jay, Federalist 2 James Madison, Federalist 10

<p>Week 5 2/18</p>	<p>The Constitution II: How Democratic is it?</p>	<p>The United States Constitution</p> <p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 4 (pg. 94-105)</p> <p>Robert Dahl, <i>How Democratic is the American Constitution?</i>, Ch. 1-2</p>
<p>Week 6 2/25</p>	<p>The Constitution III: The Formation of the Federal System</p>	<p>Alexander Hamilton, Federalist 78</p> <p>George Washington, “Farewell Address”</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural</p> <p><i>Marbury v. Madison</i></p> <p><i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i></p>
<p>Week 7 3/4</p>	<p>The 19th Century I: Antebellum Precursors and the Civil War</p>	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 4 (finish)</p> <p>Andrew Jackson, “Veto Message” (July 10, 1832)</p> <p>John C. Calhoun, “Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions”</p> <p>Abraham Lincoln, “Fragment on Slavery” —First Inaugural —“Gettysburg Address” —Second Inaugural</p>
<p>Week 8 3/11</p>	<p>Midterm</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>3/18</p>	<p>Spring Break</p>	<p>Watch <i>Lincoln!</i></p>
<p>Week 9 3/25</p>	<p>The 19th Century II: Prophets of American Democracy</p>	<p>Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul”</p> <p>Henry David Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”</p> <p>Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>, introduction</p>
<p>Week 10 4/1</p>	<p>The 19th Century III: The Tendencies of American Progress</p>	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 5 (pg. 111-132)</p>

		<p>Henry Ward Beecher, “The Tendencies of American Progress”</p> <p>John O’Sullivan, “Annexation”</p> <p>TBD: <i>Gibbons v. Ogden</i></p> <p><i>Dartmouth College v. Woodward</i></p> <p><i>Charles River Bridge Company v. Warrant Bridge Company</i></p>
Week 11 4/8	The 20th Century I: Progressivism, and WWI	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 5 (132-146)</p> <p>Theodore Roosevelt, TBD</p> <p>Woodrow Wilson, The Fourteen Points —“Presenting the Treaty for Ratification” (1919)</p> <p>Randolph Bourne, “Trans-national America”</p>
Week 12 4/15	The 20th Century II: The Depression, The New Deal, and WWII	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 6</p> <p>Franklin Delano Roosevelt, TBD</p> <p>Reinhold Niebuhr, “Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility”</p>
Week 13 4/22	The 20th Century III: Enduring Challenges	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 7</p> <p>Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”</p>
Week 14 4/29	Nationhood Revisited	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 8-9</p>