

Fall 2021

STS 325-101: The American Political Experiment

Ocean Gibson

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The American Political Experiment (STS 325)

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

Faculty Memorial Hall 203

Professor Ocean Gibson

Department of Humanities

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Office Hours: In-person (Thursdays by appointment) and Online (Monday-Thursday 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? To what extent is it democratic? How should we conceptualize issues surrounding race, class, nationhood, education, and global responsibility? What are America's guiding ideals and how could it evolve in the future? We will explore these questions primarily through primary source documents (spanning political theory, social thought, and religious reflection) and the occasional secondary source.

Course Aims: Both the content and structure of the course are hybrid in character. In terms of content, it is part political theory and part social thought. Structurally, it will combine elements from lecture-based and discussion formats. 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.

The other priority of the course is sustained focus on your critical reading and writing skills. Throughout the semester, great emphasis will be placed on your ability to clearly articulate text-based arguments in a written form.

Assignments: Active reading of the assigned texts for each class; bi-weekly written responses (six total); engagement in class discussion; one presentation on a reading; a midterm and a final, each composed of a combination of multiple choice questions and short essays.

Individual arrangements for assignments, including exams, must be arranged weeks in advance. There will be no exam make-ups.

Grading:

Presentation and Participation: 10%

Responses (6): 30%

Midterm: 30%

Final: 30%

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.

Readings: PDFs of the course readings will be made available on Canvas.

Date	Topic	Readings Due
Week 1 9/2	Introductions The Enlightenment, Republicanism, Liberalism	John Locke, <i>The Second Treatise of Civil Government</i> (1681), selections John Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> (1685), selections Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776) Abigail Adams, “Remember the Ladies” (1776) Thomas Jefferson, “Religion...my views of it...” (1787)
Week 2 9/9	The Realism of the Founders	John Adams, “Thoughts on Government” (1776) From <i>The Federalist Papers</i> (1787-8): Alexander Hamilton, Federalist 1, 6, 23, 85 John Jay, Federalist 2 James Madison, Federalist 10
Week 3	The Constitution	The United States Constitution (1787) (Skim for reference)

9/16		Robert Dahl, <i>How Democratic is the American Constitution?</i> (2001), Ch. 1-2
Week 4 9/23	American Nations and the Frontier	Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i> (2016) Ch. 3 Frederick Jackson Turner, “The American Frontier” (1893) Thomas Jefferson, Secret Message to Congress Regarding the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1803) Transcript of Louisiana Purchase Treaty (1803) John O’Sullivan, “Annexation” (1845)
Week 5 9/30	American Self-Construction: As a City on a Hill	John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630) Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address (1801) Maria Stewart, “Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall” (1832) Brigham Young, “Discourses” (1851-1877) Henry Ward Beecher, “The Tendencies of American Progress” (1871)
Week 6 10/7	American Self-Construction: The Divinity of the Individual	Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul” (1841) Henry David Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” (1849) Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> (1851), selections
Week 7 10/14	The Civil War Midterm	Andrew Jackson, Message to Congress on Indian Removal (1830) John C. Calhoun, Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions (1837) Abraham Lincoln, Fragment on Slavery (1854) —First Inaugural (1861) —Gettysburg Address (1863)

		—Second Inaugural (1865)
Week 8 10/21	Race	Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852) Booker T. Washington, “The Awakening of the Negro” (1896) Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963) Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964)
Week 9 10/28	Plutocracy and Class	Theodore Roosevelt, The “New Nationalism” Speech (1910) Woodrow Wilson, “The Old Order Changeth” (1913) —“What is Progress?” (1913)
Week 10 11/4	Immigration, Nationhood, Education	Randolph Bourne, “Trans-national America” (1916) John Dewey, “Nationalizing Education” (1916) Michael Lind, <i>The Next American Nation</i> (1995), selection TBD
Week 11 11/11	Liberalism Revisited	Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Radio Address unveiling the second half of the New Deal (1936) John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us.” (1939) Lewis Mumford, “The Corruption of Liberalism”
Week 12 11/18	American Conservatism *Recorded lecture*	Milton Friedman, <i>Capitalism and Freedom</i> (1962), Ch. 1 Everett M. Dirksen, “Speech to the Senate on the Civil Rights Bill (1964) Young Americans for Freedom, “Sharon Statement (1960) Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing” (1964)

		<p>Ronald Reagan, “Remarks to the NAACP Convention (1981)</p> <p>James Baldwin/William F. Buckley “Cambridge University Debate (1965)</p> <p>William F. Buckley/George Wallace “Firing Line Debate (1968)</p> <p>Alan Brinkley, “The Problem of American Conservatism (1994)</p> <p>George H. Nash, “The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Then and Now (2016)</p>
11/25	No class: Thanksgiving Break	
Week 13 12/2	Global Power and Responsibility	<p>Woodrow Wilson, 14 Points (1918)</p> <p>Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Four Freedoms” (1941)</p> <p>Reinhold Niebuhr, “Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility” (1943)</p> <p>J. William Fulbright, “The Arrogance of Power” (1966)</p>
Week 14 12/9	Redeeming American Democracy	<p>Colin Woodard, <i>American Character</i>, Ch. 9</p> <p>Steve McIntosh, “Depolarizing the American Mind” (2014)</p>