

POLS 150: Foundations of American Democracy

Emory University

Department of Political Science

Fall 2025

Tuesday / Thursday 11:30am-12:45pm

Tarbuton Hall 111

Instructor: Dr. Evan Cree Gee

Email: evan.cree.gee@emory.edu

Office: Tarbuton Hall 217D

Office Hours: Thursday & Friday 9:30am-11am (or by appointment)

I. Course Description

This class is devoted to the underlying principles of liberal democracy in America and American political life. Emphasis will be placed on close reading and discussion of classic texts and original documents on democracy and from the American political tradition. This course is part of Emory's Voluntary Core Curriculum, a group of courses designed to provide the foundation for a true education in the liberal arts. The course will provide an opportunity for students to study the foundational ideas that informed the creation of the American constitutional system, major debates and crises that have arisen in American political life, and some of the contemporary challenges in maintaining American constitutional democracy. The goal of the course will be to provide students with a shared core of knowledge that will provide a strong foundation for further study of politics or law and for engaged and responsible citizenship.

Topics discussed will include: contemporary critiques of liberal democracy; the principles of the Declaration of Independence; the debate over the Constitution of 1787 between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists; the nature of democracy as a social condition; the tyranny of the majority; individualism and materialism; the problem of slavery in the founding and the early republic; the moral and constitutional issues at stake in the Civil War; the question of civil disobedience.

II. Required Texts

Please make sure you purchase physical copies of the exact editions listed below. E-books or different editions are not acceptable substitutes.

1. Publius (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay). *The Federalist Papers*. (Signet: 2003) [ISBN: 0451628810]
2. Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*. Edited by CB Macpherson (Hackett: 1980) [ISBN: 091514493X]
3. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop. (Chicago: 2000) [ISBN: 0226805360]
4. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. (Signet Classics) [ISBN 9780451529947]

5. Booker T. Washington. *Up From Slavery*. (Dover Classics) [ISBN 0486287386]
6. Course Packet.

III. Assignments

Attendance & Participation (10%)
Reading Quizzes (10%)
Emory Williams Lectures (5%)
Mid Term Exam (20%)
Essay (25%)
 First Draft, Mini-Essay (5%) (C/I)
 Essay Conference (5%) (C/I)
 Final Version with Revisions (15%)
Final Exam (30%)

IV. Assignment Descriptions & Due Dates

Reading Quizzes. Quizzes will be given **every day** to assess that you're up-to-date on reading. 15% of the total number of quizzes will be dropped at the end of the semester. There will be no make-up quizzes.

Emory Williams Lectures. This course is part of the Voluntary Core Curriculum, Emory's Great Books program. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the course, you are required to attend four lectures on great works, which constitute the Emory Williams Memorial Lecture Series. These lectures are usually held on Wednesday afternoons from 4:00 – 5:00 in the Oxford Road Building Presentation Room. Any lecture that is held at another day or time will be marked on the schedule.

Note: Students unable to attend a given a lecture will make this up by watching videos of the lectures (posted on the Voluntary Core website within a week after the lecture) and submitting a 500 word summary within two weeks of the lecture or by the end of classes, whichever is earlier.

September 10: Benjamin Kleinerman, R.W. Morrison Professor of Political Science at Baylor University: Crisis Presidency

September 25 (**Thursday**): Peter Wakefield, Professor of Pedagogy, Institute for the Liberal Arts, Emory: Why did Plato Write Dialogues?

October 15: Erin Bonning, Associate Teaching Professor and Director of Emory Planetarium, Emory: It's not Aliens

October 29: Caroline Schumann, Professor of German Studies, Emory: TBD

Mid-Term Exam. There will be an in-class mid-term exam on **October 9th**. Details and a study guide will be distributed a week prior.

Essay. The essay will consist of three parts. First, students will submit a very short (500-700 words) mini-essay, which will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis. After turning the essay in, I will give feedback and will meet with each student to discuss. Following that meeting, you will have time to revise and expand the essay (1200-1500 words), and turn it in for a grade. This is to help you learn to write better and incorporate feedback. A late penalty will apply to all students – 10% off the final score for each day of lateness. **DRAFT NOVEMBER 11th | MEETINGS NOVEMBER 19-21st | REVISED VERSION DECEMBER 5th**

Final Exam. The final exam will be an in-person, essay exam that covers broader course themes. It is scheduled by the registrar for **Tuesday, December 16th at 11:30am.**

V. Course Policies

Books. You are required to have a physical copy (rather than an e-book version) of every book. Used copies are fine, but make sure you have the exact book editions listed above. You are also required to have the relevant readings with you in class.

Unexcused Absences. Two (2) unexcused absences are permitted without penalty. Each unexcused absence after the first two will result in a deduction of 10% of your attendance grade.

Excused Absences. You will be excused from attendance if you have: flu- or Covid-like symptoms (notify me at least an hour before class); a documented illness or family emergency; a religious holiday (notify me at least two weeks in advance).

Participation. Your final participation grade will be scored out of 10 on the following scale: 0-3 (rarely prepared, little participation); 3-5 (few or no contributions to class discussions over the semester as a whole); 6-8 (fair or good contributions to class discussions over the semester as a whole); 9-10 (very good or excellent contributions to class discussions over the semester as a whole). Your participation grade can be augmented by regular office hours visits.

Office Hours. I will hold office hours. If you would like to talk to me outside class time but you are not free at the scheduled times, please either talk to me straight after class or send me an email with a couple of alternative times to talk. If you just have a brief question that could be answered in a sentence or two, feel free to **email** me any time.

Electronic Devices. The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices is prohibited during class time. **After one warning, the continued use of electronic devices will result in a 0 for attendance on the given day.**

Grades. Plus and minus grades will be used as follows: A (94-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (84-86); B- (80-83); C+ (77-79); C (74-76); C- (70-73); D (60-69); F (below 60). (I will round from the tenths place such that a 93.50 is an A, but a 93.49 is an A-.)

Academic Integrity. Academic dishonesty will be treated extremely seriously. Plagiarism will result in an F for the course. The Honor Code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, to deviate from the teacher's instructions about collaboration on work that is submitted for grades, to give false information to a faculty member, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. You agree that the instructor is entitled to move you to another seat during examinations, without explanation. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the honor council.

Artificial Intelligence. The use of artificial intelligence or large language model generative services (such as ChatGPT or Claude) is strictly prohibited in this course for any purpose. Use of these may result in a failing grade for an assignment.

Disabilities. If you anticipate issues related to the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me. I would like us to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that disability related accommodations are necessary, you may register with Accessibility Services at (404)727-9877 or via e-mail at accessibility@emory.edu. To register with OAS, students must self-identify and initiate contact with the OAS office.

COURSE READING SCHEDULE

The schedule below is subject to revisions, as dictated by the pace of our discussions. Changes will be communicated in advance. Readings found in the course packet are marked "CP."

INTRODUCTION

August 28 Introduction and Liberal Democracy in America	Strauss, "What is Liberal Education" (CP) <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> (in <i>The Federalist Papers</i> , pp. 528-32) U.S. Constitution, Title and Preamble (p. 542) Read this course syllabus entirely
--	--

PART I: LOCKE'S NATURAL RIGHTS LIBERALISM

September 2 Introduction to Locke, Natural Rights	Excerpt from Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> (CP) Excerpt from Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> (CP) Locke, <i>Second Treatise</i> Chapters 1-3
September 4 Locke on Property	<i>ST</i> Chapter 4-5
September 9 Locke on Family	<i>ST</i> Chapter 6-7
September 11 Locke on Civil Government	<i>ST</i> Chapter 8-14 (excerpts); 19

PART II: THE FOUNDING & THE CONSTITUTION

September 16 <i>The Federalist</i> Introduction & Faction	<i>The Federalist</i> 1, 9, 10, 37
September 18 The Legislature & Executive	U.S. Constitution, Articles I-II <i>The Federalist</i> 52-53, 55, 57, 69-70
September 23 Federalism	The Bill of Rights <i>The Federalist</i> 47-51, 84
September 25 The Anti-Federalist Debates	Brutus I, from the Anti-Federalist (CP) Centinel I, from the Anti-Federalist (CP)
September 30 Constitutional Interpretation	<i>The Federalist</i> 78 <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (selections) (CP) Brennan, "The Constitution of the United States: Contemporary Ratification" (CP) Scalia, "Originalism: The Lesser Evil" (CP)

October 2 The Founders on Religion	Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, Q.17 (CP) Jefferson, "Letter to Danbury Baptist's Association" (CP) Washington, "Letter to Touro Synagogue" (CP) Washington, "Thanksgiving Day Proclamation" (CP) Henry, "A Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion" (CP) Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments" Mid-Term Exam Study Guide Distributed
---------------------------------------	---

PART IV: TOCQUEVILLE'S FRIENDLY CRITIQUE

October 7 Introduction to Tocqueville's <i>Democracy in America</i> & The Spirit of Equality	<i>Democracy in America</i> Introduction and Vol.1, Pt.1, Chapter 2-5 (pp. 3-15 & 27-63)
October 9 – No Readings – MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS	
October 16 Tyranny of the Majority	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.1, Pt.2, Chapters 7-8 (pp. 235-258)
October 21 On the Principle Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.1, Pt.2, Chapter 9 (pp. 264-298)
October 23 Modes of Thought & Philosophy	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.2, Pt.1, Chapters 1-8 (pp. 403-426)
October 28 Individualism	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.2, Pt.2, Chapters 1-7 (pp. 479-500) Paper Topics Assigned
October 30 Self Interest Well Understood	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.2, Pt.2, Chapters 8-20 (pp. 500-530)

PART V: SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACY

November 4 Tocqueville on Race & The Life of Frederick Douglass	<i>Democracy in America</i> Vol.1, Pt.1, excerpts from Chapter 10 (TBA) Frederick Douglass, <i>Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
--	--

November 6 The Problem of Slavery in the Early Republic	Patrick Henry, Letter to Robert Pleasants (CP) Debates on Slavery at the Constitutional Convention (CP) Benjamin Franklin, "Petition" (CP) John C. Calhoun, Speech on the Oregon Bill (CP) Alexander Stephens, "Cornerstone Speech" (CP)
November 11 Frederick Douglass on Slavery and the Constitution	Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro" (CP) Frederick Douglass, "The Constitution of the United States: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?" (CP) William Lloyd Garrison, "On the Constitution and the Union" (CP) <i>Mini-Essays Due IN CLASS</i>
November 13 Lincoln vs. Douglas	Abraham Lincoln, Peoria Speech (CP) Stephen A. Douglas, Springfield Speech (CP)
November 18 Lincoln as Statesman	Lincoln, First Inaugural (CP) Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation (CP) Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (CP) Lincoln, Second Inaugural (CP) W.E.B. Du Bois, "Abraham Lincoln" (CP) W.E.B. Du Bois, "Again, Lincoln" (CP) Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln" (CP) <i>Mini-Essays Returned & Conferences</i>
November 20 Reconstruction Washington vs. DuBois	U.S. Constitution, Amendments 13-15 (in <i>The Federalist Papers</i> , pp. 561-63) Booker T. Washington, <i>Up From Slavery</i> , pp. 1-11, 57-64, 79-81, 105-115, 156-157 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (CP) W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Training of Black Men" (CP)
November 25 The Civil Rights Era	Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (CP) Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream" (CP) Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (CP)

December 2 The Enduring Legacy of Slavery	Ibram X. Kendi, "The American Nightmare" (CP) Coleman Hughes, "A Better Anti-Racism" (CP) Glenn C. Loury, "Unspeakable Truths About Racial Inequality in America" (CP)
PART VI: LIBERAL DEMOCRACY TODAY AND TOMORROW	
December 4 Does liberal democracy fulfill its promise?	Excerpt from Nietzsche's <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> (CP) Various, "Against the Dead Consensus" from <i>First Things</i> (CP) Putnam, "Bowling Alone" (CP) <i>Final Essay Due</i>
December 9 What comes next for liberal democracy?	Fukuyama, "The End of History" (CP) Solzhenitsyn, "A world split apart" (CP) Excerpt from Bloom, <i>The Closing of the American Mind</i> (on Canvas)
December 16 Final Exam 11:30am-2:00pm	In-person, essay exam.