

POLS 313

American Political Thought

Vanguard University of Southern California

Class

Semester: Fall 2017

Room: Scott 229

Time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:45

Instructor

Kevin Walker, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Government

Office Hours: Mondays, 11-1; Thursdays, 10:30-1:30

Email: kevin.walker@vanguard.edu

Course Description

No other nation can be like America, Margaret Thatcher once observed, because all other nations “are the product of history and not of philosophy” (Speech at the Hoover Institution, 1991). The American Founding, in other words, was a philosophic creation: the Founders may have borrowed from history, but they established a regime rooted in “the laws of nature and nature’s God,” revealing self-evident truths of human equality, and the fundamental truths of human nature. Our Founding was an *idea* far more than a tradition – and though we progress and change and move forward into history, that idea never quiet lets us go. We rejected it in theory, but in practice, it continues to speak to our hearts with great clarity. This course is a study in the themes and cycles of our philosophic regime between the time of the Founding and the dawn of our own era in the 1960s. We will look at the American Founders who left us the spirit of both reform and liberty, a tension that came to shape all subsequent American politics. We will study the development of that tension in the Antebellum and Civil War eras, and the response from Abraham Lincoln in his attempt to recover the principles of the Founding when they fell into great doubt with the presence of slavery. We will look at the subsequent Gilded Age and Progressive Era with the rise of social Darwinism and the new emphasis on administrative government over capitalism. We will then examine concepts of American identity – the rise of “Americanism,” the possibilities envisioned in social engineering, the nature of racial tension, and the women’s movement. Lastly, we will consider the origins of radicalism and the new liberalism of our own time, and the conservative response. Throughout this course, we will consider the importance of philosophy in the story of American political development, and try to foretell the trajectory of American philosophy in the future, and what it means in our own lives, as citizens of a constitutional republic.

Required Texts

The following texts are required (in the order we’ll be reading them):

Something That Will Surprise the World: The Essential Writings of the Founding Fathers. Edited by Susan Dunn.

Basic Books, 2006.

Lincoln, Abraham. *Great Speeches.* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward.* New York: Dover Publications, 1996. (Originally published in 1888)

Sumner, William Graham. *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other.* Caldwell: Caxton Press, 2003. (Originally published by Harper & Brothers, 1883.)

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* Minola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994. (Originally published in 1901.)

Kirk, Russell. *The American Cause.* Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009. (Originally published in 1957.)

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Participation and Reading Questions (20%).** Come to class every day and be prepared to discuss the texts based on the weekly reading questions. Inability to answer the questions indicates not reading, and it will cost a participation point. Not having the book will cost two participation points.
- **Essay I (30%).** This is an essay on the first part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Essay II (30%).** This is an essay on the second part of the course. There will be a prompt.
- **Final Exam (20%).** This is a comprehensive exam on the texts and general themes of the class. There will be a study guide.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, or the use of someone else's text without quotes and proper citation, is considered a violation of the university's standards of academic integrity and will be grounds for serious disciplinary action. A first offense will be an F on the assignment; a second offense will be an F in the class and a referral to the Dean.

Disabilities

The Office of Disability and Learning Services provides reasonable accommodations for students who need assistance with learning, and for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your professor(s) and Disability and Learning Services. If you have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but not limited to; attention-related, learning, mental health, vision, hearing, physical or other health conditions), please contact The Office of Disability and Learning Services at 714-619-6550 or disabilityservices@vanguard.edu.

Class Schedule

I. American Natural Right

Week 1 – Founding Statesmanship

August 21

Something that will Surprise the World –
George Washington

August 23

Something that will Surprise the World – George
Washington and Alexander Hamilton

Week 2 – A Liberal or a Classical Republic?

August 28

Something that will Surprise the World –
Alexander Hamilton

August 30

Something that will Surprise the World – John
Adams

Week 3 – A Classical Republic

September 4

Labor Day

September 6

Something that will Surprise the World – John Adams

Week 4 – Idealism and Pragmatism

September 11

Something that will Surprise the World – Thomas Jefferson

September 13

Something that will Surprise the World – James Madison

Week 5 – The Jacksonian Mind

September 18

Readings – John Calhoun; George Fitzhugh; William Lloyd Garrison; and Stephen Douglas

September 20

Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – Lyceum Address

Week 6 – Lincoln’s Greatness

September 25

Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – House Divided Speech; Address at the Cooper Institute

September 27

Abraham Lincoln, *Great Speeches* – First Inaugural Address; Gettysburg Address; Second Inaugural Address

II. The State and the Free Market

Week 7 – American-Style Socialism

October 2

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

October 4

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

Week 8 – Social Darwinism

October 9

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

October 11

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

Week 9 – The Free Market

October 16

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

October 18

William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*

III. American Identity

Week 10 – Making Americans

October 23

Readings – Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Solitude of the Self* (1892); Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life* (1900); *The New Nationalism* (1910); *Who is a Progressive?* (1912)

October 25

Readings – Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization*

Week 11 – Race

October 30

Readings – Booker T. Washington; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

November 1

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Week 12 – Race and Power

November 6

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

November 8

W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*; Readings – Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation”

Week 13 – Radicals!

November 13

Readings – The Port Huron Statement

November 15

Readings – Mario Savio, *An End to History* (1964); Jerry Ruben, *The Yippie Manifesto*

Week 14 – Conservatism

November 20

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

Thanksgiving

Week 15 – Conservative Principles

November 27

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

November 29

Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*

December 4

Conclusion

Final Exam – Friday, December 11, 3:30-5:30