

## DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, AND EQUALITY – THE PRIMARY TEXTS

This is a class on American political thought. Each week we engage in conversation about foundational American texts, beginning with the Puritan settlement and continuing through the end of the Civil War, the period that shaped our form of government as well as our conception of our rights and roles within it. Readings will be available for downloading as electronic documents. (Hard copy can be provided to those who request it.) A summary of the course follows, along with readings for the first class, at which time subsequent readings and ways to access them will be provided.

### WEEK ONE: GRACE

We begin by tracing the origins of the Anglo-America philosophical tradition of Liberalism in the political and religious turmoil of 17<sup>th</sup> Century England. Using Hobbes and Locke as our guides, we introduce the central themes of the class: the nature and limitations of Sovereignty, the State, and the Individual as a bearer of rights. The first week's selections from the early Puritans explore how dissenting Protestants modified and implanted those ideas on American soil. Excerpts and selections include:

- Wm. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Chapters IV and IX (1620-1647)  
<http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/bradford.html>
- John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)  
[https://www.winthropsociety.com/doc\\_charity.php](https://www.winthropsociety.com/doc_charity.php)
- John Winthrop, "Reasons to be Considered...for the Intended Plantation in New England" (ca. 1628)  
[https://www.winthropsociety.com/doc\\_reasons.php](https://www.winthropsociety.com/doc_reasons.php)
- John Cotton, "A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace" (1636)  
<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/dfg/amrl/cotton1.htm>
- "The Examination of Anne Hutchison in the Court at Newington" (1637)  
<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bdorsey1/41docs/30-hut.html>
- Jonathon Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741)  
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.sinners.html>

Supplemental reading, for those who wish:

- Jonathon Edwards *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, (1746)  
selections to be provided by email in advance of class
- Roger Williams, "A Plea for Religious Liberty" (1644)  
<https://www.constitution.org/bcp/religlib.htm>
- John Cotton, "Limitations of Government" (1656)  
[http://explorehistory.ou.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/prewar\\_paper1\\_DOC2.pdf](http://explorehistory.ou.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/prewar_paper1_DOC2.pdf)

### WEEK TWO: LIBERTY

What is political liberty, and what did the colonists mean when they invoked it as the animating principle of their Revolution? We address these questions primarily through the writings of Thomas Jefferson and his Declaration of Independence, augmenting them with selections from Abigail Adams, Thomas Paine, and others.

### WEEK THREE: DEMOCRACY

What is a democracy, a republic, a federal system? And how can we make them work to advance the general good while protecting individual liberty? We follow the debate (and the inevitable compromises it led to) as laid out in selections from the Federalist Papers and the U.S. Constitution.

### WEEK FOUR: EQUALITY

Tocqueville was only 26 and hiding from French politics when he travelled through America, the Jacksonian Era, and what might be called our Populism 1.0. The result, *Democracy in America*, remains a classic expression of the problems and promise, as well as the tensions between liberty and equality, inherent in the American experiment. We'll explore Tocqueville's questions along with him, augmenting selections from his work with excerpts from Jackson and others on the bank crisis, the Indian removals, and the nullification controversy.

### WEEK FIVE: INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism is central to our idea of who and what we are as Americans. While many hands have shaped our irrepressible belief in and insistence on ourselves, perhaps the greatest, most lyrical, and most radical advocates of American individualism were Emerson and Thoreau. We discuss the inspiring and sometimes troubling implications of their radical individualism through a selection of their essays.

### WEEK SIX: FREEDOM

What is the difference between freedom and liberty? How has our understanding of American freedom been shaped by our understanding of its antithesis, American slavery? And how have coercion of the spirit and coercion of the body worked together throughout our history? Selections from Frederick Douglass, his fellow Abolitionists, and the radical Feminists who also spearheaded the anti-slavery movement, help us parse these questions.

### WEEK SEVEN: UNION

By the time the carnage at Gettysburg ended, Abraham Lincoln had grown to understand, as few others had or would, that nothing short of a "rebirth of freedom," and a complete reimagining of our national compact, would have to emerge from the Civil War. We follow the evolution of Lincoln's thought in selected writings and speeches from the 1850's to the healing and deeply spiritual rhetoric of his Second Inaugural Address.

### WEEK EIGHT: CITIZENSHIP

Amendments XIII, XIV, and XV abolished slavery, extended birthright citizenship and equal protection under the law to all Americans, and established universal male suffrage. We look at these transformative amendments as well as excerpts from Plessy v. Ferguson, W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, writings of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frederick Douglass' "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln" to help us consider the business our forebears left unfinished and the consequences we still grapple with today.