

THE CREATION OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

LDST 308/PLSC 330

Spring 2024

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10-12 and by appointment

This course offers students the opportunity to evaluate the arguments and actions of those involved in the creation of the American Republic (roughly, 1770-1789) as well as those who locate the origins of the United States elsewhere.

This is not a purely academic debate: President Joe Biden has repeatedly claimed that he is involved in a “battle for the soul of this nation.” The idea that political communities have souls can be traced all the way back to Plato’s *Republic* (written in approximately 360 BC); what is less clear is what the American soul in fact is. Is it established in the Declaration? In the Constitution? Are these seminal moments themselves dependent upon earlier times: the first importation of enslaved persons in 1619 or the arrival of Puritans in 1620?

We will approach these questions through a thoughtful engagement with a variety of textual sources. Beginning, as most (including Abraham Lincoln) do, with the Declaration of Independence, we will take as our guide Danielle Allen’s recent work of public philosophy, *Our Declaration*. Thanks to James Madison, we have a front-row seat for the arguments made for and against various provisions of the Constitution at the debates of 1787, allowing us to observe statesmanship in action, as well as the essays for and against the final document. We will conclude the semester by engaging with various critics: Frederick Douglass argues that the Constitution and the Declaration cohere, but that American political practice has gone awry, particularly when it comes to slavery; the 1619 Project has more recently charged that those earlier documents are themselves reflective of white supremacy that can be traced to earliest importation of enslaved persons to the colony at Jamestown. And the famous philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville—who praises the Constitution but never mentions the Declaration—identifies the Puritan settlements of New England as America’s “point of departure.” Which of these moments has the best claim to be the soul of this nation?

Particularly with regard to the Constitution, our first task is to understand what the delegates did and why. It is obviously fashionable to object to various provisions of that document—such as the Electoral College or state equality in the Senate—but these choices did not arise in a vacuum. We might have wished they did otherwise in certain cases; however, their choices were constrained by various factors. To assess fairly the choices they did make requires some awareness of what the plausible alternatives actually were.

COURSE SURVEY: <https://forms.gle/Epcmqxymynq3bCm8>

Schedule of Readings
(likely to change)

I. The Declaration of Independence

January 17: The Soul of the United States

- Plato's *Republic* (excerpts on Blackboard)
- Biden 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/01/remarks-by-president-bidenon-the-continued-battle-for-the-soul-of-the-nation/>
- Biden 2017: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/joe-biden-after-charlottesville/538128/>

January 22: Allen, *Our Declaration*, pp. 21-82

January 24: Allen, pp. 83-159

January 29: Allen, pp. 160-229

January 31: Allen, pp. 230-82

II. The Convention Debates

February 5: Founders and Leaders

- Statesmanship at the Founding [Blackboard]
- Federalist 38
- James Caesar: <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-first-american-founder> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f34dII_kHLE

February 7: *Debates*, pp. 23-106

February 12: *Debates*, pp. 106-80

February 14: *Debates*, pp. 181-256

February 17: Short Paper Due

February 19: *Debates*, pp. 256-313

February 21: *Debates*, pp. 314-405

February 26: *Debates*, pp. 405-85

February 28: *Debates*, pp. 485-579

March 3 – Article Summary Due

March 4: *Debates*, pp. 579-659

March 6: Madison's Post-Mortem

- Madison, "A Sketch Neither Finished Nor Applied"
- Letter to Jefferson: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0274>
- Jefferson's Reply: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0210>

III. The Debate Over the Constitution

March 18: Melancton Smith: He Changed His Mind (Storing 1985, 331-60)

March 20 - Brutus: He Was Against It from the Start, Letters I, II, III, IV, XVI (Storing 1985, 108-32, 187-91)

March 25 – The Bill of Right: Pennsylvania Minority (Storing 1985, 201-24); Madison's Speech on the Bill of Rights [Blackboard]; Madison and Jefferson on the Bill of Rights [Blackboard]

March 27 - CLASS CANCELLED:

Watch "The Federalist Papers: Relevant Today"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swd5FOXKrII>

Watch "The Great Constitutional Debate: Madison v. Mason"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfBGQV6jkxY>

March 29 – Leadership Assessment Due

April 1 - Key *Federalist* Papers: *Federalist* 10, 39, 47-48, 51, 68-69

April 3 – Key *Federalist* Papers: *Federalist* 52, 53, 55, 56, 62, 63

IV. The Other Foundings

April 8: Rogers Smith [Blackboard], Michael Zuckert [Blackboard]

April 10: Tocqueville [Blackboard]

April 15: Class Cancelled

April 17: Class Cancelled Watch Annette Gordon-Reed on Jefferson and Slavery:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wv9G9WIND-4>

April 19: Papers Due at 5 PM

April 22: Frederick Douglass [Blackboard], The 1619 Project [Blackboard]

April 24: Washington's Farewell Address (Gordon Wood?)

FINAL EXAM AS DETERMINED BY REGISTRAR (I believe Friday, May 3, 9 AM)

Required Books

- Allen, Danielle. 2013. *Our Declaration*. New York: Liveright.
- Hamilton, Madison, Jay. 2003. *The Federalist Papers*. New York: Signet. Other editions are acceptable.
- Koch, Adrienne, ed. 1987. *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press. Other editions are acceptable.
- Storing, ed. 1985. *The Anti-Federalist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
 - Or Ketcham, ed. 2003. *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*. New York: Signet. (It's cheaper, but less complete and has only partial notes from the debates.)
- Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard

Reserved Books (in Boatwright, under PLSC 330)

- Bailyn, Bernard. 1967. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Beard, Charles. 1935. *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*. New York: Free Press.
- Bowen, Catherine Drinker. 1986. *Miracle at Philadelphia*. New York: Little, Brown.
- Hannah-Jones, Nikole. 2021. *The 1619 Project*. The New York Times Co.
- Holton, Woody. 2007. *Unruly Americans*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Meier, Pauline. 1997. *American Scripture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Nelson, Eric. 2014. *The Royalist Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Storing, Herbert. 1981. *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Waldstreicher, David. 2009. *Slavery's Constitution*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Wilentz, Sean. 2018. *No Property in Man*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Wood, Gordon. 1969. *The Creation of the American Republic*. Omohundro, etc.

Assessments

- Participation: 20%
- Article Summary: 10%
- Short Paper: 15%
- Leadership Analysis: 15%
- Long Paper: 20%

- Final Exam: 20%

Participation (20%)

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to class and to attend prepared to engage with their fellow students in an attempt to better understand them. You should always come to class with a question or a particularly interesting passage in mind. Good, regular participation is expected of all students, as is respect for other students. Twice during the semester, on an assigned date, students will be expected to provide two discussion questions for class. These should be circulated to your fellow students by 5 PM on the day before the class (for example, by Sunday at 5 PM for Monday's readings). Each set of discussion questions will be worth 5% of your participation grades; late questions will receive a 0.

Sign up for Discussion Questions here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IGUur7EJ8TxYGWRVfNeZ69X5OyvimUhd2_n7vJgH4As/edit?usp=sharing

Short Paper (15%)

This paper should be at least 2000 words and will focus on Allen's *Our Declaration*. These papers are due at 5 PM on Friday, February 17.

Article Summary (10%)

Students should find a recent (past ten years) article from a peer-reviewed scholarly journal that relates to the creation of the American republic. They should summarize it in their own words and post that summary, along with a critical reflection on the paper's argument, on the course Blackboard site as a "Wiki." (I've posted a sample there.) These should be about three pages long: summarizing as well as critically analyzing the article. The summaries are due March 3.

Leadership Assessment (15%)

This 1500-word paper should select a moment at the Constitutional Convention where a particular delegate engaged in leadership that affected the course of the convention. The paper should explain what the leadership was and why it mattered. (Of course, that it was important does not mean that it was good, at the time or now.) These are due at 5 PM on Friday, March 29.

Long Paper (20%)

This paper should be 3000-3500 words—the length of a Federalist paper—and should either (a) defend a provision in the Constitution, whether from critics then or now or (b) argue for an amendment to the Constitution, taking into account the original purposes and arguments for that provision. Obviously, this will require making use of the relevant Convention debates as well as the Federalist and anti-Federalist essays. These papers are due at 5 PM on April 19th.

Final Exam (20%)

The final exam will take place on the day and at the time scheduled by the Registrar. Currently, as best I can tell, that should be 9 AM on Friday, May 3.

Classroom Protocols

Absences: Due to lingering concerns about Covid-19 in particular and respiratory illnesses in general, there is no penalty for excessive absences provided students notify me in advance. However, you cannot participate when you are not in class, so try to avoid excessive absences.

Food: Please do not eat during class. It's a distraction to your classmates and, depending on whether pizza is involved, to me.

Lateness: Please respect your classmates and be on time for seminar. Frequent late arrivals will affect your participation score.

Cell phones, laptops, e-readers, and pagers: With the exception of necessary academic accommodations, please do not use them in class. It is impossible to participate if you are distracted by other things. (Obviously, there are circumstances where you may need a phone; please let me know about this before class.) Repeat offenders will be asked to leave class. Texting is not acceptable under any circumstances.

Late assignments: Papers are due at the specified time. If they are e-mailed, you are responsible for making sure I receive them on time. (I am generally good about responding to let you know they have arrived.) Late papers are eligible for partial credit, with a reduction of one letter grade per day. This is not to punish you but to avoid work piling up over time.

- Each student has two 24-hour late passes, a penalty-free extension that you can use for two different assignments or combine on one. The late passes can be used on the seminar papers or the low-stakes assessment, but not the text notes or exams.

Academic Accommodations: If you have a disability and may need accommodations of some kind in this course, you must make an appointment to see me during the first two weeks of class. Please bring a copy of your UR Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) form to that meeting. You are responsible for making all necessary arrangements for the appropriate accommodations.

Academic Integrity and Citations

The University of Richmond Honor Councils defines plagiarism as: “the presentation, oral and/or written, of words, facts, or ideas belonging to another source without proper acknowledgement,” (<https://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/pdfs/statutes.pdf>, p. 5).

I do not consider myself to be a member of the plagiarism police. However, if I suspect you of plagiarizing, I will take it very seriously: All potential violations of the Honor Code will be

referred to the Honor Council. All work submitted is expected to meet the standards of integrity and trust expected of you at the University of Richmond. If you have questions, feel free to ask me, or consult an appropriate source (e.g., the Writing Center). If in doubt don't do it.

The papers for this class are based on the readings. Although it is unnecessary, I cannot stop you from doing outside research; however, if you do so, it becomes even more important to cite all sources of information properly. You should use parenthetical citations where appropriate, keeping in mind that you must cite when summarizing or paraphrasing, as well as when you are quoting directly. *The use of text-generating artificial intelligence tools (like ChatGPT) to complete course assignments without the explicit permission of the instructor is also considered an Honor Code violation.*

To avoid the suspicion of plagiarism, be sure to cite all sources of information properly.

You should use the author-date method of parenthetical citations where appropriate, keeping in mind that you must cite when summarizing or paraphrasing, as well as when you are quoting directly. Please follow the appropriate guidelines from the Chicago Manual of Style, which can be accessed here: <http://libguides.richmond.edu/content.php?pid=58750&sid=430795>. Be sure to use the Chicago Author-Date system.

Why does the University take plagiarism so seriously? It is a kind of intellectual theft, taking the words—even the ideas—of people without giving them due credit. It gives you an unfair advantage over other students in the class, but it also fails to help you acquire the skills in research and writing that you will need after graduation. Using the proper citation format is part of avoiding plagiarism, and it also helps prepare you to follow the protocols of your profession.

Resources

The Academic Skills Center (<http://asc.richmond.edu> or 289-8626) helps students assess their academic strengths and weaknesses; hone their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information processing, concentration, and related techniques; work on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encourage campus and community involvement.

The Career Development Center (<http://cdc.richmond.edu/> or 289-8141) can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major, connecting with internships and learning experiences, investigating graduate and professional school options, and landing your first job. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor during your first year.

Counseling and Psychological Services (289-8119) assists students in meeting academic, personal, or emotional challenges. Services include assessment, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention and related services.

The Speech Center (<http://speech.richmond.edu> or 289-8814) assists with preparation and practice in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions are offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

The Writing Center (<http://writing.richmond.edu> or 289-8263) assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.

Grading Explanation

An A paper or examination is one that demonstrates mastery of the course material. It also evidences independent thought or reflection on the topics at hand, integrating them into other course topics, current events, or other fields in political science. It is exceptionally well-written—clear, without grammatical or structural problems—and appropriately sourced. In other words, A work is excellent.

A B paper or examination is one that demonstrates a solid grasp of the course material. There may be some small errors, and the original reflections characteristic of the A work are absent. It is still generally well-written, although there may be some small, infrequent mistakes. A B paper or examination is good.

A C paper or examination shows some familiarity with the course materials, but there are errors—including those of omission—and shows no evidence of being reconciled into a broader intellectual framework. There are more writing mistakes, some of which may be severe. A C paper or examination is average.

A D paper or examination bespeaks a lack of seriousness about the assignment. It shows only minimal comprehension of the course materials. It contains structural, grammatical, and theoretical errors. A D paper or examination is poor.

An F paper or examination is one that is entirely unsatisfactory. It shows no familiarity with the course materials and is late, plagiarized, or unserious, indicating a deficiency of effort as much as of result.

What do I look for in grading papers? A rubric for grading papers is available on Blackboard, but there are five major points to keep in mind when writing your papers:

1. Good grammar, proper punctuation, and appropriate citations are basic expectations. They are necessary but far from sufficient.
2. A clearly stated thesis that tells me what you are going to argue and how you are going to do so. The paper itself should be written with equal clarity.

3. A well-structured paper that reflects the thesis.
4. An argument that is strongly supported by evidence, used fairly and judiciously.
5. A nuanced, perceptive understanding of the authors' argument that makes your own argument particularly insightful and persuasive.

**Please feel free to ask me any questions at any time.
I want you to understand and to enjoy the material in this course.**