

**The University of Texas at Austin**  
**Liberal Arts Honors, Government Honors & Core, Texts and Ideas**

**LAH 350/GOV 379S “Regime Perspectives on American Politics”**

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**Spring 2011**

*Office Hours:*

Tuesdays 3:30-5PM & Wednesdays 1:30-3PM,

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This is a seminar on American politics and culture. Two purposes govern the selection of texts for the course and guide our discussion of them. All of our texts attempt to look at American politics as a *whole*. Most books and courses on America look at only a part, such as the Presidency, or elections, or popular culture. Here we attempt to think about how the parts of America fit together. Even when these texts speak about a part, for example an institution such as the presidency or the Congress, they present the topic from a vantage point on the whole polity. To see the polity as a whole also means that we will have to revisit and rethink aspects of our political life that we take for granted – that we don’t examine because those parts have become so natural or familiar to us. Seeing the polity whole enables us to render the familiar unfamiliar, to make what we take for granted strange and new.

To see the polity as a whole requires that we get some distance from our subject, much as to see the planet earth as a whole requires one to look at it from outer space. Just as it is difficult to get visual perspective on a place living within it, it is difficult to understand the promise or pathologies of a regime from within. To get critical distance from our politics, we will closely study three sets of texts that look at American politics from a distance. The first part of the course will recover the perspective of the founding debate between Federalists and Anti-federalists. This fundamental debate reveals what is at stake in the basic architecture of the American regime. The second part of the course is a close study of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. Regarded by many as the best book ever written on democracy and the best book written on America, Tocqueville sees our polity whole because he looks at it from the vantage point of Europe, in general, and France, in particular. In the third part of the seminar we think about American politics from the perspective of thoughtful commentators who feel only nominally included in the polity. Half in and half out, these extraordinary black American writers reveal fissures and fault lines in the American regime. We end the class with a discussion of America’s place in the world today – examining a speech by a writer who articulately raises challenges to our self-understanding that are inarticulately expressed today in rage and ranting from enemies of the United States.

**Requirements:**

Three take home analytic essays, chosen from a list of topics I provide, each weighted 25% of the course grade. Late essays will not be accepted, except with a doctor’s excuse or a Dean’s excuse for family emergency.

**OR as an option:** you may write the two short essays (both together weighted 25%) and do a longer 15 page paper on a topic of your choice in consultation with me (weighted 50% of your course grade). Government honors students who are thinking of doing an honors thesis next year may prefer this option to begin to develop research and writing skills for longer work. Students who prefer this option will need to designate their preferred third short essay and have discussed with me a topic for their long paper by March 30.

Regular attendance and informed participation in the seminar is a vital component of the course and will be weighted 25% of the final grade. Every student should prepare a short, one or two paragraph “reader response” before each class meeting and circulate it to the entire class via “Blackboard.” One or two students will be designated as the agenda maker for each week. The agenda makers will be responsible for reflecting upon the set of reader responses, constructing an agenda of topics for discussion, introducing the agenda with a short presentation, and assisting me in guiding the discussion for that class meeting. Students who responsibly attend to their agenda leading responsibilities, regularly contribute reader responses, and who miss no more than two classes (unless excused for more than two) will receive an A- (90 on a 100 point scale) for the class participation component of their grade and a higher A if, in addition, they regularly contribute to class discussion and the if led agenda making exercise productive conversation. Careless preparation of the agenda, of the reader responses, or unexcused absence from more than two classes will mean that the student will likely receive *no more than a C (75)* and, depending on the record, possibly less than a 75, for the class participation component of the grade.

**NOTE WELL:**

Except for documented emergencies (a note from the appropriate Dean or medical staff), or for the special circumstances noted below, there will be no extensions on the due dates for the essays or paper.

**Plan now for the due dates: February 23 (Essay 1); April 6 (Essay 2); May 4 (Essay 3 or Optional Paper)**

NOTE: When planned well in advance, I can accommodate conflicts of due dates with extra-curricular activities. These accommodations are not guaranteed – but I will do my best if given ample advance notice.

NOTE: I will always make accommodations for absences due to religious holidays. Please let me know at the outset of the semester if you will need to be absent for religious reasons.

NOTE: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for students with Disabilities, 471-6259.

Grading: All assignments and class participation will be graded on a 100 point scale. The final course grade will be the weighted average of these grades on the following plus/minus scale:

94-100	A
90-93	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
60-66	D
0-59	F

**Schedule:**

- January 19 Introduction,  
Discussion of *Federalist* #1.
- January 26 Federalist 9-10, 14-16, 23-26  
Federal Farmer, (Zuckert pp.19-31)
- February 2 Federalist 37-42, 47-51
- February 9 Federalist, 52-58, 62-67, 69-73
- February 16 Federalist 78-80  
Federalist 84  
Brutus, (Zuckert pp. 168-184, 222-262)
- February 23 Federal Farmer (Zuckert, pp.19-167)  
Speeches of Melancton Smith (Zuckert, pp. 289-223)  
Proposed Amendments (Zuckert 341-352)

**Essay #1 DUE**

- March 1 Tocqueville, pp.1-82.
- March 8 Tocqueville, pp. 82-168

**March 14 – 19 Spring Break**

- March 23 Tocqueville, pp.169-219
- March 30 Tocqueville, pp.219-268.
- Essay # 2 Topics assigned

***Students who wish to submit a long paper in lieu of the third essay should discuss their topics with me, and get approval, by this date.***

- April 6 Tocqueville, pp.268-319.

**Essay #2 DUE**

- April 13 Frederick Douglass, “Fourth of July Oration” and “Destiny of Colored Americans”  
Frederick Douglass, “What are the Colored People. . .” and “Oration in Memory of Abraham” in packet

April 20 Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" and "Our Spiritual Strivings" (in packet)  
Du Bois, "Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," and "The Talented Tenth" (in packet)  
Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (in packet)

April 27 Ralph Ellison, "Haverford Statement" and "Tell It Like It Is, Baby" (in packet).  
James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" (in packet)

Essay # 3 topics assigned

May 4 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart"  
Discussion of general course themes and of your essays.

**Essay # 3 DUE**

**Optional long paper (in lieu of essay #3) DUE.**