

America's Founding Principles
(Scribner Seminar 100-004)

Skidmore College

Fall 2008

MWF 11:15 a.m.-12:10 p.m.

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Office Hours: Mon. and Fri., 10-11 a.m.,
or by appointment

This course examines American political thought with special focus on the political and philosophic principles incorporated in the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution. Our aim is to uncover and understand the principles of our liberal or pluralistic democracy. We will examine the sources of those principles, their articulation in the debates of the Founding period, and the great challenge those principles faced in the crisis of slavery.

The course will involve a careful reading of works by earlier thinkers who had a decisive influence upon the Founders, works by thinkers and statesmen from the Founding period, and works by thinkers and statesmen who were influenced by the Founders and sought to perpetuate, extend, or modify their work.

At the conclusion of the course students should be able to write and speak thoughtfully and clearly about the principles of our political order and about alternative principles that the Founders openly rejected, hoped to incorporate in our political order, or expected to displace. Those principles and alternatives include: liberty and equality, individual rights vs. devotion to the common good, representative government by consent of the governed vs. rule by divine right, religious liberty vs. divine law, individual rights vs. group or states' rights, and a large commercial republic vs. an agrarian, "virtuous" republic.

As a Scribner Seminar, this is a course about knowing, particularly about ways to identify problems, formulate productive questions, and go about answering those questions. It will introduce students to disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on the American Founding. Students in this course will demonstrate the ability to:

1. distinguish among, and formulate, types of questions asked by different disciplines
2. read critically, and gather and interpret evidence
3. distinguish among the evidence and approaches appropriate to different disciplines
4. consider and address complexities and ambiguities
5. make connections among ideas
6. recognize choices, examine assumptions and ask questions of themselves and of their own work
7. formulate conclusions based upon evidence
8. communicate ideas both orally and in writing
9. relate the results of the course to their educational goals

I. Required Texts, Available at *The Skidmore Shop*:

Frederick Douglass (Meyer, ed.), *The Narrative and Selected Writings* (Modern Library)

John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge)

J.P. Greene, *Colonies To Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History* (Norton)

Hamilton, Madison, Jay (Rossiter, ed.), *The Federalist Papers* (Mentor)
Thomas Jefferson (Mansfield, ed.) *Selected Writings* (Crofts Classics)
Abraham Lincoln (Delbanco, ed.), *The Portable Abraham Lincoln* (Viking)
Herbert Storing, ed. *The Anti-Federalist* (Chicago)

II. Course Requirements:

Attendance requirements: no unexcused absences.

Three short essays (3 typed pages), due October 1, October 29, and November 24.

Final comprehensive (essay) exam, as scheduled. (Study questions for this exam will be distributed on June 19).

In addition, a five page extra credit paper on Fredrick Douglass' slave narrative may be written and turned in on the last day of class.

Note: You are expected to be capable of writing college level prose. If you are not yet capable of doing so, your grade will reflect your deficiency. The computation of your grade takes into account the improvement that your writing will undergo over the course of the semester.

The term grade will be computed as follows: short essays 10%, 20%, and 25%; class attendance and participation 15%; final exam 30%.

III. Course Schedule

Wednesday, September 3	The Mayflower Compact John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" & "On Liberty" (Handouts)
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A. The Puritans and Locke: Alternative Sources of American Republicanism

Monday, September 8	John Cotton, "Christian Calling"; Nathaniel Niles, "Sermon on the Nature of Liberty" (Handouts)
Wednesday, September 10	Lecture on Christian Political Theology (no reading)
Monday, September 15	Lecture on Christian Political Theology (no reading)
Wednesday, September 17	John Locke, <i>First Treatise of Government</i> , chs. 1-3.
Monday, September 22	John Locke, <i>First Treatise of Government</i> , chs. 4& 5. paragraphs 54-58, 86 & 92.
Wednesday, September 24	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> , chs. 1-4
Monday, September 29	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> ch.5, ch. 8 (only pp. 330-334), chs. 9-13 (only pp. 350-370)
Wednesday, October 1	John Locke, <i>Second Treatise of Government</i> chs. 14 & 19; First Paper Due

B. Independence and the Founding

Monday, October 6

James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* CTN 26-33
New York Petition (Oct. 18, 1764) CTN 33-39
John Dickinson, *Letters From A Pennsylvania Farmer*, 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 12. CTN 121-133
Samuel Adams, *Massachusetts Circular Letter*, (Feb. 11, 1768) CTN 134-136
James Wilson, "Considerations on the Authority of Parliament," (Aug. 17, 1774) CTN 220-227

1. Jefferson

Wednesday, October 8

Thomas Jefferson, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America" (August, 1774) *TJSW*
Rough Draft of the *Declaration of Independence*
<http://www.founding.com/library/index.cfm>
(Click *Founding Era Documents*, then *American Government Documents: Federal*, then *Jefferson's 'Rough Draft'*)
The Declaration of Independence
Two Letters on the Declaration. *TJSW* 1-13.
Mansfield, "Introduction," *TJSW* vii-xv.

Monday, October 13

Act for Establishing Religious Freedom *TJSW* 13-15
"Notes on the State of Virginia":
Query XVII. *TJSW* 46-50.
Queries VI, VII, XI. *TJSW* 15-28.
Query XIV. *TJSW* 36-43.

Wednesday, October 15

"Notes on the State of Virginia"
Query XVIII, XIX, XXII. *TJSW* 50-55.
Letter to Thomas Law. *TJSW* 79-81.
Letter to Pierre du Pont de Nemerus. *TJSW* 81-83.
Query XIV continued *TJSW* 43-46.
Letters to Adams *TJSW* 74-79.
Query XIII *TJSW* 28-36.
Letters to Madison *TJSW* 67-74.

Monday, October 20

Letter to John Taylor *TJSW* 83-87
Letter to Isaac Tiffany *TJSW* 87-88.
Letter to Samuel Kercheval *TJSW* 88-91
Draft of the Kentucky Resolutions *TJSW* 55-62
First Inaugural Address *TJSW* 62-66

2. John Adams

Wednesday, October 22

"The Promise of Independence": John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776 CTN, 296-297
"Thoughts on Government," CTN, 304-311

Monday, October 27 Turgot's Letter to Price, 1778
Defense of the Constitutions of the U.S. (Handout)

Wednesday, October 29 *Defense of the Constitutions of the U.S.* (continued)
Second Paper Due

C. The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists: Debating a Constitution

Monday, November 3 *The Articles of Confederation*, CTN 428-43
Madison, "Vices of the Political System of the United States" (April 1787), CTN 514-519.
The U.S. Constitution; *Federalist* Nos. 1-8, 38, 40

Wednesday, November 5 *Anti-Federalist* pp. 13-14 (Centinel), 332-35
(Smith), 277-78 (Impartial Examiner),
295-97 (Henry) *Federalist* No. 10

Monday, November 10 *Federalist* Nos. 9 & 11-14;
Anti-Federalist pp. 113-17 (Brutus)
& 234-252 (Agrrippa)

Wednesday, November 12 *Federalist* Nos. 15-17, 23, 26-28;
Anti-Federalist pp. 32-43, 60-71, 87 -95
(Federal Farmer), 108-113, 145-162, 220-21
(Pennsylvania Protest), 284-85 (Impartial Examiner),
338-342 (Melancton Smith)

Monday, November 17 *Federalist* Nos. 31, 35, 37, 48, 49, 51;
Anti-Federalist pp. 133-38 (Brutus), 210-13
(Pennsylvania Protest), 289-91, 316-25 (Henry),
289-91 (Impartial Examiner), 13-16 (Centinel)

Wednesday, November 19 *Federalist* Nos. 52-53, 55, 57, 70-72;
Anti-Federalist pp. 43-48, 73-79 (Federal Farmer),
122-32 (Brutus), 310-11, 316-17 (Henry)

Monday, November 24 *Federalist* Nos. 78 & 84; *Anti-Federalist* pp. 54-60, 79-86
(Federal Farmer), 117-22, 182-187 (Brutus), 278-82
(Impartial Examiner); Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Madison
3/15/89 SRTJ 72-74 **Third Paper Due**

Wednesday, November 26 Thanksgiving Break; no classes

D. Slavery and the Crisis of the Union: Fredrick Douglass and Lincoln

1. Frederick Douglass and the Experience of Slavery

Monday, December 1	Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> , pp. 4-127
Wednesday, December 3	Douglass, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro, July 5, 1852 (handout); Lincoln, <i>Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum</i> , 1838, <i>PL</i> , 17-26.
2. Lincoln	
Monday, December 8	Letter to Joshua F. Speed, Aug. 24, 1855 <i>PL</i> 84-88. Address to the Republican Banquet in Chicago, December 10, 1856 “House Divided” Speech, June 16, 1858 <i>PL</i> 87-97 http://www.founding.com/library/index.cfm (Click <i>The 19th Century</i> , then <i>Speeches, Letters and Writings of Abraham Lincoln</i> .) Lincoln-Douglas: First Joint Debate: Speeches at Ottawa, August 21, 1858. <i>PL</i> 97-140.
Wednesday, December 10	First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861 <i>PL</i> 195-204 Message to Congress, July 4, 1861 <i>PL</i> 209-225 Message to Congress, Dec. 1, 1862 <i>PL</i> 247-270 Emancipation Proclamation Jan. 1, 1863 <i>PL</i> 424-425 Gettysburg Address, Dec. 19, 1863 <i>PL</i> 295 Second Inaugural, March 4, 1865 <i>PL</i> 320-321 Frederick Douglass, “Oration in Memory of A. Lincoln,” April 14, 1876 (handout) Study Questions for Final Exam Distributed
Wednesday, December 17	1:30-4:30 Final Exam