

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Instructor: Jyl Josephson

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Office Hours: Dr. Josephson:

Mondays 4 to 5:30 pm (virtual) and Tuesday 1 to 2:15 pm (in person) & by appointment

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790:375:01 American Political Theory

Tuesday evenings 6 to 9 pm, Hill Hall 102

COURSE GOALS:

The goal of this course is to provide a basic acquaintance with some texts and themes in American political theory. Throughout the semester, we will be asking the question, “What kind of country do we want?” Our focus will be on what it means to live in a constitutional democracy where political equality and equal access to the democratic process is a key political goal as well as a continuing and complicated political problem. Another way to see this question is as an ongoing and contentious political contest between democracy for some with hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion, and an inclusive multiracial democracy.

These are the expected learning outcomes for this course:

- Students will carefully read and analyze the course texts, and understand through class discussion, reading, and writing about the texts the basic ideas of each author about the nature of the U.S. political regime and American political life.
- Students will understand some of the problems that political and economic inequality has created for the U.S. constitutional system and U.S. political practice, whether based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and national origin.
- Students will understand some of the struggles for greater political equality and inclusion, from the struggle to end slavery and Jim Crow, to the struggle for greater equality for women, for reform of citizenship laws and immigration reform, and the recent struggles over growing economic inequality and the quest for a multiracial democracy.
- Through course writing assignments and in class discussion and activities, students will develop their own ideas about the thinkers and ideas studied and the approach of each thinker to analyzing American political life.

This syllabus may be subject to change. Changes to the syllabus will be announced in class and a new version of the syllabus will be posted on Blackboard.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS/REQUIREMENTS:

General:

I am very glad that we will be back to face to face instruction this fall. Yet there are more uncertainties than we might have hoped for earlier in the summer. I recognize that there may be disruptions to our planned schedule this fall, and I have tried to build a

syllabus and a pedagogy that is flexible enough to accommodate some of the ways that you and I as individuals, or we as a university community, may need to adapt to changing circumstances regarding the ongoing pandemic.

Students are expected to attend class sessions as you are able and to complete all assigned readings prior to the class session in which they will be discussed. I will try to provide as much guidance for the readings in advance of class so as to be helpful as you prepare. I have also built the assignments so that we should as a class be able to help each other to learn the material. Lectures/in class discussions will provide material in addition to the reading material. It is my hope that you as students will also contribute to class sessions through informed and relevant participation in class discussions.

Students are also expected to conduct themselves with honesty and integrity in all academic work, and to conduct themselves in the classroom in a manner in keeping with a professional educational environment, including an expectation of civility and respect for the instructor and for other students.

This course will by definition involve discussion of topics on which students may disagree. Active and informed engagement and discussion and respectful intellectual discussion (including disagreement) is an essential component of the course. After all, we will be discussing what it means to be a democracy in the specific case of American democracy. Students are expected to engage in such discussion with each other and with the instructor in a professional and respectful manner. This is the essence of democratic practice. Passionate argument is great. Respecting each other is crucial, especially when we disagree.

Students are encouraged to read the assigned texts carefully, and to take notes on the texts, in order to be fully prepared for class discussions. It is my hope that the reading summaries that each of you will prepare will also be helpful to you as a sort of collective note-taking on the readings for the class.

PLEASE NOTE and please follow the university policy regarding masks:

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at: [myRutgers Portal](#).

Required Readings:

Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration*

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Dell)

Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists were For* (Chicago)

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Additional readings available on Canvas, as assigned

Note that I ordered the books by Danielle Allen, James Baldwin, and Herbert Storing, so they should be available through the bookstore. Other reading materials will be posted

through Canvas. I am also posting links to many of these materials that are available through the library; this will be available through the course platform in Canvas as well.

Writing Assignments:

There will be three different kinds of writing assignments in this class: a reading summary, three short essays, and a final reflection paper.

Reading Presentation Summary: Students will be required to write **one** total reading summary over the course of the semester and will post their reading summary on the class discussion board in Canvas. You will choose one of the readings, for which you will provide a brief summary and help lead class discussion of the reading. Students may post these summaries in Canvas no later than the beginning of class on the day that the reading is assigned. Your summary should include the main point and key subpoints of the reading, a discussion of how this reading relates to the key themes of the class and should conclude with two to three questions that will help to foster class discussion.

Reaction papers: Students will be required to write three 2 to 3 page reaction papers regarding one or more of the texts studied. There will be four opportunities to write these essays, and the essay should deal with the readings from the period immediately before the essay is due. I will drop the lowest grade should you choose to write more than three essays. These papers will not require outside reading. The paper is intended to give you an opportunity to think through the texts studied, in relation to the major theme of the course: What kind of country do we want? Especially with respect to the problem of political equality and inequality, of democracy for some or democracy for all.

The question for each of these reaction papers will be the same: How does the author answer the question, “What kind of country do we want?” For the author, what is the nature or source of the basic problem of political equality and inequality in the U.S.? How does the author propose that American political practice change in order to solve this political problem? How do you assess this author’s analysis? You should answer these questions in standard essay format (with a thesis and arguments that support your thesis) with specific reference to the text at hand and as specifically as possible. You may use brief quotations from the text that you are discussing, but most of the words should be your own. Be sure to use proper citations of the texts when you use quotations or refer to specific ideas in the text.

Final reflection project:

This will be a project that asks you to answer the questions from the reaction papers, but with your own responses. You should draw on the material from the course to answer these questions: What kind of country do you want? What is the nature or source of the basic problem of political equality and inequality in the U.S.? How do you propose that American political practice change in order to solve this political problem?

You may write an essay for this project, but you may also choose to complete a different kind of final project: you may record a podcast, write a song, produce a series of TikTok

videos, create a piece of visual art, or propose another kind of final project. Whatever form your final reflection project takes, it will be graded on the following criteria:

Clearly expresses an answer to the key question, what kind of country do you want? 25%;

Uses language that would be accessible to a broader public (one's fellow residents of the democratic polity) 20%;

Makes clear the importance of the concepts/ideas expressed to American political thought 20%;

Reflects work commensurate with a final paper for a course in American Political Thought 20%;

Shows use of imagination and creativity 15%.

Plagiarism: The policy regarding plagiarism in this course is straightforward:

Plagiarism is a violation of the purpose of a university education. It will not be tolerated. The Rutgers University plagiarism policy will be followed in this course.

Grading:

Please note that in general, letter grades of A are 90% and above, B are 80 to 89%, C 70 to 79%, and D 60 to 69%. Please don't hesitate to ask questions about grading policies.

Here are the weights for each assignment:

Reaction papers (three)	20% each	60%
Reading summary (one)	20%	20%
Final reflection project (one)	20%	20%

Academic Integrity:

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. The entire Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

Your health and well-being matter, and Rutgers has put in place a number of resources that are intended to help students through the challenges that might emerge during these times. Information on many of these resources appears below. Please let me know immediately if you are experiencing circumstances that are negatively impacting your academic performance. I also strongly encourage you to contact your academic advisor.

Accommodation and Support Statement:

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

- **Absences:** All students are responsible for timely notification of their instructor regarding any expected absences. The Division of Student Affairs can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.) Students should refer to the University's Course Attendance policy (10.2.7), for complete expectations and responsibilities. The office can be contacted at: (973) 353-5063 or deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.
- **Disabilities:** The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and follow up with a discussion. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.
- **Temporary Conditions/Injuries:** The Division of Student Affairs can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition of injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request for assistance at: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.
- **Pregnancy:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the office at (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.
- **Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the office at: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?RutgersUniv&layout_id=7. For more information, students should refer to the University's Student Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence, Stalking and Related Misconduct located at: <http://compliance.rutgers.edu/title-ix/about-title-ix/title-ix-policies/>.

- **Interpersonal Violence:** The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance can provide any student with confidential support. The office is a **confidential resource** and does **not** have a reporting obligation to report information to the University's Title IX Coordinator. Students can contact the office at: (973) 353-1918 or run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential, text-based line students can text for support: (973) 339-0734.
- **Crisis and Concerns:** The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a support plan to address personal situations that might impact academic performance. Students may contact the CARE Team at:
https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?RutgersUniv&layout_id=11 or careteam@rutgers.edu.
- **Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-Being:** The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. To schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If a student is not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but is interested in self-help, check out *TAO at Rutgers-Newark* for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support: <https://thepath.taoconnect.org/local/login/home.php>.
- **Emergencies:** Call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) at (973) 353-5111.

☐ Learning Resources:

- Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)
(973) 353-5608
<https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center>
- Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)
(973) 353-5847
nwc@rutgers.edu
<https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center>

☐ Technology LaunchPad:

<https://runit.rutgers.edu/technology-launch-pad/>

Course Outline:

Introduction

September 7: Introduction to class

Read Marilynne Robinson, *What Kind of Country do we want?*

September 14:

Read *The 1619 Project*, essays by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Matthew Desmond, Jamelle Bouie, Jeneen Interlandi, Wesley Morris, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Bryan Stevenson
Note: There are many more essays and poems in the issue; I urge you to read more than the assigned pieces if you can

September 21

Read: Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration* first half, Parts 1 through V

Read: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

ESSAY OPPORTUNITY #1 Due September 26

September 28

Read: Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration* second half, Parts VI through VIII

October 5

Read: Herbert Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were FOR*, chs. 1 to 9

Read: Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers*: Nos. 1, 10, 51

Read: The U.S. Constitution

October 12:

Read: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts: Volume 1, Author's Introduction, Chapters 3, 4, and 5; chapters 14, 15, and 16

ESSAY OPPORTUNITY #2 Due October 17

October 19:

Read: Speeches of Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July"; "Our Composite Nation"; "The American Constitution and the Slave"; "Sources of Danger to the Republic"; "The Freedmen's Monument to Abraham Lincoln"; "Self-Made Men"; "Lessons of the Hour"

Read: Omar Ibn Al Said narrative

Supplemental materials: United States of Anxiety interview with Carol Anderson and David Blight

October 26:

Read: Frederick Douglass speech on women's suffrage "I Am a Radical Woman Suffrage Man" and "We Support the Fifteenth Amendment"

Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls

Read: W.E.B. DuBois *The Souls of Black Folk*, "The Forethought", chapters one and two; *Black Reconstruction*, chapter 15 Founding the Public School, chapter 17 The Propaganda of History

November 2:

Read: James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

ESSAY OPPORTUNITY #3 Due November 7

November 9:

Read: Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity*, Introduction, Chapter 2, Chapter 5, Conclusion

November 16: Read: Fred Lee, “Contours of Asian American Political Theory: Introductions and Polemics,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*

Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, “Stand Up”, “The End of White Innocence” “Bad English” and “The Indebted”

November 23: NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING, Follow THURSDAY class schedule

ESSAY OPPORTUNITY #4 Due November 28

November 30:

Read: David Treuer *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee*, Prologue, Digital Indians:1990-2018, Epilogue

December 7: LAST DAY OF CLASS

Re-read: Marilynne Robinson, “What Kind of Country Do We Want?”
Summary and discussion of final assignment