

GOVERNMENT

2008 - 2009

Instructor: Mr. Cook

Room: B

Time: Monday, Wednesday: 3:14–3:59; Thursday 11:54–12:59; Friday 12:50–1:35

GOAL

The goal of this course is to leave you with a secure understanding of the recent history of American government. This period is roughly 65 years long, from World War Two in 1941 until the current day. It deals with almost all of the varied aspects of the life of men: religion, language, family, war, economics, politics, law, and culture. The people, events, and problems of this era must be fully understood in order to grasp American society and government as we know it. Being an American citizen implies such an understanding, and to behave with the civic virtue necessary to maintain the free republic we have inherited demands it.

Historians use a variety of approaches, including political, cultural, social, and economic in order to explain change over time. We too will use a variety of styles in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the story of man. Students will study maps, read a wide range of materials, work on projects as a class, write assignments of varying lengths, and listen to lectures. But always our focus will be on the role and changing concept of government within American society.

REQUIREMENTS

Historical study is almost entirely an exercise in reading. Therefore we will have frequent reading assignments, ranging from following along in the textbook to engaging primary sources or the works of specific historians. I strongly recommend that you approach the reading assignments with three rules in mind: 1) do not leave the assignment for the night before it is due, 2) take detailed notes, and 3) look up any words you do not understand.

During lectures you are encouraged to ask questions and add your own ideas; often this will lead to an interlude of discussion. These additions should always be made by raising one's hand and waiting to be called upon. Interruptions will not be tolerated and may result in demerits. As discussions are most useful and interesting when all participate, I may call on you by name in order to elicit that participation. Acquiring the ability to articulate an argument is an integral part of your education; this is a learned skill and can be achieved regardless of your personal level of comfort with speaking before your colleagues. In addition to the ability to speak before one's peers, discussion sessions teach us to tackle opinions based solely on

their merits. Not all opinions will be or should be identical. *Ad hominem* debates are uninformative and unwelcome. All debates and discussions will remain civil and reasonable.

Writing is the most important and under-taught skill in American education today. The only remedy for this is practice, here achieved through occasional writing assignments based on the discussion readings, as well as other projects assigned throughout the term.

Attendance proves more important than natural ability to a student's success in any class, and since historical ability is never in-born, attendance is absolutely critical to achieve a high grade. Tardiness is a two-sided problem. First, it robs you of the material discussed in class before your arrival, and second, it disrupts the learning experience for others when you arrive late. Therefore tardiness will not be tolerated. Three tardies will count as an absence, and any arrival to class more the fifteen minutes after the beginning of the period will also count as an absence. Your attendance will be counted as a portion of your class participation grade.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and one that is easy to avoid. It can best be described as the theft of another's ideas by the presentation of those ideas without proper citation. When writing and researching historical studies it is imperative to make clear the source where one finds information. Only widely, nearly universally, known facts are exempt from citation rules. For example, if I write "The sun is bright," that statement needs no citation. But if I write that "On the morning of February 17th 1696 the sun was shining brightly," the source of this fact must be cited. In addition to preventing one from being subject to a charge of plagiarism, citing all one's facts allows others to follow the documentary trail to find their own conclusions. If evidence of plagiarism is discovered in any writings done for this course, it will be correctly treated as cheating.

SUPPLIES

All students will come to class each day, unless otherwise instructed, with the following: one loose-leaf binder with lined paper for taking notes, and capable of accepting any handouts given. All students must possess a dictionary, which they may leave at home to use for assigned readings. In addition, all students will be expected to bring any reading that is being discussed to class when necessary.

GRADING

Cumulative points [participation, quizzes, tests, projects]: 80%

[A note on participation: Class participation will be considered an important part of your overall grade. Participation implies several things, including attendance, engagement in the class, responding to questions, and proper classroom deportment. It is impossible to learn without participating in the activities of the class, and it is therefore impossible to earn a high grade without active participation.]

Final exam: 20%

COURSE OUTLINE

Our semester will be divided between two subjects: the history of the American government, and the history of presidential elections. Of course, as you know, 2008 is itself a presidential election year and this event will help to shape our understanding of American government. In order to accurately understand the issues in play in this election, it is necessary to understand both recent history as well as presidential politics as it has developed throughout the 232 years of American history.

Here are some of the subjects that we will be discussing this semester.

What are Political Parties?

Party Systems:

Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans

Jacksonian Democrats

The Republicans

New Deal Democracy

Conservatives and Liberals