

Manfred Henningsen

Polsc. 337

American Political Theory

Spring 2016

BUSAD D203

TTh 12:00-1:15

I. Description:

Listening to the candidates for the American presidency, one gets the impression that the candidates of both parties believe in the exceptional nature of the founding of the American Republic. The USA appears in their speeches and statements as a society that is confronted with problems, yet, as a result of some kind of exceptionalism that goes back more than two hundred years, is ready and able to solve them.

We will discuss in this class the origins of the discourse of exceptionalism and the various dimensions of reality that are not covered by it but contradict its meaning. We will talk about the creation of the constitutional system that was created in the late 18th century and has, despite the enormous geographic, demographic, social and economic transformations, survived with only 27 amendments.

The discrepancy between myth and reality begins with the assertion that the founders created a democracy whereas they were actually against it. In the context of discussing the constitution, we will discuss the institution of slavery as the price for the Republic that is never mentioned in the text of the Constitution by its name until it becomes abolished with the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the 13th amendment. Some of our sessions will deal with the legacy of slavery and the following period of Apartheid. We will raise questions about the persistence of racism and why its impact on American society since its historical beginning hasn't been successfully processed by now. What are the reasons for the contemporary recurrence of racism in the political realm? We will consult Black and White writers from various time periods to find answers for this question.

In addition, we will raise questions about the truly exceptional phenomenon that the US is the only Western society that never produced a viable left political movement. This absence has contributed to a somewhat challenged social fabric of American society.

II. Requirements:

There will be a midterm and a final exam, one short paper and participation in a panel discussion. Grading will be based on the exams (each 25%), the paper (25%), and the group panel discussion (25%). Students have to make an office appointment with the instructor.

III. Required Text:

Michael. S. Cummings (ed.), *American Political Thought*. 7th ed. Denver: CQ Press 2015.

IV. Format of the Class:

Lecture by the instructor, panel and class discussions, movies and documentaries.

V. Calendar of the Class:

- 1/12 General introduction.
- 1/14 The return of race (and class) in American political discourse.
- 1/19 The colonial prehistory of the Founding. (Cummings, 1-32)
- 1/21 The rebellion of the settlers. (Cummings, 33-63)
- 1/26 The war against the colonial power. (Cummings, 64-82)
- 1/28 Documentary: Thomas Jefferson.
- 2/2 Continuation.
- 2/4 The Constitution. (Cummings, 83-127)
- 2/9 Continuation.
- 2/11 The Anti-Federalist opposition. (Cummings, 128-141)
- 2/16 Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson. (Cummings,142-187)

- 2/18 The demands of the excluded: the pro-revolutionary critics of the Constitution, "Alternative Declarations of Independence."
- 2/23 The Abolitionist movement. (Cummings, 207-223)
- 2/25 Frederick Douglass (Cummings, 252-259); Sojourner Truth (272-275)
- 3/1 The ideologues of slavery: Calhoun (260-271); Fitzhugh (276-284).
- 3/3 PBS Documentary: *The Abolitionists*.
- 3/8 Continuation.
- 3/10 The Civil War and the emergence of the American nation. (285-306)
- 3/15 The struggle between feminists and abolitionists. (324-329)
- 3/17 Midterm.
- 3/20-3/27 Spring Recess.
- 3/29 The failure of Reconstruction and the emergence of Apartheid. (320-323)
- 3/31 The Black response to racism. (408-419)
- 4/5 Movements of radical discontent: Socialism, Anarchism, and Populism. (368-372; 426-432; 433-447)
- 4/7 The Capitalist Republic. (330-384)
- 4/12 Progressive critics. (469-494)
- 4/14 The New Deal. (499-516)
- 4/19 Post-World War II liberal narratives. (522-556)
- 4/21 The Civil Rights Movement. (578-584)
- 4/26 Right and left student movements. (585-595)
- 4/28 Documentary: *Why We Fight?*
- 5/3 Movie: *Is Paris Burning?*
- 5/5 Movie: *Dr. Strangelove*.
- 5/10 Last Session.

