

## Government 492

### *Politics and the American Novel*

Prof. Catherine H. Zuckert  
Decio 446, Th 9-12 or by appointment

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***Purpose and Content of the Course:*** Government 492 is a writing seminar designed for senior government majors. In this particular section we will first read and discuss selections from classic works of social contract theory from which the framers of the American regime drew so heavily and then look at the way in which this theory is critiqued and re-interpreted in American works of fiction. In other words, we will be treating novels and films as forms of American political thought.

Reading and writing, thought, argumentation and persuasion are closely linked phenomena. In this course, we will be investigating both the form and the content of fictional re-interpretations of American political principles—prose and video. At the same time, we will be attempting to improve our own communicative and analytical skills—both written and oral. You will be expected, therefore, both to write a series of relatively short analytical papers and to participate actively in class discussion.

***Assigned Texts*** (available for purchase in the bookstore)

Required:

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Selected Short Stories*  
Herman Melville, *Bartleby & Benito Cereno*  
Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
Ernest Hemingway, *Farewell to Arms*  
William Faulkner, *The Reivers*  
Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*

Recommended:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*  
John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*  
Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*  
Catherine Zuckert, *Natural Right and the American Imagination*

### **Schedule of Classes and Readings**

W-1-13      **Introduction:** What are the fundamental principles of the American regime?  
Why and how is their meaning debated?

Read: *Declaration of Independence* (handout)

***The State of Nature and the Origins of Civil Society***

M-1-18      A. “Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”

Read: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, Ch. 1-3, 6, 13-15

W-1-20      B. From a condition of peace to war and limited government

Read: Locke, *Second Treatise*, Ch. 1-5

M-1-25      C. The Fall from Innocence

1. The Goodness of Nature

Read: Preface, Introduction, Part I, *Origins of Inequality*

W-1-27      2. The Historical Degeneration of Human Life

Read: Part II, *Origins of Inequality*

**Paper Opportunity 1:** Should the Declaration of Independence be read primarily in terms of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, or . . . ? Why? Due, Monday, February 1.

***Literary Critiques and Reinterpretations***

A. James Fenimore Cooper: Teaching American Political Principles through Literature

M-2-1      Read: *The Last of the Mohicans*, Ch. 1-12

W-2-3      Read: *Mohicans*, Ch. 13-22

M-2-8      Read: *Mohicans*, Ch. 23-end

W-2-10      Film

**Paper Opportunity 2:** On Cooper’s reinterpretation of American political principles, the significance of race, expansionism, the American character, history or . . . .

Due: Monday, February 15

B. Nathaniel Hawthorne: Nature v. History? Education or Fall?

- M-2-15 1. The Question of Sex–Nature or Temptation, Self-knowledge or Sin  
Read: “*Rappaccini’s Daughter*”
- W-2-17 2. Growing Up in America  
a. The Puritanic Origins  
Read: “*Young Goodman Brown*”  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I,  
Part I, Ch. 2 (recommended)
- M-2-22 b. Acquiring Independence  
Read: “*My Kinsman, Major Molineux*”
- C. Herman Melville: Capitalism and Slavery
- W-2-24 1. On the Meaning of Individual Liberty  
Read: “*Bartleby*”
- M-3-1 2. The Politics of Perception and Race  
Read: “*Benito Cereno*”
- W-3-3 Read: *U.S. v. Amistad*; Watch: *Amistad*

**Paper Opportunity 3: Due Friday, March 5.**

Midterm break.

D. Back to Nature–Romance or Realism?

- M-3-15 1. Huck’s Withdrawal from Civil Society  
Read: *Adventures*, Notice, Explanatory, Ch. 1-11
- W-3-17 2. Life in the State of Nature  
A. Peace, freedom, friendship  
Read: *Adventures*, Ch. 12-18
- M-3-22 B. Force, fraud and the absence of law

Read: *Adventures*, Ch. 19-32

W-3-24 3. The Return

Read: *Adventures*, Ch. 33-end.

**Paper Opportunity 4:** Due Monday, March 29.

E. Retreating from Civilization in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

M-3-29 1. The Irrationality of War

Read: Hemingway, *Farewell to Arms*, Ch. 1-16

M-3-31 2. Love–Escape?

Read: *Farewell to Arms*, Ch. 17-29

Easter break

W-4-7 3. Birth and Death

Read: *Farewell to Arms*, Ch. 30-41

**Paper Opportunity 5:** Due Friday, April 9.

F. Running Away from Home to the Big City: A Boy's Education

M-4-12 1. Loss of Innocence?

Read: Faulkner, *The Reivers*, Ch. 1-7

W-4-14 2. Not for money, but for . . . ?

Read: *Reivers*, Ch. 8-13

**Paper Opportunity 6:** Due Friday, April 16.

G. Disillusionment without Love

M-4-19, W-4-14, M-4-26, W-4-28: Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, specific assignments will be made later. We will also look at the film version.

**Paper Opportunity 7:** Due Wednesday, April 28.

### **Written Assignments:**

- 1) To facilitate class discussion, each student will be expected to send the instructor a paragraph indicating his or her reaction to the assigned reading via e-mail before each meeting of the class.
- 2) In line with the emphasis on writing, each student will also be expected to write **4 papers, 5-7 pages, typed, double-spaced, at 4 of the indicated “opportunities.” Students MUST turn in at least one paper before midterm break.** Students may write more than 4 papers, if they choose. They will get credit for the 4 best. Suggested paper topics will be handed out in class before each “opportunity.”

### **Evaluation:**

Each paper–20%

Participation in class discussion & paragraphs–20%