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COURSE SYLLABUS - "America's Founding Documents: The Foundation for Civic Engagement"

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COURSE SYLLABUS

America's Founding Documents: The Foundation for Civic Engagement

Academic Bulletin Description

A study of the United States founding documents that emphasizes how the experiences of African American citizens throughout history and culture shape the country's values, norms, and ideals, and lay the foundation for civic engagement.

Full Course Description

This course will explore the evolving definitions of freedom in the United States through an analysis of the lives and writings of African Americans who have struggled to realize the country's founding principles and core values. And to this day, Black Americans, more than any other group, embrace the democratic ideals of a common good. We will couple our study of the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Emancipation Proclamation, with a deeper interdisciplinary inquiry into how the principles and provisions of these documents affect the everyday lives of Black citizens from the seventeenth century to the present. Further, through a study of these founding documents, this course lays a foundation for students taking the course to understand the importance of participating in civic engagement to maintain a healthy democracy. Central to this effort will be questions, readings, and assignments that help students to understand the societal values and norms that frame the call for self-governance, individual rights, free expression, and becoming more civically engaged citizens. Students will be asked to identify and contextualize the consequences of these practices in the United States with particular attention to the ways that Black Americans have worked to make the critical ethical codes and moral theories more inclusive.

Learning Outcomes

After successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the source and function of values tied to civic engagement and take part in an analysis of the content and form of the United States founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Emancipation Proclamation.
2. Compare the values, norms, and ideals of freedom expressed in the US founding documents and selected works by African Americans, and associated with activities or events grounded in civic engagement.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values, ethics, becoming more civically engaged, and social responsibility for the self and for contemporary society, as discussed and brought out in a range of interdisciplinary writings and cultural materials by African Americans.
4. Reflect on how values shape personal and community ethics and decision-making as they relate to civic engagement.
5. Relate course discussions of values, ethics, and responsibilities to students' own capacities to address ethical and social challenges.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Required Course Texts

- Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. 2013. *March: Book One*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions.
- Skousen, Paul B. 2016. *How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence*. Salt Lake City, UT: Izzard Ink Publishing.
- Deas, Kendall. 2024. *Freedom Papers: A Collection of Literary Works on Race and Nation*.

Additional Course Reading

The following supplemental reading for this course can be accessed on Blackboard and will be uploaded over the course of the semester by the instructor:

- Franklin, John Hope. 2011. "The Two Worlds of Race: A Historical View." *Daedalus* 140, no. 1 (Winter): 28–43.
- Hannah-Jones, Nikole. 2019. "Our Democracy's Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written; Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True." *New York Times*. August 2019.
- Williams Crenshaw, Kimberlee and Catherine Mackinnon. 2019. "Reconstructing the Future of the Equality Amendment." *Yale Law Journal* 129.
- Allen, Barbara. 1998. "Alexis de Tocqueville on the Covenantal Tradition of American Federal Democracy." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 28, Issue 2 (Spring): 1–23.
- Holton, Woody. 2021. "African Americans Played a Crucial Role in the Fourth of July." *The Washington Post*. July 2, 2021.
- Holton, Woody. 2017. "The Capitalist Constitution." In *American Capitalism: New Histories*, edited by Sven Beckert and Christine Desan. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Holton, Woody. 2005. "Divide et Impera: Federalist in a Wider Sphere." *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, No. 2 (April): 175–212.
- Slauter, Eric. 2013. "Rights." In *Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [The US Constitution](#)
- [The Declaration of Independence](#)
- [The Emancipation Proclamation](#)
- [Federalist Essay #1, General Introduction](#)
- [Federalist Essay #8, The Consequences of Hostilities Between the States](#)
- [Federalist Essay #9, The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection:](#)
- [Federalist Essay #51, The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between Different Departments](#)
- [Federalist Essay #68, The Mode of Electing the President](#)
- [African American Freedom Struggle Paper, King's Letter from Birmingham Jail \(1963\)](#)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#)

Course Assignments

ASSIGNMENT 1: DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Students will respond to 4 different discussion prompts throughout the course. The discussion prompts will be questions for analysis that extend from the weekly readings and class discussions that address required values and ethics components of this course. These written assignments should be 300–350 words in length (1.5 or double spaced; 11- or 12-point font).

The due dates are February 8, February 29, March 14, and April 4.

ASSIGNMENT 2: HISTORICAL DOCUMENT ANALYSIS EXERCISE

Students will read and discuss the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* and engage in a historical document analysis (i.e., using the social science research methodology of historiography) of *King's Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963). Through this analysis of a classic African American Freedom Struggles document, students will create a list of the UDHR articles they believe were violated under the US system of racial discrimination. Students will write a short 300–350-word essay on why these were violations and a lapse in American values and ethics during this period. **The due date for this assignment is April 18.**

ASSIGNMENT 3: ETHICAL CHALLENGES DISCUSSION LEADER AND GROUP PRESENTATIONS

During the semester, the class will break periodically into small groups to conduct background research for a class group presentation. Every student will have to serve as a discussion leader within a group for presenting information on a topic of relevancy to class readings to the class. You will bring to class a description of a representative problem or ethical challenge from our contemporary moment that your group can work through, applying the historical lessons that we have learned in our readings to decisions about responsibility, accountability, justice, and becoming more civically engaged. **The ethical challenges discussions and group presentations will occur during Week 6, Week 8, and Week 12.**

ASSIGNMENT 4: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

During the semester, students must attend at least one event, either within the university or college campus community, or outside the campus within the community at-large where they learn from individuals or groups actively engaged in activities or efforts associated with civic engagement. Within one week of the event, students must submit a written response that includes: 1.) a description of the activity, and 2.) a discussion of its potential relevance to the study of how values inform, define, and condition the way lives are lived along with why it is important to the health of a democracy for its citizens to be civically engaged (minimum of 500 words). **This assignment must be submitted no later than the last week of class, which is the week of April 22-April 28.**

ASSIGNMENT 5: FINAL EXAM

The final exam will be a written essay exam. Students will be given five essay questions of which they are to select only two to answer worth 50 points each. It will be a cumulative final exam. There will be a short review session for the final exam. **The final exam will be administered during the spring 2024 exam period of April 24 -May 1. The final exam will be Thursday, April 25 at 12:30 in Petigru 212.**

COURSE EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY: REACTING TO THE PAST EXERCISE; RE-ENACTMENT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1787

Students will have the opportunity to earn **2 extra credit points** on their final grade by engaging in a role-playing exercise as a group re-enacting the Constitutional Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia from May 25 to September 17. Students will role play as historical figures central to this event in our nation’s political history. Although the convention was intended to revise the league of states and first system of government under the Articles of Confederation, the intention of many of its proponents, chief among them James Madison of Virginia and Alexander Hamilton of New York, was to create a new government under the Articles of Confederation. As a class, we will watch a video in the *Reacting to the Past Series* to familiarize students with this exercise who are interested in obtaining extra credit.

Course Grading

EVALUATION AND GRADING SCALE

All grades will be posted on Blackboard. You are strongly encouraged to check your scores in Blackboard regularly. A final letter grade will be assigned based on percentages.

Assignment Weights	Percent	GRADING SCALE
Discussion Prompts	20%	89.5% -100% = A
Document Analysis	20%	84.5% -89.4% = B+
Group Presentation	20%	79.5%-84.4% = B
Beyond the Classroom	20%	74.5%-79.4% = C+
Final Exam	20%	69.5%-74.4% = C
		64.5%-69.4% = D+
		59.5%-64.4% = D
Total	100%	0%-59.4% = F

Note: Optional Reacting to the Past Exercise (2 points towards final grade).

Class Attendance Policy

Please look ahead in the course schedule section of the syllabus to determine if you need to miss class for an excusable reason and notify me as early as possible. If you have an excusable absence, you will be permitted to make up coursework. Everyone is permitted one unexcused absence without the deduction of points from their participation grade. Class presence and participation points are given to encourage your active class participation and discussion. You will be rewarded with a higher score at the end of the course as long as you have frequently come to class and/or actively contributed to the discussion during class times. Please refer to the university’s attendance policy for additional information:

<https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/undergraduate/policies-regulations/undergraduate-academic-regulations/#text> (2024. Undergraduate Academic Regulations. University of South Carolina)

Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify the source and function of values.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of values, ethics, and social responsibility for the self and for contemporary society.
3. Reflect on how values shape personal and community ethics and decision-making.

Assessments

You will demonstrate this through:

- Class Discussions (#1)
- Historical Document Analysis Exercise (#1)
- Final Exam (#1)
- Discussion Prompts (#2)
- Small Group Activités (#2)
- Final Exam (#2)
- Discussion Prompts (#3)
- Ethical Challenges Discussion Leader (#3)
- Beyond the Classroom Activités (#3)

Course Reading and Assignment Schedule

Week	Readings and Assignments
Week 1 January 8- January 14	Course Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lewis, Aydin, and Powell, <i>March: Book One</i>• Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part I• Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 1.2 (“External Configuration of North America,” Alexis de Tocqueville)
Week 2 January 15- January 21	Monday, January 15; (MLK Day; No Class) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lewis, Aydin, and Powell, <i>March: Book One</i>• Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part II (the Declaration of Independence)• Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 2.1 (“The Arithmetic of Emancipation,” Allen Carden)• <u>Additional Reading</u>: Read the Declaration of Independence (date available for access on Blackboard: January 15)

Week	Readings and Assignments
Week 3 January 22- January 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lewis, Aydin, and Powell, <i>March: Book One</i> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part II (The Declaration of Independence) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 2.2 (<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, Frederick Douglass)
Week 4 January 29- February 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part III (The Constitution) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Read Nikole Hannah Jones, “Our Democracies Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written; Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True” (date available for access on Blackboard: January 29) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Read the U.S. Constitution (date available for access on Blackboard: January 29) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 2.3 (<i>Freedom’s Promise</i>, Elizabeth Regosin)
Week 5 February 5- February 11	Discussion Prompt #1 Due: February 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part III (The Constitution) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Nikole Hannah Jones (continued discussion) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: The U.S. Constitution (continued discussion) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 2.5 (“The Sunset of Northern Slavery,” Allen Carden)
Week 6 February 12- February 18	Ethical Challenges Discussion #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part IV (The Bill of Rights) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Kimberly Williams Crenshaw, Catherine Mackinnon, “Reconstructing the Future of the Equality Amendment” (date available for access on Blackboard: February 12) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: The U.S. Constitution (continued discussion) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 2.6 (“The Boycott Begins,” Jo Ann Gibson and David J. Garrow)

Week	Readings and Assignments
Week 7 February 19- February 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part IV (The Bill of Rights) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Woody Holton, “African Americans Played a Critical Role in the Fourth of July” (date available for access on Blackboard: February 19) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Woody Holton, “The Capitalist Constitution” (date available for access on Blackboard: February 19) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 3.2 (“Introduction,” <i>A Documentary History of the American Civil War Era</i>, Thomas C. Mackey)
Week 8 February 26- March 3	Ethical Challenges Discussion #2 Discussion Prompt #2 Due: February 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part V (Preamble and the Seven Articles Made Easier) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Woody Holton, “Divide et Impera: Federalist in a Wider Sphere” (date available for access on Blackboard: February 26) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Eric Slauter, “Rights” (date available for access on Blackboard: February 26) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 3.3 (“The Aftermath of War,” John Hope Franklin)
Week 9 March 4- March 10	March 3-March 10; Spring Semester Break; No Classes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part V (Preamble and the Seven Articles Made Easier) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: John Hope Franklin, “The Two Worlds of Race: A Historical View” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 4) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Barbara Allen, “Alexis de Tocqueville on the Covenantal Tradition of American Federal Democracy” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 4) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 3.4 (“Nat Turner’s Revolt Spurs Southern Fears and Sparks Public Debate Over Slavery,” James Scythes)

Week	Readings and Assignments
Week 10 March 11- March 17	Discussion Prompt #3 Due: March 14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skousen, <i>How to Read the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence</i>, Part VI (Historical Basics) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Federalist Essay #1 “General Introduction” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 11) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Federalist Essay #8 “The Consequences of Hostilities Between the States” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 11) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 3.5 (“Free to Fight: The Confederate Army and the Use of Slaves as Soldiers,” Colin Edward Woodward)
Week 11 March 18- March 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Federalist Essay #9 “The Union as a Safeguard Against Democratic Faction and Insurrection” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 18) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Federalist Essay #51 “The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between Different Departments” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 18) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: Federalist Essay #68 “The Mode of Electing the President” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 18) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 4.1 (<i>Abolitionism, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the End of Compromise</i>, Dianne M. Bragg)
Week 12 March 25- March 31	Ethical Challenges Discussion #3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional Reading: “The Emancipation Proclamation” (date available for access on Blackboard: March 25) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 4.2 (“Equity in Education: The Present and Future of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Allison R. Brown)
Week 13 April 1- April 7	Discussion Prompt # 4 Due: April 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional Reading: African American Freedom Struggle Paper: “King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)” (date available for access on Blackboard: April 1) • Additional Reading: “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (date available for access on Blackboard: April 1) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 4.3 (“The Army of the Disillusioned,” David A. Davis)

Week	Readings and Assignments
Week 14 April 8- April 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Additional Reading</u>: African American Freedom Struggle Paper: “King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)” (date available for access on Blackboard: April 8) • <u>Additional Reading</u>: “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (date available for access on Blackboard: April 8) • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; Reading 4.4 (“Black Women Activists in Mississippi During the Civil Rights Era, 1954-1974,” Tiyi M. Morris).
Week 15 April 15- April 21	Historical Document Analysis Assignment Due: April 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deas, <i>Freedom Papers</i>; (Review of book’s discussion questions)
Week 16 April 22- April 28	Final Exam Review (April 22; Last Day of Classes) Final Week for Submission of “Beyond the Classroom Activity” April 23 (Reading Day)
	April 24- May 1: Spring semester Final Exams; (Final Exam is Thursday, April 25 at 12:30 p.m. in Petigru 212) May 3-May 4: Spring Commencement Exercises