

## DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Political Science 150  
Northern Illinois University

Spring 2018  
MW 12:30-1:45pm  
DuSable 461

“One cannot say it too often: There is nothing more prolific in marvels than the art of being free; but there is nothing harder than the apprenticeship of freedom.”

Alexis de Tocqueville

“The birds left the swamps just like the rest of the animals did. The water, quiet as it was, just by sweeping up the leaves, scared the birds. We could hear their little cries long before we saw them, and when they flew overhead it was like a black cloud passing over the sun. For days and days, and even at night, we could hear their shrill little cries. Olive Jarreau said it was Judgment Day. It wasn’t Judgment Day. Man had just gone a little too far.”

Miss Jane Pittman, in Ernest Gaines’ *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome and overview

Martin King, Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963) \*\*

### A NEW SCIENCE OF POLITICS

Publius, Federalist Papers, Nos. 1, 2, 9, 10, 51 (1787-1788) \*\*

Richard Henry Lee, Letters from the Federal Farmer (1787) \*\*

### A WORLD ALTOGETHER NEW

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, selections (1835, 1840) \*\*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDING

Ernest Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) \*

### PERSON AND CITIZEN

Flannery O’Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1971) \*\*

Flannery O’Connor, *The Displaced Person* (1971) \*\*

Flannery O’Connor, *The Geranium* (1971) \*\*

## LAW, VIOLENCE, AND OTHERS

Mark Twain, *The War Prayer* (1916) \*  
Roman Mars/99 Percent Invisible, Sanctuary: Church ##  
Romans Mars/99 Percent Invisible, Sanctuary: State ##  
Roman Mars/99 Percent Invisible, Manzanar ##

## COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

Lillian Smith, *When I was a Child* (1949) \*\*  
Glynn Washington/Snap Judgment, Finding Rebecca ##  
Helen Prejean, *The Death of Innocents* (2005) \*  
Malcolm Gladwell/Revisionist History, Ms. Buchanan's Period of Adjustment ##  
Wendell Berry, *Fidelity* (1992) \*

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### COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this course is to examine democracy as it has developed in America. We want to better understand the meaning of liberty and equality, and their tensions, in American political experience. First, we engage a defense of American political institutions in *The Federalist Papers*. Second, we trace Tocqueville's evaluation of American institutions and mores amidst the spread of equality. Then we take up a series of stories whose authors ask us to evaluate the tensions of liberty and equality. Throughout the course, each work introduces new questions about democratic institutions and human dignity. These stories invite us to more closely examine some important themes we encounter as humans, and as citizens of democracy and of America.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Midterm Exam	30 %
Final Exam	30 %
Essay	30 %
Quality of Contribution	10 %

NIU has a plus/minus grading scale for final course grades. Your course grade is based on an essay (30%), a midterm exam (20%), a final exam (30%), and the quality of your contributions in the course (10%). I will provide further instruction on the expectations for writing. Late material will be penalized.

### Grading Scale

A+ = 97-100  
A = 93-96  
A- = 90-92  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 83-86  
B- = 80-82  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 73-76  
C- = 70-72  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 63-66  
D- = 60-62  
F = <60

## **PRESENCE, READING, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Your success in this class depends upon your consistent presence, participation, and integrity. College is about challenging yourself to learn, to think about what matters and about who you want to be. Those are difficult tasks, but tasks more than worth the effort. University life requires us to prepare, to think, and to be present. Presence is about much more than simply showing up to class. It is about sharing in the task of understanding and analysis. That said, showing up to class is an important prerequisite for success. Your classmates, and you, depend on your presence for success in university life.

Before each class period, you should read the assigned materials and thoughtfully consider their significance for our study. Our task is to read sympathetically in order to read critically—that is, to understand what each author is asking and arguing, and then to thoughtfully evaluate the work. Of course, you should bring your copy of the text to class. I will post a **weekly reading schedule** on Blackboard.

In university, all you have is your integrity. All forms of cheating, including plagiarism, harm both the person who commits the offense and the class as a whole. I expect you to show integrity; there is no other way to accomplish what we are here to do. Those who fail this standard should expect to face themselves, and meet appropriate consequences. Familiarize yourself with the NIU Student Code of Conduct (<http://www.niu.edu/conduct/student-code-of-conduct/>) for guidelines.

## **CONDUCT AND ELECTRONICS IN CLASS**

Class time is set apart for a special purpose. Your aim is to respect others in word and in deed. **The use of laptops, tablets, and smart phones is *not* allowed in class**, except when approved for official note-takers. When you use pen and paper, you avoid the distractions a laptop would present to you and your neighbor. In addition, studies show that using pen and paper improves your ability to learn. You may not record this class without permission.

## **PLUS Pathway: Origins and Influences**

Democracy in America (POLS 150) is one of the courses available for fulfilling your general education Origins and Influences Pathway. It is identified as one of the courses under the Creativity and Critical Analysis knowledge domain. Of these two knowledge domains, this course focuses on critical analysis. We explore primary readings in political philosophy to trace the origins of important concepts regarding politics in American Political thought, including notions of liberty, equality, and good governance. In making our way through arguments made by key figures in this tradition, we develop analytic and critical skills as well as an historical sensibility about the contexts in which key ideas developed.

In an effort to contribute to students' general education, this course joins others in the Origins and Influences Pathway in posing some of the same questions, and exploring various possible answers across academic disciplines. We will focus on the following two Pathway questions:

- 1) How have societies balanced group and individual needs over time?
- 2) How have humans perceived nature, culture, and society over time?"

## **BLACKBOARD**

Login to Blackboard through your myNIU account to access readings and other course materials (posted as PDF files or Internet links) as well as your grades.

## **RESOURCES**

**Office Hours.** These are for you. Email to arrange a time.

**Group Study.** I encourage you to organize your own group study, as it facilitates your understanding of the material and challenges you to think about the major questions and arguments of the texts.

**University Writing Center.** For tutoring in writing, schedule: <http://www.niu.edu/uwc/>.

**Students with Disabilities.** Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center. Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center if they have not done so already. The Disability Resource Center is located on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 [v] or 815-753-3000 [TTY] or by email at [drc@niu.edu](mailto:drc@niu.edu).

**Department of Political Science Website.** To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

**\*\*** *Students should print the selections marked on syllabus with a double asterisk from Blackboard.*

**\*** *Students should purchase the following books (available at the NIU bookstore and through online retailer such as Amazon, AbeBooks, etc.). If **for any reason** you have any trouble acquiring your texts, please see me.*

**##** *We will listen in class to the selections marked with double pound.*

Purchase:

Wendell Berry, *Fidelity*, Pantheon, 1993  
ISBN 0679748318

Ernest Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Bantam Books, 1971  
ISBN 0553263579

Mark Twain, *The War Prayer* Harper Colophon, 2001  
ISBN 0060911131

Helen Prejean, *The Death of Innocents*, Vintage Books, 2005  
ISBN 9780679759485