Class Description

The American constitution is based on a system of checks-and-balances, where executive, judicial, and legislature powers are divided into separate branches of government. Where does this system come from? What historical forces could undermine it? In this course, we examine historical models from Antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. The concept of the mixed constitution, combining aspects of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, goes back to Athens in the fourth century BC. It began as a critique of radical democracy, especially by Plato and Aristotle, but it is better known through the work of Montesquieu and Rousseau as a form of opposition to monarchical tyranny. Tracing its evolution is a useful exercise for learning the methods of intellectual history and for critically examining classic texts in political thought. People with quite different ideological perspectives have engaged with one another’s writings on the mixed constitution to find a solution to a timeless problem: how to balance the competing interests that make up complex societies in order to steer between tyranny and anarchy. We will soberly reflect on the ethnocentric and sexist biases of many writers discussed in the course and ask ourselves what social processes (ideological, economic, military, political) made the mixed constitution a powerful idea for some but not for others.

Desired Outcomes

On completion of this course, students should:

- be able to define key terms such as citizenship, sovereignty, constitutionalism, and social contract
- be able to describe some specific historical precedents for the American constitution
- grasp what social processes pushed societies towards constitutional vs. despotic governments
- have acquired a basic understanding of how the concept of the mixed constitution changed over time
- have improved their ability to think critically, engage in complex reasoning, and express their thoughts clearly through written and oral work.
Lecturer Details
Name: Andrew Monson, Associate Professor of Classics
Office: Silver Center 503G
Office Hours: Tuesday 11-12 and Thursday 3:15-4:15
Office Phone: 212-992-7977
Email Address: andrew.monson@nyu.edu

Section Leaders
Name: Benjamin Nikota, PhD Student in Classics
Office: Silver Center 503
Office Hours: Wed. 2-4 or by appt.
Email Address: ben233@nyu.edu

Name: Mikael Papadimitriou, PhD Student in Classics
Office: Silver Center 503
Office Hours: Tues. 3:30-4:40, Fri. 11-12.
Email Address: mp3837@nyu.edu

Name: Laura Santander, PhD Student in Classics
Office: Silver Center 503
Office Hours: Tues./Thur. 3:30-4:30
Email Address: mp3837@nyu.edu

Assessment Components
10% Participation – attendance, punctuality, discussion, and preparation for recitations
10% First Paper – 4-5 double-spaced pages, 12 pt font, New Times Roman
10% Second Paper – 4-5 double-spaced pages, 12 pt font, New Times Roman
20% Midterm – short answer questions and essay questions with some choice
20% Third Paper – 8-10 double-spaced pages, 12 pt font, New Times Roman
5% Federal Hall Report – two double-spaced pages, 12 pt font, New Times Roman
25% Final Exam – same as midterm with emphasis on material from after the midterm

First Paper Topic
What is citizenship? Compare your conception with Plato’s and Aristotle’s ideas about virtuous citizenship. Cite specific passages from their works with book and chapter numbers in the text in parentheses (no footnotes).
Second Paper Topic
What is a constitution? Compare your conception with Cicero’s description of the Roman constitution in Republic and Laws. Cite specific passages from his works with book and chapter numbers in the text in parentheses (no footnotes).

Third Paper Topic
What is sovereignty? Consider whether you agree with Jean Bodin and other modern theorists (Pufendorf, Grotius, Hobbes) that a mixed or balanced constitution is impossible. You may want to compare, for example, Aristotle (Politics 3.6-7, 4.8-9), Polybius (6.3-10), Cicero (Republic 1.69), or Machiavelli (Discourses 1.2). Cite specific passages from their works with book and chapter numbers in the text in parentheses (no footnotes).

Federal Hall Report
This assignment requires you to explore Federal Hall National Memorial on Wall Street. The original building at this site was the first capital of the United States, where George Washington was inaugurated as president. Identify a text, object or image that seems to refer to the political ideas or values of ancient Greece and Rome. Write about its significance and how it relates to ideas that we have discussed in this course. The assignment will not be graded but satisfactory completion counts for 5% of the final grade and particularly creative and thoughtful reports could merit extra credit.

Assessment Expectations (for participation, papers, exams, and final grades)
- **Grade A:** the student has performed truly extraordinary, superior work.
- **Grade B:** the student has challenged him or herself and performed good work.
- **Grade C:** the student has fulfilled only the minimum requirements for satisfactory work.
- **Grade D:** The student’s work falls below expectations for a university-level courses.
- **Grade F:** There are grave deficiencies in the student’s performance that merit a failing grade.

Grading Guidelines (for papers, exams, and final grades)

Academic Accommodations
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see the Moses Center for further information.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Attendance Policy
In case of absence, regardless of the reason, the student is responsible for completing missed assignments, getting notes and making up missed work in a timely manner based upon a schedule that is mutually agreed upon between the faculty member and the student. The only excused absences are as follows:
Illness

- If you are sick, please see a doctor; report absence to your Section Instructor within 48 hours.
- After two excused absences, a detailed doctor’s note will be required; you may be asked to take a medical leave of absence and withdraw from the course.

Religious observance

- Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.
- Please report your absence to your Section Instructor.

Late Submission of Work

- All course work must be submitted on the date and by the time specified on the syllabus.
- Late papers will receive a 1/3 letter grade deduction for each day late.

Plagiarism Policy

PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism. In the event of suspected or confirmed cases of plagiarism, the faculty member will consult first with the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs as definitions and procedures vary from school to school. For a detailed description of some possible forms of plagiarism and cheating, please consult: https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

Required Texts for Purchase in the Bookstore and on Reserve in Bobst Library


Reading Assignments Available in NYU Classes Resource Folder

- Herodotus, The Histories
- Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War
- Livy, History of Rome
- Polybius, Histories.
- Pufendorf, The Present State of Germany
- Grotius, The Rights of War and Peace
- Hobbes, Leviathan
- Harrington, Commonwealth of Oceana
Lectures and Reading Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENT (READ BY FRIDAY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 9/4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Herodotus 1.95-102, 3.80-83; Thucydides 3.69-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 9/6</td>
<td>Nature and Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 9/11</td>
<td>Athens and Sparta</td>
<td>Plato, Republic, chs. 1, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 9/13</td>
<td>The Ideal Constitution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 9/18</td>
<td>The Cycle of Constitutions</td>
<td>Plato, Republic, ch. 11; Aristotle, Politics,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 9/20</td>
<td>Citizens, Slaves, and States</td>
<td>1.1-5, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 9/25</td>
<td>Stability and Revolutions</td>
<td>Aristotle, Politics, 4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 9/27</td>
<td>Athenian Democracy Now!</td>
<td>FIRST PAPER DUE (FRIDAY 9/28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 10/2</td>
<td>The Hellenistic World</td>
<td>Polybius, Histories 6.1-18, 6.43-58; Livy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 10/4</td>
<td>The Roman Republic</td>
<td>History of Rome, 1.42-60, 2.1-2, 2.27-33, 3.32-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 10/9</td>
<td>NO LECTURE (MODAY SCH.)</td>
<td>Cicero, Republic and Laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 10/11</td>
<td>Cicero’s Political Theory</td>
<td>SECOND PAPER DUE (FRIDAY 10/12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 10/16</td>
<td>Crisis and Constitutionalism</td>
<td>Finish Readings and Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 10/18</td>
<td>MIDTERM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 10/23</td>
<td>Classics Rediscovered</td>
<td>Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy 1.1-10, 1.16-21,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 10/25</td>
<td>Renaissance Italy</td>
<td>1.34-58, 3.1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Reading Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 10/30</td>
<td>Republics and Monarchies</td>
<td>Bodin, <em>On Sovereignty</em>, pp. 1-109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 11/1</td>
<td>Reformation Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 11/8</td>
<td>Natural Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THIRD PAPER DUE (FRIDAY 11/9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 11/15</td>
<td>English Republicanism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 11/20</td>
<td>Review/Discussion</td>
<td>Enjoy your break!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 11/22</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING BREAK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 11/27</td>
<td>Learning from Antiquity</td>
<td>Montesquieu, pp. 85-193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 11/29</td>
<td>Constitutional Monarchy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 12/4</td>
<td>Popular Sovereignty</td>
<td>Rousseau, <em>Social Contract</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 12/6</td>
<td>The American Revolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F.H. REPORT DUE (Fri. 12/7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 12/11</td>
<td>Defending the Constitution</td>
<td>Adams, <em>Defending the Constitution</em>; <em>Federalist Papers</em> 9-10, 47-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thur. 12/13</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tues. 12/18</td>
<td>FINAL EXAM, 2:00-3:50 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>