

Advanced Institute, Spring 2014
AMERICAN IDEAS
Instructor: William Kristol
Washington, D.C.

America is said to be a country founded on an idea. Which idea? Or more likely, which *ideas*? This seminar will examine five central ideas that have given shape to American democracy, focusing on the theoretical roots of those ideas and their continued influence in politics today.

In addition to completing the reading assignments, students are expected to write one 500- to 750-word essay for the course. Each session, several students will submit an essay in response to one of the discussion questions listed on the syllabus or a question raised in class. The essays will be shared and used to begin the seminar.

Wednesday, April 16, 2014, 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Rights

Reading:

- Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826
- Abraham Lincoln, Letter to Henry L. Pierce & Others, April 6, 1859

Discussion Questions:

1. Can a political order dedicated to securing individual rights last?
2. What about the interests of the community?
3. What about duties?

Wednesday, April 23, 2014, 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Self-Government

Reading:

- Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, Nos. 1, 37, 39, 49, 63

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do The Federalist authors think self-government is difficult?
2. Do their proposed solutions solve the problems of self-government?

Wednesday, April 30, 2014, 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Self-Interest

Reading:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. Two, Part Two, Chs. 1-17

Discussion Question:

1. How can you have a functioning nation and a coherent people if everyone pursues his or her self-interest?

Wednesday, May 7, 2014, 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Capitalism

Reading:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. Two, Part Two, Chs. 18-20
- Irving Kristol, "Corporate Capitalism in America"
- Irving Kristol, "On Conservatism and Capitalism"
- Irving Kristol, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism"

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism for democracy?
2. For liberty?

Wednesday, May 14, 2014, 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Liberty

Reading:

- Abraham Lincoln, Address at a Sanitary Fair, April 18, 1864
- Abraham Lincoln, Speeches to Ohio Regiments, April 18 and 22, 1864
- Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863
- Leon Kass, "The Problem of Technology and Liberal Democracy"

Discussion Questions:

1. Can liberty be sustained?
2. Is it enough?