

COURSE SYLLABUS

Constitution 101:

THE MEANING AND HISTORY OF THE CONSTITUTION

Special Study Session

July 13 - August 19, 2021

The twelve lectures and the accompanying materials that comprise Hillsdale's online course, "Constitution 101," have been organized into twelve lessons. This study session will run from Tuesday, July 13 through Thursday, August 19. During this study session, participants will receive email reminders on Tuesdays and Thursdays with information regarding the day's lesson and lecture video. Hillsdale College Ph.D. candidates will be available to answer questions via email, on a dedicated discussion board exclusive for study session participants, and on a weekly podcast that will be posted on the study session webpage.

Professors

Larry P. Arnn, President and Professor of Politics and History

John W. Grant, Associate Professor and Chairman of Politics

Ronald J. Pestritto, Charles and Lucia Shipley Professor in the American Constitution

Kevin Portteus, Lawrence Fertig Professor of Politics, at Hillsdale College

Thomas G. West, Paul Ermine Potter and Dawn Tibbetts Potter Professor of Politics

Recommended Text

The U.S. Constitution: A Reader, edited by the Hillsdale College Politics Department

Course Materials (Available on Course Page)

Recommended Readings: The lectures include downloadable primary source readings.

Study Guides: Lectures 1 through 11 contain study guides to assist students in this course.

Lecture Quizzes: Lectures 1 through 11 include quizzes with questions drawn from the lecture.

Final Quiz: After completing the lectures and lecture quizzes, students can access the final quiz. Students who score 80% or higher on the final quiz will be awarded a digital certificate.

Schedule

July 13: Lesson 1 - The Theory of the Declaration and the Constitution

Video:

- Lecture 1 - The Theory of the Declaration and the Constitution (34:14)

Recommended Readings:

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Constitution of the United States of America
- Abraham Lincoln, "Fragment on the Constitution and the Union," (1861)

Discussion Question:

- What is the relationship between the Declaration and the Constitution? How does the first inform the second?

July 15: Lesson 2 - Natural Rights and the American Revolution

Video:

- Lecture 2 - Natural Rights and the American Revolution (29:26)

Recommended Readings:

- U.S. State Constitutions, Selections on Equality and Natural Rights
- John Jay, *Federalist 2* (1787)

Discussion Question:

- Why is consent so fundamental to the political theory of the Founders?

July 20: Lesson 3 - Majority Tyranny and the Necessity of the Union

Video:

- Lecture 3 - Majority Tyranny and the Necessity of the Union (36:47)

Recommended Readings:

- James Madison, "Vices of the Political System of the United States," (1787)
- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIII (1784)
- George Washington, "Letter to John Jay," (1786)
- Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist 15* (1787)

Discussion Question:

- How can the rule of an elected majority become tyrannical or despotic?

July 22: Lesson 4 - Consent of the Governed and the Separation of Powers

Video:

- Lecture 4 - Consent of the Governed and the Separation of Powers (40:24)

Recommended Readings:

- Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist 9* (1787)
- James Madison, *Federalist 10* (1787)
- James Madison, *Federalist 51* (1788)

Discussion Question:

- Why did Madison think that the large size of the American republic was helpful in ensuring good government?

July 27: Lesson 5 - “To Secure these Rights”: Property, Morality, and Religion

Video:

- Lecture 5 - “To Secure these Rights”: Property, Morality, and Religion (29:35)

Recommended Readings:

- Virginia Declaration of Rights
- George Washington, “To the Annual Meeting of Quakers,” (1789)
- George Washington, “Farewell Address,” (1796)

Discussion Question:

- What role does virtue play in the political theory of the Founders?

July 29: Lesson 6 - Slavery and the Roots of the Secession Crisis

Video:

- Lecture 6 - Slavery and the Roots of the Secession Crisis (32:31)

Recommended Readings:

- Alexander Hamilton, “Letter to John Jay” (1779)
- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XVIII (1784)
- The Northwest Ordinance (1787)
- John Jay, “Letter to the English Anti-Slavery Society” (1788)
- John C. Calhoun, “Speech on Reception of Abolition Petitions” (1837)
- John C. Calhoun, “Speech on the Oregon Bill” (1848)

Discussion Question:

- Why did the Founders not immediately abolish slavery? Did they do nothing about it?

August 3: Lesson 7 - Secession and Civil War

Videos:

- Lecture 7 - Secession and Civil War (33:27)

Recommended Readings:

- Abraham Lincoln, “Address at Cooper Institute” (1860)
- South Carolina Secession Declaration (1860)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Message to Congress in Special Session” (1861)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address” (1863)
- Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (1865)

Discussion Questions:

- Why did Lincoln think that the conflict between the North and the South was between republican government on the one hand and oligarchy on the other?

August 5: Lesson 8 - The Progressive Rejection of the Founding

Videos:

- Lecture 8 - The Progressive Rejection of the Founding (37:47)

Recommended Readings:

- Frank Goodnow, “The American Conception of Liberty” (1916)
- John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935)

- Woodrow Wilson, “What is Progress?” (1913)
- Woodrow Wilson, “Socialism and Democracy” (1887)

Discussion Questions:

- How did the Progressives understand the Constitution? Was their understanding in agreement with that of the Founders?

August 10: Lesson 9 - The New Deal and the Rise of the Administrative State

Videos:

- Lecture 9 - The New Deal and the Rise of the Administrative State (33:16)

Recommended Readings:

- Frank Goodnow, *Politics and Administration*, Chapter I (1900)
- Herbert Croly, *Progressive Democracy*, Chapter XV (1914)
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Commonwealth Club Address” (1932)

Discussion Questions:

- How does the shift from the idea of a separation of powers to the idea of politics and administration affect the three branches of government?

August 12: Lesson 10 - The Administrative State Today

Videos:

- Lecture 10 - The Administrative State Today (32:17)

Recommended Readings:

- Richard Flacks, “Is the Great Society Just a Barbecue?” (1966)
- Sanford Levinson, “Our Imbecilic Constitution,” (May 28, 2012)
- Jordan Michael Smith, “Vote all you want. The secret government won’t change” (October 19, 2014)
- Jonathan R. Macey, “Crony Capitalism: Right Here, Right Now” (2014)
- Joel Kotkin, “America’s Drift toward Feudalism” (2019)

Discussion Questions:

- What are the main ways in which the modern administrative state is anti-constitutional? How is it like an oligarchy?

August 17: Lesson 11 - Post-Sixties Liberalism and Contemporary Politics

Videos:

- Lecture 11 - Post-Sixties Liberalism and Contemporary Politics (23:58)

Recommended Readings:

- Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959) (excerpts)
- Jerome C. Foss, “The Hidden Influence of John Rawls on the American Mind” (2016)

Discussion Questions:

- In what ways did the New Left depart from the policies of early 20th century Progressives?
- What changes to American politics and society did the New Left successfully bring about?

August 19: Lesson 12 - A Path to Restoration

Videos:

- Lecture 12 - A Path to Restoration (7:04)

Recommended Readings:

- Winston Churchill, "What Good's a Constitution?" (1936)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some ways you can think of to restore Constitutional government in the US today?

High School Essay Contest

As part of this study session, Hillsdale College is sponsoring an essay contest for high school students.

Please answer the following:

What are the principles of the Declaration of Independence? How does the Constitution establish a form of government based on these principles?

Essays should be 600-800 words, double-spaced, and in 12-point Times New Roman font. Please provide your name, grade, and the name of your high school at the top of your essay.

Essays should demonstrate a clear understanding of the course content and be logical, clear, and grammatically correct.

Essays are due on Thursday, August 26, 2021, by 5:00 PM. To enter the contest, email a PDF or word document of your essay to studygroup@hillsdale.edu by the due date.

Note: Official rules are forthcoming and will be sent via email to study session participants.