

POL323 – AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Spring 2005

CLASS DEBATE/ESSAY INFORMATION

Our course materials are divided into five thematic units (dates as listed on the course syllabus). Each unit consists of all material listed on the syllabus since the previous unit, that is, all material that falls in the time periods listed below:

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Syllabus Dates</u>
I. Authority and Democracy	January 10-January 28
II. Rights, Responsibilities and the Constitutional Order	January 31-February 18
III. Democracy and Property in the Industrial Age	February 28-March 18
IV. The Struggle for Equality	March 21-April 13
V. Challenges for the 21 st Century	April 15-March 6

Each unit consists of a variety of thematically related readings spanning time across American history. Our broad challenge is to engage the critical issues raised in the readings, considering them in their historical context, as they apply today, and as they might help shape the world of tomorrow. We will accomplish through both debates and essays.

Each student is required to participate in one in-class debate and must submit essays for two of the first four thematic units. Essays must be from different units than the one for which a student participates in the class debate.

The principal requirement of the debates and essays is to engage, in depth and detail, critical issues raised by the readings, noting the different perspectives of various authors and schools of thought. Because the readings cover such a range of issues and topics, students have a fair amount of discretion as to exactly how they focus their efforts. The key thing is that you should be able to explain why the issues you focus on are important ones.

Students also have considerable discretion in the format of debates and essays. You can write a standard analytical essay addressing a range or relevant views. Conventional debates, matching two or more sides on a specifically defined topic (or topics) are appropriate, as are less conventional formats including (but not limited to) dramatic interpretations (for debates), multimedia presentations, and fictional essays where characters give voice to critical ideas drawn from the course materials. The selection from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* in Dolbeare and Cummings (Ch. 24) offers an example of the latter approach.

One way to select key themes for debate is to identify particularly succinct or powerful passages in the readings. These can then be framed as debate topics, for

example, “true liberty must be subjected to moral authority,” “the rich man is as much dependant upon the poor man for his labor, as the poor man is upon the rich for his wages,” “human rights should come before property rights,” “without economic freedom, none of the other freedoms can be realized,” or “one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.” You may wish to identify two or three central topics and a few subsidiary issues.

Another possibility would be to “invite” the various authors to debate a particular contemporary public policy question. For example, you might create a fictional roundtable where the nation’s founders, their critics, and perhaps other voices debated restrictions on civil liberties since September 11, 2001. You could frame a debate for the unit on democracy and property in the industrial age on the subject of a proposal for national health care.

It is quite likely that if you put your minds to it, you can come up with even better possibilities. In any event, you should check with your instructor before finalizing your plans for debates and essays if you plan to choose an “alternative” approach.

For debates, in addition to the in-class performance, each student participant is required to prepare and turn in a typewritten brief of 1-2 pages summarizing relevant readings appropriate to at least one of their roles in their group. Groups are free to allocate responsibilities among members in any manner they desire, but each individual is expected to prepare a substantial separate contribution. Student scores on class debates will be based on both the written briefs and oral debate. Students may be able to supplement their scores with relevant postings to the class e-mail list.

For essays, the key is to **demonstrate your detailed mastery of course readings and discussions**. All essays must be typewritten, double-spaced and should **not exceed six pages**. Essays should be concise, yet as detailed as possible. **Present direct quotations** from the readings where appropriate and **back up your points with evidence, reasoning and examples**. Your essays will be much stronger if you **anticipate and respond to opposing views**.

In-class debate topic requests are due in class Wednesday, January 19th. Assignments will be made on a random basis from all requests submitted (all first choices will be honored until a given unit has reached capacity; if a student’s first choice is filled, they will receive their second choice, etc.). Students who do not submit preferences will be assigned to groups by the instructor. Expect assignments to be announced January 20th.