

SPECIAL TOPICS: THE LINCOLN/DOUGLAS DEBATES

Fall 2019

UC Boulder ~ PSCI 4028-002 (#34194)

Professor Sheehan

email: colleen.sheehan@colorado.edu

Office Hours: TH: 12-2 pm

Office: N225 Kittredge Central, N. Wing, 2nd Floor

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the theory, politics, and statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in the years leading up to the American Civil War. The study of Lincoln and Douglas is prefaced by an examination of the exchange between Socrates and Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*. These texts raise fundamental questions of political philosophy, American politics, democratic theory, and statesmanship. They prod us to consider the relationship between ethics and politics, between majority rule and minority rights, between power and right. The readings and class discussions are also designed to encourage you to think about your own political and ethical views and about the meaning and importance of politics in human life.

II. READINGS

Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait Through His Speeches and Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964. ISBN: 0-8047-0946-7

Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962. (Recommended)

Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 195. ISBN: 0-226-39112-4

Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harper & Row, 1965. ISBN: 0-06-080618-4

III. CLASS PREPARATION AND CONTRIBUTION

This class includes a substantial amount of in-class discussion and debate. You are asked to make a significant and meaningful contribution to these class discussions. In order to accomplish this, you need to attend the classes, complete the reading for each class, and spend time thinking about the issues raised in the texts and class conversations. I ask you to take this responsibility with the utmost seriousness, for your own progress of learning as well as the quality of the class will largely depend on the extent to which you do this.

IV: DEBATES

There will be a series of one-on-one debates throughout the semester. Each of you will sign up for two debate topics (see below). The format of the debates will be as follows: Each debater will have 12 minutes. Side A will talk 4 minutes, then Side B will have 6 minutes, then Side A will have 2 additional minutes.

V. EXAMINATIONS

There will be a midterm and a final exam in this course. The final will be comprehensive and may include questions on assigned readings, assigned class handouts, lectures, and class discussions; it may be written and/or oral.

VI. WEEKLY ESSAYS

At the start of each week, a brief essay (2 pages) on one of the weekly topic questions listed on the syllabus is due on Blackboard (by 11:59 Monday night). There will also be lectures hosted by the Benson Center that you are highly encouraged to attend, each of which can serve as a substitute for one of the brief essays (tba).

VII. GRADING FOR THIS COURSE

Grading in this course is based on your class contribution, debate, midterm examination, final examination, and paper.

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| Class Contribution (including debates): | 25% |
| Brief Essays: | 25% |
| Midterm Examination: | 25% |
| Final Examination: | 25% |

VIII. SCHEDULE

NB: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a lengthy novel; you should begin reading it as soon as possible and continue reading it throughout the semester in order to have the portions assigned read by the due dates.

TQ = Topic Questions

WEEK 1: 8/27-29

Introduction

Kinds of Argumentation

Republic, Book 1

WEEK 2: 9/3-5

Republic, Books 1 and 2

UTC, chs. 1-5

- TQ: 1) How is the issue of power v. persuasion presented in Book 1?
2) Why is the issue of power v. persuasion considered a fundamental question in politics? What does this issue have to do with the idea of justice?
3) Explain and analyze Thrasymachus' argument.

Debate Topic: Is justice the right of the stronger? (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 3: 9/10 (no class Th 9/12)

Republic, Books 2 & 8

UTC, chs. 6-10

- TQ: 1) Explain and analyze Adeimantus' passions/ambitions.
2) Explain and analyze Glaucon's passions/ambitions.
3) Explain the cycle of regimes discussed in Book 8.
4) What are the central strengths and weaknesses of democratic government?

Debate Topic: Is democratic government good government? (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 4: 9/17

L/D, 16 June 1858 Speech by Lincoln

L/D, 9 July 1858 Chicago Speech by Douglas

Crisis, Introduction, chs. I-IV

UTC, chs. 11-15

- TQ: 1) Explain and defend Douglas' concept of popular sovereignty.
2) Explain Douglas' idea that uniformity is the parent of despotism.
3) Explain and defend Douglas' criticism of Lincoln's stated position in the *Dred Scott* decision.
4) Present a clear summary of the Kansas-Nebraska (K-N) Act.

Debate Topics:

- 1) Popular Sovereignty (Pro v. Con)
- 2) 1) Lincoln v. Douglas (Issues from First and Second Joint Debates)

WEEK 5: 9/24-26

L/D, First, Second, Fifth & Sixth Joint Debates

Crisis, chs. V-VIII

UTC, chs. 16-20

- TQ: 1) Present a clear summary of Douglas' position on the K-N Act.
2) Explain and defend Douglas' view that Lincoln's principles and policy will destroy the Union.
3) Why did Douglas think that there was no way to destroy slavery under the Constitution? Was Douglas correct about this?
4) Explain and defend Douglas' vision of how to put slavery on the course of ultimate extinction and save the Union.
5) Do you agree with Douglas' solution regarding how to get rid of slavery in the United States? Defend your position.

Debate Topic: Lincoln v. Douglas (Issues from Fifth & Sixth Joint Debates)

WEEK 6: 10/1-3

Douglas, continued

Lincoln, Lyceum Address

Crisis, ch. IX

Documentary Portrait, Nos. 1, 4

UTC, chs. 21-25

- TQ: 1) Describe and explain Lincoln's portrait of the "towering genius."
2) Analyze Glaucon's character within the context of Lincoln's description of the "towering genius."

Debate Topic: Glaucon fits the mold of the “tower genius” in the mode of Lincoln’s description of a Napoleon and Alexander (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 7: 10/8-10

Lyceum Address, continued

Midterm Examination

WEEK 8: 10/15-17

Lyceum Address and Temperance Address

Crisis, ch. X

Documentary Portrait, Nos. 7, 11

UTC, chs. 31-35

TQ: 1) What (if any) is the difference between the shepherd and the wolf?

2) Explain the idea of temperance/moderation presented in the Temperance Address.

Debate Topic: All Men are Created Equal (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 9: 10/22/-24

Peoria Speech

Crisis, chs. XI-XIII

Documentary Portrait, Nos. 20

UTC, chs. 36-38

TQ: 1) Defend Douglas’ support of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

2) Defend Lincoln’s opposition to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

3) What is the difference and what is the relationship between Lincoln’s understanding of the legal and political tendency toward slavery?

Debate Topic: The Meaning of Rights: There is No Right to Do Wrong (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 10: 10/29-31

Lincoln’s Speech on the *Dred Scott* Decision

Crisis, chs. XIV-XV

Documentary Portrait, Nos. 19, 25, 26, 32

UTC, chs. 39-40

TQ: 1) Explain the contemporary idea of toleration.

2) Consider the contemporary idea of toleration within the context of the following passage from *Crisis* (p. 334, 336):

“According to Lincoln, a free people cannot disagree on the relative merits of freedom and despotism without ceasing, to the extent of the difference, to be a free people....The commitment to freedom must simultaneously be a commitment to justice, and the idea of a freedom to be unjust would imply, by equal reason, a freedom to be unfree.”

3) What is a “standard maxim” (i.e., that Lincoln speaks of in the Dred Scott Decision Speech)? Explain and discuss.

Debate Topics:

1) What is the Meaning of “All Men are Created Equal” in the Declaration of

Independence? (Lincoln v. Taney/Douglas)
2) Which principle is superior?: Toleration v. Moral Right

WEEK 11: 11/5-7

Crisis, chs. XVI-XVII

Documentary Portrait, No. 33, 29

UTC, chs. 41-43

TQ: Explain Lincoln's understanding of the meaning of equality.

Debate Topics:

- 1) The Right to an Abortion (Pro v. Con)
- 2) Marriage is between one man and one woman vs. Marriage as a personal choice

WEEK 12: 11/12-14

Crisis, chs. XVIII-XX

Documentary Portrait, Nos. 60, 68, 87, 92, 105

UTC, chs. 44-45

TQ: 1) When Lincoln "freed the slaves" in the Emancipation Proclamation, he did not free all the slaves, but only those in states which had succeeded from the Union. Should he have freed *all* the slaves?
2) What did Lincoln mean by his professed primary devotion to "saving the Union"? Is his legal and moral position defensible?

Debate Topic: Lincoln should have freed all of the slaves (Pro v. Con)

WEEK 13: 11/19-21

Uncle Tom's Cabin

TQ: 1) Who is the hero of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Explain.

- 2) Who in *UTC* is most like Thrasymachus? Who is most like Adamantus? Who is most like Glaucon?

Debate Topic: Who is the hero of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: George Harris v. Uncle Tom

Thanksgiving Break: 11/25-29

WEEK 14: 12/3-5

Uncle Tom's Cabin

TQ: 1) Is Uncle Tom a good man? Is he a good Christian?

- 2) Does Uncle Tom care about only heavenly things, or does he care about the earthly things as well? Is he a good citizen? Is he a good slave?

3) Describe and analyze the character of Augustine St. Clare

4) Who in *UTC* is most enslaved? Who is most free? Explain, discuss, and analyze.

5) What is freedom? What is self-government?

Debate Topic: Is Uncle Tom an "Uncle Tom"? -- that is, in the way the term "Uncle Tom" is often used derogatorily to describe someone who is passive and allows himself to be pushed around, and who doesn't stand up for himself or his race?

WEEK 15: 12/10-12
Debates on Contemporary Issues
Summary Review

FINAL EXAMINATION TBA