

ADVANCED PLACEMENT U.S. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

The goal of this summer reading assignment is to acquaint the class with the concepts and skills that we will visit throughout the course. I feel that each of the topics covered in these books will provide you with a base of conceptual and factual knowledge upon which we can build the entire course. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns throughout the summer, please feel free to contact me at mkarpyn@mnsd.org

All of the readings are in print and readily available through any number of traditional or online booksellers.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Richard Beeman, Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution (New York: Random House, 2009) ISBN – 0812976843

Bob Woodward, The Price of Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012) ISBN 978-1-4516-5111-9 (paperback)

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Joe Klein, Politics Lost: How American Democracy Was Trivialized By People Who Think You're Stupid [New York: Doubleday, 2006] ISBN - 0385510276

David M. O'Brien, Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002] ISBN – 0393978966

Fred I. Greenstein, The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton [Princeton, NJ: The Princeton University Press, 2001] ISBN - 0691090831
- Read chapters 1 and 13, in addition to the chapters on **six** of the presidents featured in the book

Garrett Ward Shelton, The Political Philosophy of James Madison [Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002] ISBN – 0801871069

Do not wait until the last minute to begin these readings. Speed-reading, though an impressive party trick, will not provide with the depth of understanding I expect you to take from the assignment. We have a lot to cover in the next year, and these readings are a critical foundation for the introductory units of the course. Take your time and take notes following the provided questions – it will make writing the essays that much easier.

The three completed essays are a graded assignment, and are due on September 3rd, 2019, the first day of school. I will not accept late assignments for any reason.

At the end of this assignment, I will provide some guidelines that should assist your reading of each of the texts. You should certainly take notes and underline passages and quotes that you find interesting, funny, truthful or confusing.

My objective in assigning these readings is for you to compare the theory and practice of our systems of government in the United States. Great portions of our founding documents are based on a variety of different philosophies about the nature, purpose, powers and individual rights and liberties included within a system of government. Even today, politicians, pundits, academics and our court systems still consider and debate the same questions that the Framers faced over 200 years ago.

Your quest is to stake your own position in this ongoing debate. I am not looking for you to regurgitate what was said in the books; I am looking for your original **opinion** of the questions that I have assigned. Obviously, you cannot pull this opinion out of thin air – you must base it in the substance provided by the readings. I am looking for quality, not quantity, so endeavor to keep your writing within the guidelines provided below.

Answer the following questions in three separate one to two page essays:

- 1. The events of your books occur over two centuries apart from each other. Time aside, do you find that the political processes described in those books are more similar or more different from one another? Do you find any common elements between the two, or are they so radically different that any comparison is almost impossible? Why? Be sure to include specific examples from each book to back your response.**
- 2. What were the greatest fears of the Framers about the system of government created by the United States Constitution? In your view, how were these fears addressed within the structure, language and provisions of the Constitution? Do you see the fears of the Framers embodied in the events of The Price of Politics? Why? Cite specific examples from each text to back your opinions.**
- 3. In any process, the work of individuals is critical to the success of an overall group effort. Select one figure from each book that, based on your reading, held similar roles within those different processes. Despite the expanse of time between those two events, why do you see their roles and efforts as so similar? What qualities did each individual possess that allowed them to take on such a role?**

Other guidelines:

- Stay within one to two pages for each essay. I cannot stress this request enough. I am looking for coherent, organized thought, not fluff and padding.
- Big words and jargony writing do not equal higher grades. Despite the best efforts of my graduate programs, I still firmly believe that good writing allows us to clearly communicate, not obscure, our original ideas. Nothing makes me happier than simple, clear and concise prose.
- Use parenthetical citations with a page number if you cite any direct quotes or ideas that are not your own.
- Please email me at mkarpyn@mnsd.org if you have any questions, comments or concerns.
- Above all, have fun!

AP US Government and Politics: Summer Reading Guide Questions

Please use the following questions to help guide your understanding and analysis of the assigned readings. I will not collect these questions, but their completion will help you gather the evidence needed to support your responses to the essay prompts.

“Plain, Honest Men”

[Whenever] “you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?”

- Benjamin Franklin, September 17, 1787

Think about this observation from Philadelphia’s own Benjamin Franklin. Many adjectives describe the United States Constitution: brilliant, miraculous, revolutionary, vague, outdated, incomplete, living . . . and on and on. Which of those would you choose? To Franklin’s point, is it perfect, or is it flawed? Why?

Popular government is a process, and not even our founding documents were spared from the meat grinder of competing groups and factions, all with their own visions for the country.

This first assigned text provides you with a first-hand glimpse into the difficult day-by-day process that led to the creation of the United States Constitution. In the masterful hands of Richard Beeman, you will fully understand the challenges, energy, ideas, controversies and, yes, the literal sweat that poured into the creation of those four simple pages. It was extraordinarily difficult, but it was also successful. Your overall task with this book is to consider why it was successful.

Consider the following questions as you read:

Why did a “crisis” exist in American government by the early 1780s?

What were the fatal flaws within the Articles of Confederation?

What conclusions were reached at the Annapolis Convention in 1786?

Why did the 1787 convention attract more delegates than the Annapolis convention?

Which of the delegates are described by the author as “indispensable” to the Philadelphia convention? Why?

Why was the start of the convention delayed? Why does the author argue that this delay was actually beneficial?

Describe the conditions under which the delegates worked from May to September.

How were the events of the convention reported in the local newspapers?

In your view, what were the three most difficult issues addressed by the delegates? How were each of these issues resolved?

What revisions were made during the month of August?

Were there certain issues that the delegates did not fully address?

Was the ratification process a simple formality? Why?

What roles did these individuals play during this process?

John Dickinson

Oliver Ellsworth

Benjamin Franklin

Elbridge Gerry

Alexander Hamilton

Nathaniel Gorham

John Lansing

James Madison

Luther Martin

George Mason

Gouverneur Morris

Robert Morris

Edmund Randolph

John Rutledge

Roger Sherman

Charles Pinckney

William Paterson

George Washington

James Wilson

Robert Yates

“The Price of Politics”

Plain, Honest Men provides you with a detailed, personal overview of a complex, challenging process that succeeds, despite many obstacles. The Price of Politics will describe a more modern process that was not as successful. What, if anything, has changed in 200 years?

To understand the events of The Price of Politics, it is important to understand the role of debt ceiling, and why it’s important to finances of the United States. In the fall of 2011, the government of the United States needed to raise this limit in order to keep paying its bills . . . and all kinds of trouble broke loose.

You will sometimes find the details of this debate arcane and mind numbing, but it’s how the institutions of government often work. Behind the sound bites, photo ops, selfies, hashtags and campaign slogans, the wheels of government often turn in a painfully slow manner. Try not to get too bogged down in the details, but instead take a step back, thinking about the whole, messy process described by Bob Woodward. Think of all of the different players and their roles in this very complex process: Congress, the committees, the caucuses, the interest groups, the media and, yes, the Executive Branch. “Schoolhouse Rock” it is not, but it best represents the system we have and the one that was put in place by the Framers in 1787. Or . . . does it not? Does this system still work as intended? What do you think?

Consider the following questions as you read:

What is the “debt ceiling?” Why did it create so much controversy in 2011?

What was the apparent condition of the U.S. economy in 2009? Why?

How did the Obama administration attempt to reverse this condition? Did everyone agree with this approach? Why?

What are the major philosophical differences – especially between Republicans and Democrats – on policies related to taxes, spending and the federal budget?

What other major policy issues did President Obama wish to address during his first term?

How would you characterize the differences between the two major political parties? Is there any middle ground that you see?

Do you see differences and divisions within the major political parties?

What was the Simpson-Bowles commission? Why was it formed? What were their conclusions?

Were these recommendations followed? Why?

Outside of the political parties and government officials, what other types of groups or organized interests are highlighted by the book? How much influence did they have over this process?

Who, in your opinion, had more power and influence over the debt ceiling debate: the President of the United State or Congress? Why?

What happened in the 2010 midterm elections?

Over what issues did the negotiations over the debt ceiling break down? Why were Congress and President Obama unable to reach a settlement?

Why was a “supercommittee” formed? Who served on this committee? Did it succeed? Why?

Describe the solution to the debt ceiling stalemate that was finally reached. Would you describe this solution as a success? Why?

Who, in your view, is more at fault for the apparent failure of this process: President Obama, the House of Representatives, or the United States Senate? Or, is the blame equally shared? Why?

What roles did these individuals play during this process?

Barack Obama Joe Biden Harry Reid Mitch McConnell Nancy Pelosi John Boehner
Eric Cantor Paul Ryan Timothy Geithner Larry Summer Peter Orszag Jack Lew
Rahm Emanuel Bill Dailey David Plouffe Max Baucus Patty Murray Steny Hoyer
Dave Camp Alan Simpson Erskine Bowles

Guideline questions for the Extra Credit readings:

To receive full extra credit for this optional reading assignment, answer each of the questions attached to each with two to three paragraph responses. I will read these responses closely for specific detail and correct interpretation of the material. Some questions are more opinion-based, but I expect that you will base your opinions in the factual content of the readings.

“Politics Lost”

What, as best as you can determine, is the central argument of Politics Lost? Does Joe Klein offer any solutions to the perceived challenges faced by our modern political system? Are there any problems with Klein’s arguments that you can detect based on your own knowledge of American politics? Are the challenges described by Klein similar or different to those that Madison and Hamilton faced during their political careers? Why?

”The Presidential Difference”

Can we, as students of government, arrive at a single definition of a “successful” or “great” president? Or, is this definition wrapped up in the context of time or a particular situation? Fred I. Greenstein is a specialist in presidential leadership, and his work alone has reshaped the historical perceptions and evaluations of some presidencies. What is his framework for evaluating a president? What is the importance of each of those elements in evaluating a president’s effectiveness? Are these criteria fair? Would Madison agree or disagree with his framework? At what point is it fair to evaluate the successes or failures of a presidency? What similarities and differences, successes and failures do you see among the presidents that you studied?

”Storm Center”

Considering recent events, you have picked an excellent time to study the Supreme Court. Through this reading, I want you gain an understanding of how the Court chooses, hears and decides cases. What types of cases are argued in front of the court? How are decisions reached? What role do clerks play in the process? What goes on behind closed doors? How are cases decided? Who gets on the court? Is the court totally separate of politics? How would Madison react to reading this account of the workings of the Supreme Court?

A more important question to consider is what role politics play in the operation of the court, both in the processes of nominating justices and deciding cases. Do you feel that the Court is truly “independent” in its thinking or do politics sometimes seep into their decisions? After *Bush v. Gore* and the recent affirmative action, juvenile death penalty and partial birth abortion decisions, some critics feel that the courts are becoming too political in its rulings. What are your feelings on this issue, based on this book?

“The Political Philosophy of James Madison”

Did James Madison, as a revolutionary, Framers, Secretary of State and president, always support the same type of government? In his mind, what was the most important purpose of government? How did his early life influence his political philosophy? Did Madison believe that majority rule was the best way to run a government? Why?