

The paper is due **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10 by 5:00 P.M.**

NOTE: This is paper option #2 on the syllabus. If you choose this option, select one of the following topics for your 9-12 page scholarly paper. You should rely heavily on the readings assigned for class when writing your paper.

History topics:

1. The “American mind” during the Founding era was influenced or shaped by history/tradition, by religious thought, and/or “natural philosophy.” Which had the most profound influence on the American mind”?
2. James Madison and many other founders claimed that the American Founding was “unique” and “novel.” Were they correct? To what extent did the founders borrow from the past and to what extent did they reject the past? What is the true place of the American Founding in the Western tradition of “foundings”?
3. Why did Founding-era Americans believe that education and virtue were especially important in a republic? What kinds of virtues in particular did they believe were important, and how should government promote virtue and morality?
4. Americans during the Founding era believed that the structure of the family was critical in republics. How was the Founding-era family influenced by republican principles, and how was the structure of the family intended to promote and preserve republican principles?
5. Tocqueville claimed that there was a “kind of equality of the sexes” in America during the early years of the Republic. What did he mean by this statement, and was he correct in this observation?
6. Evaluate the following claim made by some contemporary historians: “There was no American Revolution. There was only a war for independence from direct political control by Great Britain.”
7. What did “religious liberty” and “separation of Church and State” mean to Founding-era Americans?
8. What arguments did Americans during the Founding era make for and against property requirements for voting privileges?
9. What political lessons did Founding-era Americans draw from Scripture and/or the Judeo-Christian tradition, and how did they apply those lessons or teachings to their own political thought?
10. Choose another topic relevant to the course, with permission of instructor.

## Political Science topics:

1. Make an argument on whether the founders would agree or disagree with the following statement, excerpted from Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (pp. 56-64): “For all the decade’s lurid brutality and revolutionary upheaval, the Sixties [*i.e.*, 1960s] were not a complete break with the spirit of the American past...The signers of the Declaration took the moral order they had inherited for granted. It never occurred to them that the document’s rhetorical flourishes might be dangerous if that moral order weakened...Men with [too much optimism and faith in] human nature would naturally continually emphasize liberty. Though they surely did not envision a society resembling ours, they set in motion a tendency that, carried far enough, could and often did eventually free the individual from almost all moral and legal constraints...We can now see the tendency of the Enlightenment [and] the Declaration of Independence[:]Each insisted on the expanding liberty of the individual and each assumed that order was not a serious problem and could be left, pretty much, to take care of itself.”

2. Make an argument on whether the founders would agree or disagree with the following statement, excerpted from Isaac Kramnick and R. Lawrence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (pp. 12, 14-15, 22-23): “[T]he nation’s founders...sought to separate the operations of government from any claim that human beings can know and follow divine direction in reaching policy decisions...[I]f the First Amendment means anything, it means that government should not sponsor or encourage a particular form of religious expression...While many at the birth of America advocated a Christian politics, the principal architects of our national government envisioned a godless Constitution and a godless politics...So successful were the drafters of the Constitution in defining government in secular terms that one of the most powerful criticisms of the Constitution when ratified and for succeeding decades was that it was indifferent to Christianity and God. It was denounced by many as a godless document, which is precisely what it is.”

3. Make an argument on whether the founders would agree or disagree with one or both of the following claims made by some contemporary scholars:

a. “Because the founders meant to establish a democratic marketplace of ideas, freedom of speech was meant to guarantee the absolute and unfettered right to engage in the expression (whether oral, written or involving activity) of ideas and opinions, whether orally, through action, or in writing – even those ideas that are offensive to individuals who hold contrary opinions.”

b. “Although the founders placed emphasis on the importance of freedom of speech, they realized that some forms of speech (for example speech indicating hatred or intolerance of particular identity groups) and some particular terms or words are so universally offensive to reasonable individuals that government regulation or even prohibition of such speech would not be contrary to the essential conception of freedom.”

4. The Declaration of Independence asserts that all men are created equal, and that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. And yet many founders believed that a property requirement for voting was consistent with Founding principles. Are property requirements for voting privileges consistent with the principles of the Founding?

5. Many Founding-era Americans believed they had found a way to reconcile the tension between “natural philosophy” (or reason) and the Christian teachings in Scripture (or Revelation) in their political thought. How did they attempt to do so and were they successful in reconciling the two?

6. James Madison wrote, “A man has a property in his opinions and the free communication of them. . . . He has an equal property in the free use of his faculties and free choice of the objects on which to employ them.” In light of the political theory animating the American Founding (i.e., an understanding of “nature” and “human nature”) how did Madison come to such a conclusion?

7. In his 1776 sermon, Reverend Samuel West asserted that “whenever magistrates abuse their power and authority to the subverting the public happiness, their authority immediately ceases, and it not only becomes lawful, but an indispensable duty to oppose them.” How did West arrive at this conclusion?

8. In his Farewell Address, George Washington wrote, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.” To what extent did other prominent American founders agree or disagree with Washington on this, and how did their views on this question affect their understanding of “separation of Church and State”?

5. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that Americans had a unique understanding of “the equality of the sexes.” What was that understanding, and how was it a reflection of “the American mind”? How did this understanding affect the rights of women during the Founding era?

10. Choose another topic relevant to the course, with permission of instructor.