

**17.20: Introduction to American Politics**  
**Spring 2013**  
**Short Paper #1**

**Paper Requirements:**

- Your paper must be uploaded in PDF format by noon on February 26.
- Your paper must be between 1,000 and 1,250 words in length (about 4 double-spaced pages).
- Assignments submitted after the noon deadline will be immediately penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g., A to A-), and each 8 hours the penalty increases by 1/3 of a grade.
- Use parenthetical citation with a references list at the end of your essay. (The reference list will not count toward your word limit.) For a good resource, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>). When citing a specific quotation or part of a work, provide the page number.

**Paper Prompt:**

Select **one** of the following speeches:

- President Obama's Second Inaugural Address (January 2013):  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/21/us/politics/obamas-second-inaugural-speech.html?pagewanted=all>
- Governor Mitt Romney's "Faith in America" speech (December 2007):  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16969460>

Your task is to construct an argument about how President Obama's or Governor Romney's speech invokes, modifies, undermines, ignores, and/or employs elements of the American political tradition. You should clearly define the element(s) of the American political tradition most relevant to the speech and take a position on how that tradition is used. Your argument should be grounded in the readings assigned in Part I of this course. The readings for Lecture 3, which covered such themes as liberalism, republicanism, pragmatism, and ascriptive hierarchy, will be particularly useful, but you need not rely on them exclusively. The writing tips below contain several reflection questions to help formulate your argument.

**Writing tips:**

- Formulate your thesis statement (main argument) before you start writing. The thesis statement should appear in the first paragraph of your essay and be easy to identify.
- Aim to make your essay primarily analytical rather than normative (it should not, for example, argue *for* or *against* small government).
- Explore such questions as the following:
  - Does the speech emphasize or privilege certain elements of American political culture over others? Are some elements ignored entirely?
  - Does the speech invoke elements of the American political tradition that are in tension with or even contradict one another?

- Do parts of the speech have multiple or ambiguous meanings that depend on what elements of the American political tradition are used to interpret them?
- For what strategic purposes does the speech use different cultural themes? How does the speaker use them to accomplish his goals in the speech?
- Does the speech imply a view of the proper role or function of government that reinforces or contradicts the “analytical foundations” of political science or the beliefs and values embodied in the U.S. Constitution?
- Is it more consistent with the view that there is a single coherent American political tradition or the view that there are multiple competing traditions?
- Make explicit reference (direct quotes) to your chosen speech, but keep quotations as short as possible. Include a citation every time you paraphrase or directly quote an author. You do not need to bring in texts from outside readings for the course, but if you do, be sure to cite them as well.
- You only have a few pages to make your point. Focus from the first paragraph on your main argument. You do not need to bring in texts from outside the course.
- Schedule a meeting with the writing advisors if you have any concerns. They want to help you!

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