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Cycles of American Political Thought

(36 lectures, 30 minutes/lecture) Course No. 4820

Taught by Joseph F. Kobyłka Southern Methodist University Ph.D., University of Minnesota

America is often described as a nation of doers. Its folk heroes are men and women of action, like Daniel Boone and Annie Oakley, who subdued an untamed wilderness on the way to forging a great nation. But is that the whole story? Is American history really just a tale of dynamic movers and shakers who left philosophizing to their European counterparts?

In Cycles of American Political Thought, you'll examine the often neglected philosophical underpinnings of this nation's history. With renowned political scientist Professor Joseph F. Kobyłka as your guide, you'll explore how this nation of "doers" has, from its birth, been deeply engaged with the most fundamental questions of political philosophy.

Over the course of 36 engaging lectures, Professor Kobyłka weaves a tale of nation-founding and nation-building. You'll learn how, from its earliest days, the nation has borne the imprint of influential thinkers from the European continent, from the Reformation theology of John Calvin to the Enlightenment philosophy of John Locke. You'll examine how these ideas have influenced the greatest Americans as, over the centuries, the nation has cycled between variants of a single revolutionary political theory.

But America's story is not simply one of ideas. From the Civil War to the civil rights movement, the Industrial Revolution to the Great Depression, Professor Kobyłka's analysis shows how the actions and events of history have both affected and been influenced by underlying political philosophies.

The Ever-Changing Definition of "America"

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- 30. Eugene V. Debs and Working-Class Socialism
- 31. Hamiltonian Means for Jeffersonian Ends
- 32. FDR, the New Deal, and the Supreme Court
- 33. The Racial Revolution
- 34. The New Egalitarianism and Freedom
- 35. The Reagan Revolution
- 36. Cycles of American Political Conversations

Throughout this epic historical journey, you'll explore the many ways this nation has answered the question: "What is an American?" Professor Kobylka traces the many answers that have been offered over the centuries, showing how the idea of "We the People" has changed and expanded far beyond the founding fathers' original conception.

And just as the definition of what it means to be an American expands, so the ideas about governance have changed and grown. We'll navigate this ever-shifting political landscape and see how the great political trends in American history can be understood as variations on a single theme: the philosophy of liberalism. Derived from the writings of Enlightenment philosopher John Locke, this conception of government is the source of some of our most deeply valued political notions, such as the idea that government is designed to serve the needs of the people. Professor Kobylka shows how the many twists and turns of the nation's history can be seen as a cycling back and forth between competing interpretations of this foundational political theory.

Founding Fathers and Freedom Fighters

You'll also meet the great men and women who, over the course of American history, have molded political thought and policy. We'll see how our most beloved leaders—Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan—acted from deeply felt philosophical convictions about government, and how apolitical observers—such as philosopher Henry David Thoreau and essayist J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur—offered insights into the strengths, and shortcomings of American liberalism.

Our journey through the American political landscape includes the critics and activists who demanded equal access to the nation's promise of equality and liberty. We'll meet some of the great figures who fought to redress deeply rooted inequities, including such abolitionist Frederick Douglass and suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Understanding the Past, Understanding the Present

Through **Cycles of American Political Thought**, you'll gain a deep understanding both of the nation's past and how this rich political history continues to influence the current day. Even if you've studied American history before, you'll encounter something new: a unique synthesis of viewpoints, ideas, and events that's enlightening and compelling.

And while the story is epic, you'll never lose your way. Professor Kobylka illuminates both the larger patterns of history and the finer details—the lives, events, and ideas that bring history to life. This course will change the way you think about American history.

Should I Buy Audio or Video?

This course works well in any format. There are about 165 images of people and events. The professor reads from many primary sources and explains them in great detail, so audio customers will have no problem following along.

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