

**Course Title: Advanced Placement American Government and Politics**

**Department: Social Studies**

**Primary Course Materials:**

Janda, Berry and Goldman. (2005). *The Challenge of Democracy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Matthews, C. (1999). *Hardball: How Politics Is Played By One Who Knows the Game*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Terkel, S. (2003). *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Difficult Times*. New York: New Press.

**Course Description:**

The AP United States Government and Politics course is designed to give students a critical perspective on politics and government, and provide them with a framework for life-long analysis of the American political system. Students will be prepared to take the Advanced Placement Exam in American Government and Politics

**Essential Questions:**

Explain why conflict is an inevitable outcome when governments seek to promote both freedom and equality, and provide a specific example.

Summarize the major points from the California election example and specifically illustrate how this example fits the definitions of two theories, types of democracy or models studied.

Briefly summarize the data on negative advertising and campaigning presented in the chapter. Do you find the trend toward simplistic, negative campaigning disturbing, or do you believe that “all’s fair in love, war, and politics”? What reforms (if any) should be made to upgrade the quality of presidential campaigns?

Discuss the ways in which the privacy cases illustrate the conflict between freedom and order, throughout U.S. history.

Evaluate issue networks in terms of both their efficiency and their democratic responsiveness

**Course Objectives:**

Develop their conceptual knowledge of United States government and political science.

Read and digest factual information independently in order to utilize class time for higher level thinking skills.

Practice and develop writing skills in order to communicate THEIR ideas clearly and concisely to others.

Foster critical thinking about United States government and political science.

### **Common Goals:**

#### *1. Cause & Effect*

United States government and politics require the active participation of US citizens. To understand how to function as responsible citizens students need to examine how and why changes have occurred.

#### *2 Historical Understanding*

United States government and politics illustrate recurring themes. To understand the relevance of these themes today, students must analyze them and draw conclusions about them.

#### *3. Critical Thinking*

Political Science as a discipline requires the implementation of the skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking. These lessons will provide practice and application leading toward mastery in each of these skill areas as an integral part of learning the lesson content.

### **Concepts and Skills, from the College Board.**

#### **Unit I: Dilemmas of Democracy**

The differences between liberals and conservatives have changed over time. Discuss the nature of these changes.

Equality is a complex concept. Describe the various meanings of this concept and the concerns usually associated with it.

The United States has a capitalist economic system. Is such a system a necessary condition for democracy? To what extent does the basic mix of freedom, order, and equality in the United States contribute to the operation of a capitalist system?

The United States is becoming far more diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, and lifestyle. What significance does this have for American democracy—in particular, for the balance between majoritarian and pluralist elements in our system?

There are several different models of democracy, including direct, representative, majoritarian, and pluralist. Discuss the role of popular participation in each of them. In which model(s) is participation most crucial for the practice of democracy?

The United States has long regarded helping countries to democratize as a major responsibility and has even applied pressure to encourage some countries to move toward a democratic form of government. Is this appropriate for a democratic nation to do to another nation? Discuss the reasons why it is or is not appropriate, and present an argument supporting one position.

“The United States is really an elitist system, and democracy just a sham.” Present the major arguments for and against this proposition, then draw your own conclusions.

Discuss the meaning and function of procedural democracy. Does the creation of democratic procedures guarantee substantive democracy?

Summarize the major points from the California election example and specifically illustrate how this example fits the definitions of two theories, types of democracy or models studied.

## **Unit II: Foundations of American Government**

Compare the Virginia and New Jersey plans presented at the Constitutional Convention. How do these plans reflect the political divisions of that period? How would our nation have been different if either plan had been adopted unchanged?

Describe the formal methods and informal processes by which the Constitution can be amended or adapted to changing conditions and circumstances.

The Constitution is filled with provisions like separation of powers and checks and balances. Do these provisions now serve to hinder the effective functioning of government by making it too complex and unwieldy? What reforms would you suggest?

Discuss the origins of the Bill of Rights and the major arguments for and against these provisions. With two hundred years of hindsight, who do you think was right? How would our history have been different without the Bill of Rights?

How did the Constitutional Convention handle the issue of slavery? What were the reasons for the compromises reached on this question? Was this outcome consistent with the underlying values of the Constitution and/or the Declaration of Independence?

Explain the application of the Voting Rights Act to federalism.

The courts have played a critical role in determining the legitimate scope of various levels of government. Discuss how the judiciary has helped to define federalism at various points in time.

Examine the role of federal mandates in creating uniform policies among the states. Discuss the methods the federal government may use to obtain compliance with the laws it wishes to see enacted, and evaluate the implications of these methods for federalism.

Summarize the use of grants to facilitate federal control over state's rights, including the drunk driving example or the "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

Conservatives generally support a return of power and responsibility to the states. Liberals wish to maintain the strong role of the national government. Write an essay in which you present and defend both the liberal and the conservative analyses of American federalism.

## **Unit III: Linking People with Government**

The majoritarian and pluralist models of democracy differ greatly in their assumptions about the role of public opinion in democratic government. What are those differences? Which model of democracy is correct in its assumptions about public opinion?

The paths to political awareness differ among individuals, but most people are exposed to the same agents of political socialization. What are those agents and links that exist between people's social and economic backgrounds and political values? How do they help to shape political knowledge and values?

In other Western democratic countries, the print media are privately owned but the broadcast media usually are not. In the United States, however, there is private ownership of both print and broadcast media. What consequences does private ownership have for the news operations of mass media in America?

Argue in three specific points the merits of private ownership of the media.

Although freedom of the press is highly prized in the United States, the mass media have not been completely free of government regulation. In what ways has government regulated the media? What differences have existed between the broadcast and print media in terms of regulation? Why have the two kinds of media been treated differently by the government? What are some of the implications of the relaxation of this regulation?

Progressivism was a philosophy of political reform that trusted the goodness and wisdom of the individual citizen and distrusted special interests and political institutions. What were some of the "direct democracy" causes championed by the Progressive movement? Have these mechanisms for direct participation in government had their intended effect?

Identify five factors that have contributed to the weakening or decline of political parties.

Briefly summarize the data on negative advertising and campaigning presented in the chapter. Do you find the trend toward simplistic, negative campaigning disturbing, or do you believe that "all's fair in love, war, and politics"? What reforms (if any) should be made to upgrade the quality of presidential campaigns?

Is the American method of campaigning and electing officials a rational or efficient method of choosing leaders? Justify your answer by discussing the stages of an electoral campaign, the consequences of the American system of nomination and election, and any reforms that you think could improve the process

Analyze in three key points the consequences of political parties not being central to elections in the U.S. Should this be reformed?

What is the electoral college, why was it created, and how does it work? Provide three arguments in support of electing a president by the electoral method rather than by popular vote.

Alexis de Tocqueville suggested that the ease with which Americans form organizations reflects a strong democratic culture. Madison, however, warned of the dangers of "factions" in American society. Who was right? Are interest groups a threat to the political system, or do they contribute to its proper functioning?

How does the debate over interest groups and PACs reflect the underlying tension between freedom and equality?

How could interest groups be reformed to make them less hostile to the principles of majoritarian democracy? What would be lost by such reforms?

## **Unit IV: American Political Institutions**

Presidential powers are quite broad. Discuss the powers that the president can exercise, through both constitutional and extra constitutional authority. How have presidents gained so much power beyond what is specifically granted in the Constitution?

Discuss the way in which attitudes about the size and function of the bureaucracy are somewhat paradoxical and reflect the tension between majoritarianism and pluralism.

Discuss the process by which judges are selected for the federal judiciary, citing an example. Who are the important actors? What qualities do they look for in nominees to the bench? To what extent should the court makeup resemble the general public?

How should we evaluate the role of the courts as policymakers in a democratic government? What would the majoritarian model suggest? How would the pluralist model address this issue?

Some observers of the Supreme Court argue that the Court should play a restrained role in policymaking, whereas others support judicial activism. What arguments have been raised by those encouraging judicial restraint? How would those in favor of judicial activism respond?

## **Unit V: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**

Although the First Amendment holds that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,” exceptions to the protection of free speech have been made. What are those exceptions? Why have these categories of “speech” and “press” been excluded from constitutional protection?

The safeguards embodied in the Fourth through Eighth amendments specify how government must behave in criminal proceedings. How has the application of these amendments as limits on the states reshaped American criminal justice in the last 30 years?

The Constitution does not specifically guarantee a right to privacy, yet in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) the Supreme Court acknowledged that a zone of privacy does exist. Where did the justices “find” this right to privacy? How has the extension of the right to privacy been problematic for the Court and controversial for the rest of the political system?

Discuss the ways in which the privacy cases illustrate the conflict between freedom and order, including recent decisions.

The meaning of civil rights has been shaped, to a significant degree, by the interpretations of the Supreme Court. Discuss the ways in which the Court’s decisions have advanced—or restricted—the development of civil rights during the course of American history.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) extended protection to more than 40 million Americans. Discuss the roots of the disabled rights movement and describe the protection the disabled gained under the 1990 act.

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments granted full citizenship rights to African Americans. Southern states, however, refused to honor these amendments. Describe the legal and illegal methods by which African-Americans were repressed.

What is affirmative action? Is it a viable way to ensure equality? How does the debate over affirmative action reflect a clash between freedom and equality?

Most accounts of the civil rights movement focus on the struggle of African-Americans for social and economic equality. However, at least four other groups—Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, disabled Americans, and homosexual Americans—have experienced a similar struggle. Write an essay exploring the efforts of these groups to gain acceptance and opportunity in America. Compare and contrast these movements with the movement for civil rights for African-Americans.

### **Unit VI: Public Policy**

Evaluate issue networks in terms of both their efficiency and their democratic responsiveness. Does the role of issue networks in policymaking reflect a pluralist or a majoritarian view of government? Do you regard this response as a positive or a negative development?

What is meant by *fragmentation*? How does fragmented government affect the creation and implementation of public policy?

What is implementation, and why should political scientists study it? What steps can Congress take to ensure effective implementation of a given policy?

Does the current U.S. system of decentralized policymaking, with its heavy reliance on private sector organizations, further freedom, order, and equality? Why or why not?

Nonprofits now play a substantial role in the policymaking process. What are nonprofits, and why have they become important policy actors?

### **Major Evaluation Strategies:**

Name of Assessment	Type of Assessment		Common Goals Assessed	Standards Assessed	Other Objectives Assessed
	Test	Performance Assessment			
CRT tests for Challenge of Democracy (20)	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	1, 2, 3,	MA Frameworks :1– 9, 12, 14 - 28	See course overview.
Advanced Placement Tests	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	1, 2, 3		AP
Campaign Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	1, 2, 3		
AP Open Response Evaluations	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	1, 2, 3		AP
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			

