

HIST 211, United States History to 1877, not only explores the drafting and ratification of the Constitution but it weaves into the discussion the evolution of political theory from European thinkers such as Locke and the influence of the Enlightenment on preparing the stage for the creation of a republican form of government in North America. Students who take 211 will learn that the Declaration of Independence was not simply a flourish of prose by Thomas Jefferson, but the articulation of principles developed by “enlightened” European theorists to justify the revolution and later to inform the delegates as they met in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation. Students will understand, as did the Founders, that the Articles of Confederation were fatally flawed and that the delegates meeting in Philadelphia determined to write an entirely new Constitution. Students will study the document produced by the Founders, reading each Article to understand the basic design of the three branches and how they were placed in tension with one another to provide balance and accountability (Federalist 10). Students will further learn that the brevity of the document left it open to interpretation and that some, like Jefferson, read it strictly, and others, like Hamilton read it loosely. Students will see the Necessary and Proper Clause and the Commerce Clause as examples of Constitutional interpretation and how Congress throughout the decades following ratification used the clauses to broaden the power of the national government. Students will understand the nature of federalism as a system of states retaining autonomy within a republic with a much stronger central government than under the Articles of Confederation. Through the course students will note that Federalism ebbed as the central government’s power developed and that of the states diminished. While reading the Bill of Rights, students will not only see their basic rights and liberties preserved, but also that there is a safeguard for the preservation the rights of the states and the people in Amendment X. Students will also understand the delegates’ need to find compromise between the interest of the larger states and those of the smaller states, a compromise that yielded a bicameral legislature to protect the interests of the small states while giving fair representation to the large states. Although students note that the word slaves does not appear in the document, they understand that it is, in fact, in Article I, section 2 as “other persons.” Students will understand that for apportionment of representatives and taxes the Founders issued the Three Fifths Compromise, permitting slave states to count only three of every five slaves. Students will further understand that any “public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings” must be accepted as valid across state lines under the Full Faith and Credit Clause. Students will further appreciate that Article IV, section 2 also provides for a seamless republic whereby “The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all Privileges and Immunities of Citizens in the several States.” Students will understand that Publius (James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay) explained the “intent” of the Constitution in The Federalist Papers, a series of essays that continues to provide excellent commentary on the Constitution. Although many of the essays may be discussed, students will pay particular attention to #10 and #51 to understand the nature of factions and the incumbent difficulties (10) as well as the rationale for checks and balances in the national government (51). Students will understand the “living” nature of the Constitution by examining Supreme Court rulings in cases such as Marbury v Madison (1803) that established judicial review and McCulloch v Maryland (1819) that further demonstrated the authority of the national government. History 211 draws relevance to the lives of our students exposing them to the concepts of impeachment and the Electoral College. Students will understand the rationale behind both and how they work. Students will further understand the importance of the amending feature of the Constitution and learn that Amendment XII revised the process of the Electoral College and that the Civil War Amendments (XIII, XIV, and V) completely transformed the republic by freeing the “other persons”, making them citizens of

the United States by virtue of birth, and extending to them their political rights respectively, all advancing the ideal of equality articulated in the Declaration of Independence.

HIST 212, United States History since 1877, establishes a platform for reflection on the Constitution and its evolution between the late decades of the 19th century and the present day. It does this by placing the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and subsequent amendments in the context of Enlightenment thought in which they were conceived, especially Lockean thought that provided many of the foundational principles upon which those documents were based. To set the stage for the post-Reconstruction period, History 212 places special emphasis on Amendments XIII, IV, and V that made slavery unconstitutional, neutralized the 3/5 Compromise installed in the Constitution at the time of its conception, and reinforced the principle that “all men are created equal” as articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Routine reflections on the Constitution naturally occur in 212 as important Supreme Court cases are discussed that involve questions of original intent--questions that can only be understood with reference to relevant excerpts from The Federalist Papers. Among these are #10 and #51. Essential Supreme Court decisions that expand students’ understanding of the Constitution include such cases as Plessy v Ferguson (1896), Northern Securities Co. v United States (1904), Standard Oil of New Jersey v United States (1911), Korematsu v. United States (1946), Brown v Board of Education (1954), Baker v Carr (1964), and Roe v Wade (1973). Examination of these cases and others require students to revisit the foundational concepts of the Founders in their effort to move the nation from the constraints of the Articles of Confederation to a Constitution that made possible the evolution of federal power and authority. Students will understand that the pressures inherent in the industrializing, modernizing world of twentieth-century America prompted an expansion of federal power that drew its justification, in part, from the Commerce Clause and the Necessary and Proper Clause, while deriving its centralized authority over local and state jurisdictions from the Supremacy Clause. Students will appreciate that the pace of this expansion increased most notably under Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, but drew its precedent from the establishment of the Interstate Commerce Commission and Sherman Anti-trust Act of the late nineteenth century. Despite the expansion of the power of the national government, students will understand that the United States maintains a character of federalism and that the Full Faith and Credit clause of the Constitution insures that all states respect the laws and judicial decisions of each state. Students in 212 have ample opportunity to appreciate the importance of this clause as they explore controversies ranging from gun control laws to same sex marriage. Students will understand further that the Founders put in place a process of impeachment by which the executive branch might be held in check, but only under extreme circumstances and with the participation of both of the other branches. Finally, students will understand that the Founders established a safeguard from what Alexis de Tocqueville described as “the tyranny of the majority” through the presidential election process referred to as the Electoral College.