

**IS AMERICA EXCEPTIONAL?
ADVANCED INSTITUTE, SPRING 2013
Instructor: William Kristol
Washington, DC**

“American Exceptionalism,” once a term debated by academics, has entered political discourse. What does or could the term mean? Isn’t America based on universal principles? So how can it be exceptional? If it’s not (or if it is), what are the implications of so many Americans believing it is? This seminar will feature William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*.

In addition to completing reading assignments, students are expected to write one 500- to 750-word essay for the course. Each day, several students will submit an essay in response to one of the discussion questions listed on the syllabus. The essays will be shared and used to begin the seminar.

SYLLABUS

Session 1 — Wednesday, March 27, 2013

Readings:

- [Declaration of Independence](#)
- [Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Roger Weightman, June 24, 1826](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln, Speech on the Dred Scott Decision, June 26, 1857](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln, Letter to Henry L. Pierce and others, April 6, 1859](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863](#)
- [Abraham Lincoln, Speech to the 166th Ohio Regiment, August 22, 1864](#)

Discussion Question: How can the American experiment in self-government be at once exceptional and universal?

Session 2 — Wednesday, April 3, 2013

Readings:

- Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist*, Nos. 1, 2, 6, 10, 37, 39, 49, 51, 68, 70

Discussion Question: How can America be exceptional if the Constitution is based on unexceptional realities of politics?

Session 3 — Wednesday, April 10, 2013

Readings:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume One, Introduction; Volume Two, Parts Two and Four

Discussion Question: Is America exceptional or is America merely a canvass on which democratic forces will work themselves out?

Session 4 — Wednesday, April 17, 2013

Readings:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume Two, Part Three, Chapter 18, “On Honor in the United States and in Democratic Societies”
- Robert Warshow, “The Westerner”
- Robert Warshow, “The Gangster as Tragic Hero”
- Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”

Discussion Question: Can America be exceptional if Americans aren’t?

Session 5 — Wednesday, April 24, 2013

Readings:

- Daniel Bell, “The End of American Exceptionalism,” *The Public Interest*, Fall 1975
- David Gelernter, “Americanism—and its Enemies,” *Commentary*, January 2005
- Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, Chapter One

Discussion Question: Where stands American exceptionalism today?