The American election of 2016, more than any other in recent memory, has exposed the deep divisions in this country over who we are, what our country is about, what its major problems are, and what its elected officials should (or should not) do about these problems. The divisions are now so deep that what was taken for granted not long ago is now hotly contested. Everything seems up for grabs. For thoughtful Americans, a good way to address our divisions has always been to return to our founding fathers, the Constitution they designed, and the essays they wrote to explain and defend its provisions. Most still agree that these documents describe who we are and how we should solve our problems, because more than any nation in the history of the world ours has been the product of philosophical ideas.

What one finds when one returns to the founders, however, is that they themselves developed these ideas by returning to the writings of ancient Greece and Rome. This return was easy for them, as they were all schooled thoroughly in the Greek and Latin classics. In this course, we shall read some of their most important writings alongside a sample of the texts that were most influential on their political thinking. From the founders, we shall read the Declaration of Independence, the articles of the US Constitution, the amendments to it (especially the Bill of Rights), and selections from both The Federalist Papers and The Anti-Federalist Papers. From antiquity, we shall read excerpts from the following authors: Herodotus, Protagoras, Thucydides, Antiphon, Critias, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Livy, Cicero, Sallust, Seneca, Plutarch, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Our guide throughout will be the pre-eminent scholar of this question, Carl J. Richards. (One of our required texts will be his Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers, 2008).