

****2011 Students: NOTE that I include last fall's documents to provide a general sense of the themes we will explore together this spring. Materials here are not a finalized agenda for Splash 2011 and should not be treated as such. Please contact me with any questions this may prompt.**

November 2010

Good morning Splash students,

My name is Albert Tomasso, and I am THRILLED to welcome you to one of my four Stanford Splash seminars in American Political Challenges and Opportunities! As an undergraduate student with focuses in history, public policy, and ethics in society, this is a subject that naturally lies at the heart of my personal interests and convictions. Yet given the perils of the 21st century I believe emphatically that *none* of us can afford to sit around waiting on the world to change – and that the impetus for action *must* come from each and every one of you. Yes, YOU, and hopefully you will enter this seminar with faith in your own capacity for leadership and courage as we set out to revitalize a people and rebuild a nation.

With that in mind, I invite (and implore!) you to read and consider three newspaper editorials from the New York Times that will get us thinking about the notions of American greatness and the particular challenges to our political system. The first is rather self-explanatory, entitled "National Greatness Agenda," by David Brooks, a columnist for the NYT and a former senior editor of *The Weekly Standard*. The second is a piece by David Kennedy, a renowned history professor here at Stanford, with the heading "Throwing the Bums Out for 140 Years," a narrative of the historical fluctuation between eras of volatility and gridlock on Capitol Hill (this one included) and alternative periods of epic leaders with transformational agendas (from the Founding Fathers to Roosevelt and Reagan). Both of these articles appeared serendipitously in the last week, but the last one I include struck me two years ago in the hype before the 2008 election. Written by Thomas Freidman, the Pulitzer Prizewinning foreign affairs columnist for the NYT, "Who Will Tell the People?" reminds us of the tough decisions that we knew lay ahead – and thus far have largely chosen to ignore. But do not lose hope, for our time is only just beginning, and this weekend we will prove that the ideal of America is as alive and fervent as ever!

David Brooks, "National Greatness Agenda"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/12/opinion/12brooks.html?hp>

David M. Kennedy, "Throwing the Bums Out for 140 Years"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/opinion/07kennedy.html?scp=1&sq=david%20kennedy&st=cse>

Thomas L. Friedman, "Who Will Tell the People?"

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/opinion/04friedman.html?ref=thomasfriedman>

The links can also be seen as attached PDFs.

As the class description indicated, this is neither a lecture nor a PowerPoint presentation but rather a vigorous discussion among peers. PLEASE bring your opinions, questions, and any additional sources you would like to reference. I positively encourage input from all across the political spectrum, as this is exactly the kind of uninhibited (and radically creative!) dialogue our country so desperately needs on the national level. However, I will also moderate to keep our discussion respectful and productive, and trust you to do the same. Feel free to email me with any inquiries, concerns or preferences for discussion topics prior to this weekend.

With that said I wish you all a delightful [Friday](#) and most eagerly await your arrival to Stanford University!

Cheers!

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