

Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics

PLAP 490H
Honors Program: Seminar in American Politics
Wednesday: 3:30-6
Office: Cabell Hall 232
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Spring 2007
Cabell 225
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Course Description:

This course is designed to provide students in the political science honors program with an intensive examination of American political life. Although the course will cover a wide assortment of the classic and prominent contemporary political science approaches to the study of American politics and government, its special concern is to probe the deep philosophical and historical roots of contemporary developments in the United States.

Course Requirements:

The main course requirement is very active participation in the weekly seminar. You are required to attend all class sessions; read each book or assigned portion thereof, as well as supplementary required materials, prior to class and submit an essay on the reading. Your essays should answer one of the questions listed on the syllabus. Much of our class discussion will revolve around your essays. Essays are due on Tuesday at 2:00 p.m., in Cabell Hall 232, the day before we discuss the reading in question. You may omit any two essays during the course of the semester. Essays should be no more than 6 double-spaced pages.

Course Materials:

Newcomb Hall Bookstore has been asked to stock the following books. Readings otherwise assigned have been placed on the class toolkit site. Asterisked materials are available on toolkit.

Required Texts:

Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Penguin Classics, 1982).

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New American Library, 1999), editor, Charles Kessler.

Herbert Storing, editor, *The Anti-Federalist* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Merrill D. Peterson, editor, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (Penguin, 1977).

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop.

David Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of a Genre*, Yale University Press, 2004.

Martha Derthick, editor, *Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism* (Brookings Institution, 2001).

Julian Zelizer, *Taxing America: Wilber D. Mills, Congress and the State, 1945-1975* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

Alexander Bickel, *The Least Dangerous Branch*, 2nd edition (Yale University Press, 1990).

Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Morris Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd edition (Longman, 2005).

Recommended Text: Those of you who have not had a lot of exposure to American Government might find helpful the following textbook, which also is available at the bookstore: Marc Landy and Sidney M. Milkis, *American Government: Balancing Democracy and Rights* (McGraw Hill, 2003).

I. Introduction: January 17

II. The Revolution: January 24

Thomas Paine, Common Sense.

Merrill Peterson, **The Portable Thomas Jefferson**, 3-21,235-241.

**Bernard Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution," in Stephen Kurtz and James Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution*.

**Gordon Wood, "Democracy and the Constitution," in Robert A. Goldwin and William A. Schambra, eds., *How Democratic Is the Constitution?*

Discussion questions:

1. What similarities and differences do you see between Paine and Jefferson with respect to their views on American Independence?
2. Ironically, the *Declaration of Independence* that proclaimed the equality of all men was drafted by a man who owned slaves. What position does Jefferson take on slavery in his draft of the *Declaration*? The final form of the document does not include any explicit reference to slavery: Does this prohibit it from becoming an important weapon against forced servitude in the United States?
3. According to Bernard Bailyn, "the American Revolution not only created the American political nation but molded permanent characteristics of the culture that would develop within it." What characteristics did the Revolution create that would endure? Wood suggests that certain features of the Revolution did not last – what are these? Do Bailyn and Wood have fundamentally different interpretations of the revolution and its aftermath? Or can their views be reconciled?

III. The Founding: January 31, February 7

Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, nos. 1, 6, 9, 10, 14-15, 25, 35, 39, 41, 44, 46, 48-49, 51,53, 55, 57, 62-63, 68-73, 78, 84.

Herbert Storing, ed., *The Antifederalist*, pp. 32-65, 162-173, 201-221, 261-272,295-315.

Merrill Peterson, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 124-128, 133-144, 162-166, 185-199, 206-217, 251-253, 390-412, 415-418, 423-440, 444-451, 533-547, 583-586.

**Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Democracy and Citizen: Community, Dignity, and the Crisis of Contemporary Politics," in *How Democratic is the Constitution?* (American Enterprise Institute, 1980).

**James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 2.

Discussion Questions:

1. In *Federalist* 10, James Madison makes an essential distinction between "pure" democracy and a "republic"? What are the most important differences between these forms of government? As a "republic," is the Constitution appropriately characterized as a representative democracy? Does the Constitution embody, or depart from, the "natural rights theory" defended in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and the Declaration of Independence?
2. Does the Constitution rely on a virtuous citizenry? Or does the complex system of checks and balances compensate for the "defect of better motives"? What is the appropriate relationship between government and society in a republic?

3. "There is an idea that is not without its advocates," Alexander Hamilton writes in *Federalist* 70, "that a vigorous executive is inconsistent with the genius of republican government." How does Hamilton argue against the prevailing view, rooted in theory and history, that popular rule was incompatible with a unified and energetic executive power? How do the architects of the Constitution conceive of the relationship between the President and the other two branches of government (legislature and judiciary)? What is the appropriate relationship between the president and the citizenry?

4. Why did the Anti-Federalists oppose the Constitution? Was there opposition to the so-called "Federalists" based on fundamental principles? Or, did the Federalists and Anti-Federalists agree on ends, dividing only on the appropriate means to achieve commonly understood purposes?

5. "Consolidation," the Pennsylvania Anti-Federalists observed about the Constitution, "pervades the whole document." Did the Constitution conceive of a centralized government that would destroy the independence of the State governments? Why did the Anti-Federalists champion state and local governments?

6. Alexis de Tocqueville praised Thomas Jefferson as 'the greatest democrat ever to spring from American democracy.' In contrast, the historian Richard Hofstadter claims that the view of Jefferson as a "militant crusading democrat...[has] been overdramatized." What are Jefferson's views on democracy? Do his views on the original Constitution shed any light on his understanding of popular rule?

7. What were Jefferson's views on slavery? Did he anticipate that the principles of the Declaration of Independence would eventually be used to challenge this institution? What thoughts did Jefferson have about future relations among the three races of America (White, Blacks, and Native Americans)?

IV. Democracy in America: February 14, 21

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: Volume I, Author's introduction, Part I, Chapters 2-5; Part II, Chapters 2, 4, 7-10, Conclusion; Volume II, Part II, Chapters 1-2, 4-5, 7-14, 20; Part III, Chapters 18, 21; Part IV, Chapters 3-4, 6-8.

Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1955), Chapter 1, 10-11, (Xerox Copies Available in Cabell 232).

** Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 87, No.3 (September 1993): 549-566.

** James W. Ceaser, *Nature and History in American Political Development* (Harvard University Press, 2006)., Chapter 1.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Tocqueville, what are the "laws of honor" in the United States? Do these laws confirm or defy Publius's hope for republican government?
2. "Although the Americans are constantly modifying or repealing some of their laws," wrote Tocqueville, "they are far from showing any revolutionary passions." Why did Tocqueville think that America was exempt from the revolutionary turmoil of Europe? If not revolution, what is the greatest threat to American democracy? Does this threat correspond to the conscious fear that the architects of the Constitution expressed about popular rule?
3. "Self-interest, properly understood," Tocqueville observes, is "at the root of all actions" in America. Why is this principle "universally accepted"? What role does it play in maintaining freedom? How is this doctrine applied to religion?
4. According to Hartz and Smith, how prescient was Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy? Does Ceaser's understanding of history conform to Tocqueville's emphasis on "mores" as the foundation of American democracy?

V. Parties and Elections: February 28

**V.O. Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics*, vol. 17 (1955), 3-18.

**Walter Dean Burnham, "Party Systems and the Political Process," in Walter Dean Burnham and William Nisbet Chambers, *The American Party Systems: Stages of Development* (Oxford University Press, 1967).

** Burnham, "Critical Realignment: Dead or Alive?" in Byron Shafer, ed., *The End of Realignment?* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*, entire.

** James Ceaser and Andrew Busch, *Red Over Blue: The 2004 Elections and American Politics*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, Chapter 2.

** Steven E. Schier, "Frustrated Ambitions: The George W. Bush Presidency and the 2006 Elections," *The Forum*, 2006, vol. 4, issue 3, Article 1.

** John J. Pitney, Jr., "The Midterm: What Political Science Should Ask Now," *The Forum*, 2006, vol. 4, issue 3, Article 2

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Walter Dean Burnham, “the critical realignment may well be regarded as America’s surrogate for revolution.” What are the characteristics of partisan realignments that make them near revolutionary experiences? As the “mainsprings of American politics,” have partisan realignments been “constitutional moments,” in Bruce Ackerman’s phrase, which have transformed the institutions and practices of constitutional government in the United States?
2. Why does David Mayhew argue that realignment theory inadequately accounts for the development of American democracy? What changes in politics and government during the 20th century make another partisan realignment unlikely? Does Mayhew offer an alternative framework for understanding American political parties and elections?
3. What can political science contribute to our knowledge of the 2004 presidential election and the 2006 congressional elections?

VI. Federalism: March 14

Derthick, entire

** Derthick, “American Federalism,” Manuscript, July 2006.

** Sidney M. Milkis, and Jesse Rhodes, “George W. Bush, the Party System, and American Federalism.” *Publius*, special issue on federalism during the Bush Administration, forthcoming.

Discussion Questions:

1. The historian Herman Belz has suggested that the founding generation held two rival conceptions of freedom: the liberty of self-governing communities, which have an obligation to make citizens virtuous and on which they depend for happiness and well-being; and freedom resting on natural rights, which asserts the primacy of individual liberty over community consensus. Have these two concepts of freedom affected the development of federalism in the United States?
2. “The federal system of the United States,” Professor Derthick writes, “was constructed in the eighteenth century from the bottom up, on a foundation of thirteen British colonies. Today office-holders in the national government increasingly attempt, contrary to history and constitutional tradition, to direct it from the top down.” How has the expansion of national administration affected the system of federalism? Do states and localities still retain significant independent governing authority? What are the most important factors at work in contemporary American political life that sustain government decentralization?
3. Has federalism been affected by the development of the party system? Has George W. Bush’s leadership of the Republican party had an important effect on the party system and intergovernmental relations?

VII. The Presidency: March 21

Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*, Chapters 1-3, 4 (skim), 5, 6 (skim), 7-8, Afterward.

** Stephen Skowronek, "Leadership by Definition: First Term Reflections on George W. Bush's Political Stance," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December 2005): 817-831.

** Polity Forum, *The Politics Presidents Make*: Sidney M. Milkis, Peri Arnold, James Sterling Young, and Stephen Skowronek, *Polity*, vol. 28 (Spring, 1995): 483-534.

Discussion Questions:

1. Skowronek argues that certain presidents in history -- Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Reagan -- have played the principal part in "reconstructing" the American constitutional order. Have presidents been so central to constitutional development in American politics? What role have political parties, Congress, and the Courts played in these transformations?
2. "The presidency," Skowronek writes, "is a governing institution inherently hostile to inherited governing arrangements" (p. 20). How does this "core paradox" of the executive office affect presidential leadership? Do all presidents strive to attain their place in history? Why do so few presidents succeed in disrupting the governing institutions they inherit?
3. The conclusion of *The Politics Presidents Make* identifies forces that are leading to "the waning of political time." What does Skowronek mean by this? Did Bill Clinton's "third way" politics confirm or refute Skowronek's analysis of contemporary presidential politics? Has the presidency of George W. Bush encouraged Skowronek to reconsider contemporary developments in American politics?

VII. Congress: March 28

Zelizer, Introduction, Chapters 4-11.

** Eric Schickler, "Institutional Developments of Congress," in Paul J. Quirk and Sarah A. Binder, *The Legislative Branch* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get it Back on Track* (Oxford University Press, 2006), Chapters 4 and 5. (Xerox Copies Available in Cabell Hall 232).

Discussion Questions:

1. *Taxing America*, Zelizer argues, sheds light on how “the American state achieved what it did between 1945 and 1975, despite the nation’s anti-statist culture and despite its fragmented political institutions.” (6). Did programmatic expansion during this period take place in spite of America’s cultural and constitutional traditions? Or did the politics and policies of post-War America reveal that the New Deal and World War II had redefined the principles and remade the institutions of political life in the United States? How did Congress contribute to “state-building” during this period?

2. How did reforms carried out during the 1970s affect Congress? Did the reforms, as their proponents claimed, make Congress a more democratic institution? How did these reforms affect Congress’s relationship to the “American state”? How did they affect the role of political parties in Congress?

3. How has the growing party polarization of the past twenty-five years affected the constitutional system of checks and balances? Are Mann and Ornstein correct in claiming that Congress has forfeited its constitutional responsibilities? Are the 2006 elections, and the shift from Republican to Democratic control, likely to have an important influence on Congress?

VIII. The Courts: April 4

Bickel, entire

** Doris Marie Provine, “Judicial Activism and American Democracy,” in Kermit L. Hall and Kevin T. McGuire, editors, *The Judicial Branch*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

** Melnick, “Congress and the Supreme Court in a Partisan Era: Lessons from the Past Twelve Years,” Prepared for presentation at the conference on “Courts and the Making of Social Policy” Oxford, June, 2006.

Discussion Questions:

1. In his classic defense of judicial review, Alexander Hamilton argued that the courts were the “least dangerous [branch] to the political rights of the Constitution.” Critically evaluate Hamilton’s defense of an independent judiciary. Give examples that shed light on whether the courts threaten or are an important bulwark of representative government in the United States?

2. A distinctive feature, and perhaps the most distinctive feature, of American politics is the power accorded an independent judiciary. How has the court acquired such power? Does its authority rest in the Constitution or public opinion?

3. The past two decades have witnessed a renewal and transformation of the American party system. How has the emergence of national programmatic parties affected the

Judiciary? Did the political circumstances of the first six years of the Bush presidency -- unified “party government”, the centralization of power in Congress, and the polarization of elite opinion – consolidate a development that began with Ronald Reagan: the formation of “conservative” Judiciary? Or is the Judiciary likely to reflect, as it has for the past twenty-five years, a fractious nation that favors neither the Democrats or Republicans decisively?

VIII. Critical Developments in American Politics

A. The Rise of the Administrative State: April 11

Milkis, 1-6, 8-10, Conclusion.

** Martin Shefter, “War, Trade, and U.S. Party Politics,” in Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade*, Princeton University Press, 2002.

** Sidney M. Milkis, “Executive Power and American Democracy: The Dilemmas of Scale in American Democracy,” in Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson, eds., *The Executive Branch* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

** Jacob S. Hacker, “Privatizing Risk Without Privatizing the Welfare State: The Hidden Politics of Social Retrenchment in the United States,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 98, No. 2 (May): 243-260.

Discussion Questions:

1. Franklin Roosevelt's leadership was the principal ingredient in a full-scale partisan realignment. Did this transformation revitalize the party system, which had been weakened by Progressive era reforms? Or did the New Deal lead to the consolidation of an executive establishment that weakened political parties?
2. What does the New Deal and its legacy for the United States tell us about Louis Hartz’s idea of a liberal tradition dominating political culture in the United States? Does the development of the welfare and national security states suggest that liberalism competes with alternative culture traditions? Or, does the development of the American national state confirm the power of liberalism in America, that is, suggest that debates over social policy are less about whether to have a liberal regime, and more about what kind of liberalism to have?
3. What does Jacob Hacker mean by “social retrenchment”? Do the changes he identifies in social welfare policy and programs challenge or confirm the thesis of *The President and the Parties* that the New Deal makes unlikely a new partisan realignment in American politics?

B. The Crisis of Citizenship: April 18

Putnam, Chapters 1, 3, 15, 23, 24.

** Suzanne Mettler, "The Creation of the G.I. Bill of Rights of 1944: Melding Social and Participatory Citizenship Ideals," *Journal of Policy History* - Volume 17, Number 4, 2005, pp. 345-374.

** Theda Skocpol, Chapter 13, "Advocacy Without Members: The Recent Transformation of Civic Life," in Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, Brooking Institutions, 1999.

Discussion Questions:

1. Robert Putnam argues that a crisis of citizenship exists in contemporary American politics. What are the sources of this crisis? What political reforms might ameliorate it?
2. Putnam wrote at the time that *Bowling Alone* was published that restoring civic engagement in America "would be eased by a palpable national crisis, like war or depression or natural disaster, but for better and for worse, America at the dawn of the new century faces no such galvanizing crisis (402)." Of course, America did face such a crisis after September 11, 2001. Did the horrific events of that day, and the War Against Terror that followed, mark a galvanizing episode that strengthened civic engagement? Or was it merely a brief pause during which Americans looked up for a moment and then returned to their solitary pursuits?
3. What light do Skocpol and Mettler shed on contemporary developments in American democracy? Does their work complement or challenge in important ways Putnam's study of social capital?

C. Culture War: April 25

Fiorina, entire

** Hugh Heclo, "Sixties Civics," in Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome Mileur, editors, *The Great Society and The High Tide of Liberalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

** Sidney M. Milkis, "George W. Bush and the 'New' Party System," *CLIO*, Fall/Winter 2005-2006, 1; 44-47; Milkis, "Reflections on a Polarized America: Partisan Rancor and Development in the United States, Spring/Summer 2006, 1; 44-47.

Discussion Questions

1. On what grounds does Morris Fiorina dispute the conventional wisdom that America is polarized? What are the strongest arguments he brings to bear to support the view that

America is traumatized by a culture war? What are the largest holes in his claim that Americans are not divided by fundamental political issues?

2. Does Hugh Hecló's essay on the Sixties support or refute Fiorina's claims about the absence of a culture war in the United States? Did the Sixties affect only contemporary liberalism? Or were "Sixties Civics" so pervasive as to transform conservatism as well?

3. Which political issues buttress the "vital center" in American politics? Which issues tend to have a polarizing effect on the country? Is partisan rancor a novel political development in America? Or has political polarization reared its head throughout the nation's history?