

Government 2515  
The Early Development of  
American Political Institutions and Organizations  
[1650-1860]

Harvard University  
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**Course Description:** A theoretically informed review of the development of political institutions and political organizations from the colonial period of British North America to the founding of the American constitutional order to the coming of the American Civil War. The rise of colonial and state governments, the synthesis of state constitutions and regulatory authorities, the forging of the Constitution of 1787, the emergence of the two-party system, the rise of congressional committees, the emergence of national bureaucracy [particularly in the national postal system] and the patronage regime, abolitionism and new social movements, and the creation of new statutory rights to vote will be studied using three theoretical approaches – transactions cost theory, historical institutionalism, and cultural theory.

Institutions are the formal and informal structures that shape our policy and our political experience. This course surveys the historical evolution of three American political institutions -- the party system, Congress, and the bureaucratic state.

For several reasons, I am teaching this course despite the fact that I am not anything of an expert in either the colonial period, the Founding or the early Republic. My published research on American political development to date has concerned the Reconstruction period to the New Deal, and only in as yet unpublished work on abolitionist petitions and the origins of U.S. executive bureaucracy have I ventured into antebellum politics. The first reason is that nothing like this course appears to have been taught here at Harvard (or anywhere else in graduate political science) for quite some time. So important are the developments covered here that someone ought to do it, even if that someone is as ill-equipped as your professor. A second reason is that the study of American political development properly speaking is moving away from the 1865-1945 period and either into the contemporary period (witness Paul Pierson, Jacob Hacker, Julian Zelizer and others) or to the period before (witness recent works by Laura Jensen, Charles Stewart III, John Aldrich and others).

Throughout the semester we will attempt to answer several core questions concerning American political institutions. What are institutions and how do they shape our political life? How did we get the institutions we have today -- the two party system, the congressional seniority system, interest groups, the welfare state, the regulatory state? How can we account for institutional change? And how can attention to the history of American political institutions help us to understand the dilemmas now facing the American political system?

To address these questions we will study closely important facets of the three institutions listed above. Among other things, we will ask how changing party structures led to voting realignments, we will trace the rise of the committee structures in Congress, and we will gauge the implications of patronage for the operation of the federal bureaucracy. In other words, we will study "institutions within institutions."

In discussion, we will also consider three approaches to the study of American political institutions and their evolution. The first, the *rational-choice* or *transactions-cost approach*, argues that institutions develop and change in response to changing preferences and patterns of transactions in American society at any given time, and that institutional change is driven by efficiency considerations. The second approach, the *historical institutionalist approach*, points to the fundamental impact of historical sequence and timing as a driving force in the emergence of new institutions and institutional forms (Pierson), and points also to the forceful impact of "frictions" among multiple orders (Orren and Skowronek). The final approach we will consider is a *critical-theoretical approach* which asks whether American political institutions can be seen as subordinating schemes which divide and repress people along lines of class, race and gender. In this vein, we will consider feminist, Marxist and race-centered analyses of the institutions of American politics. An important part of the course will be our cooperative assessment of the strengths and limitations of these approaches in light of the historical development of American institutions.

**Caveats: "The Many Things Left Out."** The literature on any one of the topics or issues covered below is immense. Indeed, one could easily teach entire courses on these phenomena. This survey is intended to leave social scientists – particularly those interested in "formal" politics and the public sphere – with research questions to pursue in their dissertations. As such, there are several large-scale developments in what could easily be called "political institutions" that we will not cover here. The most obvious of these is slavery. Although we consider legal and ideational changes in colonial law that facilitated the institutional reach of chattel slavery (in Edmund Morgan's famous *American Slavery, American Freedom*), and although we consider interstate slavery politics in the making of the U.S. Constitution and the early Republic, and the fall of the second party system, we do not cover the evolution and transformation of slavery in North and south over this period. That subject could again easily absorb a separate class or two, and I am simply not expert enough to discuss it here.

There are also massive transformations in law – discussed most thoroughly by Christopher Tomlins, *Law, Labor and Ideology in the Early American Republic*, and Morton Horowitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* – that we do not treat except in passing. William Novak's *The People's Welfare* – which we do read – treats some of these developments but leaves others aside.

#### Format:

After one week in which we conduct a cursory historical overview of institutional development and consider some alternative approaches to the study of institutions and institutional change, we launch into the study of developments in these three institutions over five time periods – the "colonial period, the period from the Founding to the 1800 election, 1800 to the election of Andrew Jackson (the "First Party System") and the so-called Second Party System (1828-1860). Within each period, we will spend a week or two each on the party system or electoral institutions, Congress, and the bureaucratic state. We will then consider the importance of transformations in these institutions for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and beyond.

In addition to numerous secondary readings, we will also be reading a good bit of “primary source” material, primarily from the Davis and Mintz reader. These readings are also required and it is expected that you will be prepared to discuss them in class sessions.

Requirements: *Scholars should read all scheduled materials and be prepared to discuss them in class.* For the following writing requirements, all students should be familiar with *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White. This small book will function as the standard for proper grammar and style for writing assignments in this course. Flawless grammar and correct spelling are minimum requirements for acceptable papers.

(1) Participation and Discussion Papers: Students are expected to maintain pace with class readings and to participate actively in class discussion. Each week during the semester students will submit an e-mail of 250 to 500 words, in which they will (1) advance several questions from the readings that they would like to see discussed, and (2) either (2a) assess the class readings in light of the three approaches to institutional development, or (2b) ask how contemporary American politics has been influenced by the developments studied. Participation and the papers will account for 50 percent of your grade.

(2) Final Paper: Students will write a final research paper involving independent work on a topic of their choice in American institutional development. Your performance on this effort will account for 50 percent of your grade.

Research Paper: If you are interested in government regulation of business, you may wish to study the growth of the early state railroad laws. If you were intrigued by the candidacies of Ralph Nader, Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan or Jesse Ventura, you may wish to study the third-party movements among the Know-Nothings, Free Soilers and Liberty partisans of the 1840s and 1850s. If you were outraged by the Senate's treatment of Anita Hill in 1991, you may want to study the effect of party structure, electoral laws and legislative organization in excluding women from Congress, from voting, and from other forms of political life. The choice is yours, but please do seem me about this early in the semester so that I can advise a propitious start. The paper (minimum 25 pages, excluding bibliography and notes) is due exam week and will comprise 50 percent of your grade.

### Readings:

The following books will comprise the principal texts used during the quarter.

Aldrich, John. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

*The Anti-Federalist: Federal Farmer and Brutus I and VI.*

Davis, David Brion, and Steven Mintz. *The Boisterous Sea of Liberty: A Documentary History of America from Discovery through the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press). Useful as a general guide to developments during the period studied.

Hamilton, Alexander, Madison, James and Jay, John. *The Federalist Papers*, edited and with an Introduction by Clinton Rossiter.

Holt, Michael. 1987. *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (Oxford).

Foner, Eric. *Free Labor, Free Soil, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford).

John, Richard. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press).

Morgan, Edmund. *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Novak, William. 1997. *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

Orren, Karen, and Stephen Skowronek. 2004. *In Search of American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press)

Silbey, Joel. *The American Party Battle: Election Campaign Pamphlets, 1828-1876* (Volume I 1828-1854), (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

Pierson, Paul. 2004. *Politics in Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

White, Richard. 1991. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1660-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Wood, Gordon. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*.

## Course Schedule

### Legend for Symbols:

J = Available in J-STOR

P = Available in packet or will be provided

O = Optional reading

### **Theories of Institutions and Institutional Change [1 week]**

#### January 31<sup>st</sup>: Introduction: Puzzles and Models of Political Change

- North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, passim. See esp. Chapters 1, 10.
- Pierson, Paul, *Politics in Time* (Princeton), passim
- Orren and Skowronek, *In Search of American Political Development*, selections.
- P Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "Introduction," in DiMaggio and Powell, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- J Tim Buthe, "Taking Temporality Seriously: Modeling History and the Use of Narratives as Evidence," *American Political Science Review* 96 (3) (September 2002) 481-494.
- J John Padgett and Chris Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1450," *American Sociological Review* (1993).
- J Ann Swidler "[Culture in Action](#)" *American Sociological Review* (April 1986), pp. 273-86 [JSTOR].
- J Avner Greif and David Laitin, "A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change," *American Political Science Review* 98 (4) (November 2004) 633-652.

### **February 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>: Development of Political Institutions and Political Culture in Colonial North America [2 weeks]**

Morgan: *American Slavery, American Freedom*, passim

White: *The Middle Ground*, passim.

My assigning these two books obviously does something far short of justice to what you might call "the colonial period." I assign them less as comprehensive treatments and more as models of highly imaginative and transformative scholarship (this is particularly true, in my view, of Richard White's book). There are also all sorts of questions here for political historians and political scientists do conduct more research, both secondary and primary. That's one reason for assigning the whole of these two books. For other treatments, see James Brooks, *Captives & Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (2002), and Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (2001).

## February 21<sup>st</sup>: The Revolution and the Republican Moment in the States

Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*.

### Week 1:

- Chapter 1, Sections 1,2, 4, 5 (pp. 3-18, 28-43).
- Chapter 2, Sections 1-5 & 7 (pp. 46-75 & 83-91).
- Chapter 4, Sections 1-4 (pp. 127-161)
- Chapter 5, Section 1 (pp. 162-173)
- Chapter 6, Sections 1 & 2 (pp. 197-206)

Jack P. Greene “The Foundations of Political Power in the Virginia House of Burgesses 1720-1776,” *William and Mary Quarterly* XVI (1959)

Joyce Appleby, “The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology,” *Journal of American History* (1978).

Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992) 11-38.

Kloppenburg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History* 74 (1987).

Laura J. Scalia, “Constituting a People: the Role of State Constitutions in Citizen Character Formation,” online at <http://ptw.uchicago.edu/scalia98.pdf>.

Jack Rakove, Barry Weingast and Rui deFigueiredo, “Rationality, Inaccurate Mental Models, and Self-Confirming Equilibrium: A New Understanding of the American Revolution.” Manuscript, Stanford University.

### Other Readings, optional:

Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, Vintage).

Edmund Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1956], 1992).

Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967).

Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* XXV (1968).

## February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>: The Constitution and its Ratification

### February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>:

*The Federalist*

Week 1: Numbers 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 23.

Week 2: Numbers 30, 33, 35, 36, 39, 45, 51, 63, 69, 70, 78, 84, 85.

*Anti-Federalist: The Federal Farmer and Brutus I and VI*, selections.

Week 1: 108-117

Week 2: 117-122 (Brutus), 133-182 (Brutus), 229-240 (Agrippa), 295-315 (Patrick Henry).

Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*.

Week 1:

- Chapter 1, Sections 1,2, 4, 5 (pp. 3-18, 28-43).
- Chapter 2, Sections 1-5 & 7 (pp. 46-75 & 83-91).
- Chapter 4, Sections 1-4 (pp. 127-161)
- Chapter 5, Section 1 (pp. 162-173)
- Chapter 6, Sections 1 & 2 (pp. 197-206)
- Chapter 8, Sections 1 & 2 (pp. 306-19)
- Chapter 9, Sections 1-3 (pp. 344-372)
- Chapter 10, Sections 1-4 (pp. 393-413)

Week 2:

- Chapters 11-13, passim.

P Russell Hardin, "Why a Constitution?" in Grofman and Wittman, eds., *The Federalist Papers and the New Institutionalism* (New York: Agathon Press).

Rakove, *Original Meanings*, passim

William Riker, "Negative Campaigning and Voting Strategies at the Constitutional Convention," *Studies in American Political Development*, vol 3.

Optional, Other:

## **Politics of the Early Republic**

March 14<sup>th</sup>:

Aldrich, *Why Parties?*

John Aldrich and Ruth Grant. 1993. The Antifederalists, the First Congress, and the First Parties. *Journal of Politics* 55:295-326.

Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (Yale).

Theda Skocpol essay on why deTocqueville was wrong re joinership.

Keith Whittington, "Reconstructing the Federal Judiciary: The Chase Impeachment and the Constitution," *Studies in American Political Development* 9:1 (Spring 1995): 55-116.

Nolan McCarty, "Presidential Vetoes in the Early Republic," manuscript, Princeton University. [Web]

## Antebellum Economic Regulation and Developmental Policies

March 21st:

William Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), passim.

John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

John Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, "Equilibrium Impotence: Why the States and not the American National Government Financed Infrastructure Improvement in the Antebellum Era," manuscript, Stanford University.

*Studies* article on internal improvement by guy at COFHE.

## Transformations in Congress: Committees and Leadership

April 4th and April 11th:

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P Cooper, Joseph. *The Origins of the Standing Committees and the Development of the Modern House*.

P Jillson, Calvin and Rick Wilson, *Congressional Dynamics: Structure, Coordination and Choice in the First American Congress*.

J Nelson Polsby, "The Institutionalization of the House of Representatives," *American Political Science Review*

J Binder, *JOP* piece on early legislative organization.

All Stewart, Jenkins pieces on web or will be supplied:

Charles Stewart III, "Architect or Tactician? Henry Clay and the Institutional Transformation of the U.S. House of Representatives." [Web, MIT]

Stewart, "Speakership Elections and Control of the U.S. House." [Web, MIT]

Stewart, and Jeffrey Jenkins, "Order from Chaos: The Transformation of the Committee System in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1810-1822." [Web, MIT]

Stewart, and David Canon, "The Evolution of the Senate Committee System, 1789-1889." [Web, MIT]

## Patronage and the Second Party System

April 18th:

Silbey, *The American Party Battle*, Vol I, passim.

Aldrich, *Why Parties?*

Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford).

Richard Bense, *The American Ballot Box in the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2005).

John, Chapter 6, “The Wellspring of Democracy.”

Scott C. James, “Patronage and Patronage Parties in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” manuscript, University of California, Los Angeles; now published in *British Journal of Political Science* (2005).

Optional/Other:

Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893*.

Robert Remini’s multi-volume biography of Andrew Jackson (see also his biographies of Clay and Webster) are also useful if you’re looking into particulars.

## **Abolition, Reform Movements and Civic Engagement**

April 25<sup>th</sup>:

Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, passim.\*\*

Carpenter, “Mobilization by Petition: Evidence from the Abolitionists’ Congressional Campaign,” unpublished manuscript, Harvard.

John, *Spreading the News*, Chapters 5 and 7.

Theda Skocpol on why DeToqueville was wrong.

Optional:

James Brewer Stuart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, (New York: Hill and Wang).

Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery & Women’s Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

## **The Demise of the Second Party System and the Creation of the Republican Party**

May 2<sup>nd</sup>:

Required: Michael Holt, *The Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press).

William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Weingast, essay in *Analytic Narratives*.

Carpenter, response in *Journal of Social Science History*.

Optional/Other:

Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press). [Might take a semester to read, but well worth the time invested.]

**Addendum Material:** I am not teaching this material directly this year because of the Government Department's pressing needs in legislative material, and because of the graduate bureaucracy course last semester. However, there should be an opportunity to integrate this material into the course, and the readings are strongly recommended, particularly the Richard John book.

**The Early Bureaucracy, the Postal System and American Political Development**

Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), Chapters 1-4.

Richard R. John, "Governmental Institutions as Agents of Change: Rethinking American Political Development in the Early Republic, 1787-1835," *Studies in American Political Development*, 11 (Fall 1997): 347-380. [e-journals]

Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick. *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Daniel Carpenter, "The Evolution of National Bureaucracy in the United States," manuscript, Harvard University. Forthcoming in Joel Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson, eds., *The Executive Branch and American Democracy* (vol. 5 in the Institutions of American Democracy series), New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).