STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT ALBANY

POS 515  Spring 2013  Bruce Miroff
American Political Theory

SYLLABUS

This seminar in American political theory has three major objectives. First, we will examine the historical development of American political theory from the Revolution to the present. Second, we will concentrate on some of the central themes in this history: the founding debate over the size, character, and institutional structure of the republic, individualism, equality, race, gender, the problems and prospects for democracy in industrial and post-industrial America, and more. Third, we will explore contemporary academic debates over the nature of American political theory, especially the debate between the liberal and republican schools of thought.

This is a reading and not a research seminar. Reading assignments will be heavy; writing assignments will be modest. I expect active participation from each member of the seminar.

Please obtain the correct editions of the required books and the course packet listed below. They should be available at Mary Jane Books. I regret that they are so numerous, but most are inexpensive; further, you can find used copies of most of them online for even less money. Required books are:

C. Rossiter and C. Kesler, eds., *The Federalist Papers* (Signet)
R. Ketcham, ed., *The Anti-Federalist Papers* (Signet)
M. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (Viking)
B. Atkinson, ed., *Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings* (Modern Library)
Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and Other Tales* (Signet)
J. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on Government* (Hackett Publishing)
A. Lincoln, *Selected Speeches and Writings* (Vintage)
H. Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Northeastern University Press)—or other editions
L. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Harcourt)
W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (obtain online in any edition)
Course packet (available at Mary Jane Books)

COURSE OUTLINE

Jan. 28 Introduction: What is American Political Theory?
The Revolutionary Vision and Thomas Paine
Required reading:

**Recommended reading:**
Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*
Wilson Carey McWilliams, *Redeeming Democracy in America*
Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*
J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*
Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*

**Feb. 4**
From Revolution to Constitution: The Reformulation of Republicanism
**Required reading:**

**Recommended reading:**
Symposium on Wood’s *Creation of the American Republic* in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1987
Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*
Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Crucial Questions*
Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*
Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*

**Feb. 11**
James Madison and the Second Founding of the Republic
**Required reading:**
James Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments,” “Vices of the Political System of the United States,” “The Virginia Plan” (course packet)
*The Federalist Papers* # 10, 14, 37-41, 43, 45-51, 53, 55, 57, 62-63
James Madison, “Virginia Resolutions Against the Alien and Sedition Acts” (packet)

Recommended reading:

a)  *The Federalist Papers*
Garry Wills, *Explaining America: The Federalist*
David Epstein, *The Political Theory of the Federalist*
Trevor Colbourn, ed., *Fame and the Founding Fathers: Essays by Douglass Adair*
Colleen A. Sheehan and Gary L. McDowell, eds., *Friends of the Constitution: Writings of the ‘Other’ Federalists, 1787-1788*

b)  James Madison
Jack N. Rakove, ed., *James Madison: Writings*
Richard K. Matthews, *If Men Were Angels: James Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason*
Lance Banning, *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic*
Drew R. McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy*

Feb. 18  Alexander Hamilton and the Creation of the American State
Required reading:
*The Federalist Papers* # 1, 6, 9, 11-12, 15-16, 23, 25, 27-28, 30, 33, 35-36, 68-72, 78, 84-85

Recommended reading:
Joanne B. Freeman, ed., *Alexander Hamilton: Writings*
Clinton Rossiter, *Alexander Hamilton and the Constitution*
Gerald Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*
Harvey Flaumenhaft, *The Effective Republic: Administration and Constitution in the Thought of Alexander Hamilton*
Karl-Friedrich Walling, *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and States*
Free Government

Feb. 25 The Anti-Federalists: The Fears of American Republicanism
Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, pp. 567-615

Recommended reading: Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Anti-Federalist*
Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*
Christopher M. Duncan, *The Anti-Federalists and Early American Political Thought*
Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828*

Mar. 4 Thomas Jefferson and the Ambiguities of American Democratic Theory

Recommended reading: Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence*
Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*
Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson*
Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson*
Jean M. Yarbrough, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People*
Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*
Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*
Joyce Appleby, “What is Still American in Jefferson’s Political Philosophy,” in her *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*

Mar. 11 Democracy and Individualism: Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman
Required reading: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume 2, chapters on “Of Individualism in Democratic Countries” and “That the Americans Combat the Effects of Individualism by Free Institutions” (handout)


**Recommended reading:**
Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*

George Kateb, “Democratic Individuality and the Claims of Politics,” in his *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture*

Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy*

Bob Pepperman Taylor, *America’s Bachelor Uncle: Thoreau and the American Polity*

David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography*


Mar. 25

Herman Melville: Literature and the Subversion of American Political Theory

Required reading:
Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and Other Tales*, pp. 107-43 (“Bartleby”), 144-226 (“Benito Cereno”)

Recommended reading:
Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville*

John H. Schaar, “The Uses of Literature for the Study of Politics: The Case of Melville’s *Benito Cereno*,” in his *Legitimacy in the Modern State*

Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His World and Work*

**FIRST PAPER DUE ON MAR. 25**

Apr. 1

Democracy and Slavery: John C. Calhoun and Abraham Lincoln

Required reading:
Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” (link on Blackboard)

John C. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on Government*


Recommended reading:
Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, Ch. 4 (Calhoun), 5 (Lincoln)
Ross M. Lence, ed., *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*
James H. Read, *Majority Rule versus Consensus: The Political Thought of John C. Calhoun*
George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*
Bruce Miroff, “Abraham Lincoln: Democratic Leadership and the Tribe of the Eagle” (*Icons of Democracy*, Ch. 3)
Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*
Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*
J. David Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion*
Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*

**Apr. 8**

Postbellum America: Dilemmas of Class, Gender, and Race
Required reading:
William Graham Sumner, excerpt from *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (packet)
Edward Bellamy, excerpt from *Looking Backward* (packet)
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Address Delivered at Seneca Falls,” “Address to the Legislature of New York on Women’s Rights,” “The Solitude of Self” (packet)
W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Ch. 1 and 3;
“The Talented Tenth” (packet)

Recommended reading:
Mason Drukman, *Community and Purpose in America*, Ch. 7 (Sumner), Ch. 8 (Bellamy)
Richard Hofstader, *Social Darwinism in America*
Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage*
Bruce Miroff, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Dissenting Leadership and Feminist Vision” (*Icons of Democracy*, Ch. 4)
Adolph Reed, Jr., *W. E. B. DuBois and American Political Thought*

**Apr. 15**

The Progressive Era and the Emergence of State-Centered Liberalism: Herbert Croly
Required reading:
Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life*, Ch. 1-2, 5-7, 9, 12-13

Recommended reading:
Herbert Croly, *Progressive Democracy*
Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery*
Edward Stettner, *Shaping Modern Liberalism: Herbert Croly and Progressive*
Thought
Eldon J. Eisenach, *The Lost Promise of Progressivism*
Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy*

Apr. 22 The Industrial Age and the Eclipse of the Public: Walter Lippmann and John Dewey
Required reading:
Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, Ch. 1, 3-12, 14-18, 20, 24-28
John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Ch. 4-6 (packet)

Recommended reading:
Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*
John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*
John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*
Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*
Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*

Apr. 29 The Liberalism/Republicanism Debate: Louis Hartz and Liberalism
Required reading:
Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Ch. 1-5, 8-11

Recommended reading:
Mark Hulliung, ed., *The American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered: The Contested Legacy of Louis Hartz*
Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*
John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics*
Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*
James P. Young, *Reconsidering American Liberalism*

May 6 The Liberalism/Republicanism Debate: Michael Sandel and Republicanism
Required reading:

Recommended reading:
Anita L. Allen and Milton C. Regan, eds. *Debating Democracy’s Discontent: Essays on American Politics, Law, and Public Philosophy*
Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*

SECOND PAPER DUE ON MAY 13
Papers: I will hand out topics for the two papers, which will be based on required readings for the course and will be analytical in character. The expected length for each paper is 8-10 pages, double-spaced. Grades for the course will be computed as follows: 1/3 for each paper, 1/3 for participation in the seminar.

Office hours: My office is Milne 216. My office hours downtown are on Wednesdays, 2:30-3:30. I also have office hours on the uptown campus on Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:30-12:30. Email is bmiroff@albany.edu