

“The foundation of our empire was not laid in the gloomy age of Ignorance and Superstition, but at an Epoch when the rights of man were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period; the researches of the human mind, after social happiness, have been carried to a great extent; the Treasures of knowledge, acquired through a long succession of years, by the labours of Philosophers, Sages, and Legislatures, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the Establishment of our forms of Government; the free cultivation of Letters, the unbounded extension of Commerce, the progressive refinement of Manners, the growing liberality of sentiment, and above all, the pure and benign light of Revelation, have had a meliorating influence on mankind and increased the blessings of Society. At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be intirely their own.”

-- George Washington, *Circular to the States* (1783)

“...we of the present generation are in the first season of free, outspoken, unrestrained constitutional criticism. We are the first Americans to hear our countrymen ask whether the Constitution is still adapted to serve the purposes for which it was intended; the first to entertain any serious doubts about the superiority of our own institutions as compared to the systems of Europe; the first to think of remodeling the administrative machinery of the federal government, and of forcing new forms of responsibility upon Congress.”

-- Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government* (1885)

## **Political Science 7980**

### **Seminar in American Political Thought: The Founders and the Progressives**

**Fall 2011**

As a matter of simple, linear time, we stand today as far from the Progressives as they stood from the American Founders. As the Progressives lived in a world of institutions designed by the Founders, so we live among institutions—especially the universities—that the Progressives designed or redesigned to make their own. As the Progressives fancied themselves the first critics of the Founders, so we now see emerging sustained criticism of the Progressives and their reforms. As the latter considered their world decisively altered from the world of the late eighteenth century—not least as a consequence of economic, social, and political changes the Founders had encouraged—so the question now arises whether the world for which the Progressives wrote has now been similarly changed and thus is as much in need of rethinking as the Founders’ world was for them.

Both the Founders and the Progressives thought themselves to possess a new political or social science; both sought to employ that science in the formation of institutions. Both drew unhesitatingly on important intellectual movements in Europe: the Founders on the Enlightenment, the Progressives on historicism. They differed in many ways as well. The former drew their principles from nature, the latter from history. The first stressed liberty and understood equality as equal freedom; the second stressed equality, although they aimed for liberation, too, even from the constraints of nature itself. Neither movement was particularly orthodox in religious faith; neither felt bound by custom, at least when science pointed out an alternative way. Both promoted a politics that incorporated the many and the few: the Founders through a representative republic, the Progressives through a democratically accountable administrative state.

In this course, we will examine each era or moment in itself and in relation to the other. Moreover, since the emergence of a large and active state is often seen as the achievement of Progressivism and analysis of the process of state formation is seen as the project of political development, we will be attentive to the claims of the subfield of American Political Development in relation to American Political Thought. Finally, we will compare the work of political scientists and historians in discussing both the Founding and the Progressives. Is the thought of either the Founders or the Progressives of live interest today? What, if anything, must be added to allow them to address our own time?

**Instructor:** James Stoner, Stubbs 240  
 (225) 578-2538 [office] or (504) 232-4399 [cell]  
 poston@lsu.edu

**Office Hours:** Mondays, 2:00-3:30  
 Wednesdays, 10:00-11:00, and by appointment

**Books available for purchase:**

- Michael Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic* (Notre Dame) [ISBN: 978-0268014872]
- Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (Vintage) [ISBN: 978-0679736882]
- Adrienne Koch, ed., *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention Reported by James Madison* (Ohio University Press) [ISBN: 978-0821407653]
- Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided* (rev. Chicago, 2009; orig. 1958) [ISBN 978-0226391182]
- James Ceaser, *Nature and History in American Political Development* (Harvard, 2006) [ISBN 978-0674027237]
- John Marini & Ken Masugi, eds., *The Progressive Revolution in Politics and Political Science: Transforming the American Regime* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) [ISBN 978-0742549746]
- Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge, 2004) [ISBN 978-0521547642]
- Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State* (Cambridge, 1982) [ISBN 978-0521288651]
- Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (CreateSpace, 2011; orig. 1909) [ISBN 978-1461064299]
- Irving Kristol, *The Neo-Conservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942-2009* (Basic Books, 2011) [ISBN 978-0465022236]

**Course requirements:**

- Attendance at all class sessions and participation in discussions
- Four 2-page papers on the assigned reading, due in class (and sometimes to be read) [8/31 or 9/7; 9/14 or 9/21; 10/12 or 10/19; 10/26 or 11/2]
- Two 1-page bibliographic annotations [9/28 and 10/19]
- Research paper, 20-25 pages, on a topic approved by the instructor (preliminary presentation on 11/16; final paper due December 7)

**SYLLABUS:**

Wed., 8/24 Introduction  
 James R. Stoner, Jr., "Is There a Political Philosophy in the Declaration of Independence?" *Intercollegiate Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005), pp. 3-11

James R. Stoner, Jr., "Progressivism, Social Science, and Catholic Social Teaching in the Building of the American Welfare State" [working paper, April 2011]

## I. The Founding

- Wed., 8/31 Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic*  
 Wed., 9/7 Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*  
 Wed., 9/14 *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention*, May 14-July 16, pp.1-302  
 Wed., 9/21 *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention*, July 17- September 17, pp. 302-659  
 Wed., 9/28 One book each from the Founding bibliography

## II. Transition: The Civil War

- Wed., 10/5 Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*

## III. Progressivism

- Wed., 10/12 Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*  
 Skowronek, *Building a New American State*  
 Wed., 10/19 Ceaser, *Nature and History in American Political Development*  
 Marini & Masugi, eds., *The Progressive Revolution in Politics and Political Science*  
 Wed., 10/26 selections from Edward Ross, Richard T. Ely, John Dewey, and Ronald J. Pestritto & William J. Atto, eds., *American Progressivism: A Reader*  
 Wed., 11/2 Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life*  
 Wed., 11/9 One book each from the Progressive bibliography

## IV. Presentation of Research

- Wed., 11/16 present a bibliography of your sources, discuss the question you are asking, and share your hypothesis or tentative conclusion

## V. Reflections from the later Twentieth Century

- Wed., 11/30 Irving Kristol, *The Neo-Conservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942-2009*