

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

A Group 4 course in the History Department, University College London
Autumn Term 2006-7

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Course Website : www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucraasm (and follow the link)

Class time: Wednesdays 11am-1pm



INTRODUCTION

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, vibrant election campaigns and the world's first mass party system helped to create in the United States what one historian has described as a “lost Atlantis” of participatory democracy. European visitors—most notably Alexis de Tocqueville, who published his observations as *Democracy in America* (1835)—arrived in the United States to witness for themselves this extraordinary experiment in democratic government. These observers agreed that the new mass politics was bound up with the culture and identity of the American republic. *Democracy* had come to mean not only rule by the majority but also respect for the tastes and values of the people, and a creed that was worth upholding as the United States' distinctive contribution to the world.

“Democracy” is an essentially contested concept; it is an inherently ambiguous term. This course will explore the debates about just what democracy meant, in theory and practice, in the context of nineteenth-century America. How were the boundaries of democratic participation defined and challenged? How did nineteenth-century Americans engage in politics and what did they believe a democratic society should look like? We will also consider how Americans wrestled with the key conceptual problems raised by democratic theory: How can minority rights be protected? How can the ideal of equality be reconciled with liberty? Perhaps most pressing of all – what does democracy require of citizens? And what becomes of the democracy if the requisite skills, education, or altruism (what early Americans called “republican virtue”) was missing? We will discuss the concerns of critics of democracy including those who feared the tyranny of the majority and those who saw democracy debasing culture and alienating a “natural” elite. One of our major themes will be the relationship between democracy and republicanism in American political culture.

The course takes as its starting point the expansion of the franchise to almost all white adult males and the Jacksonian appeal to the ‘people.’ It ends with the challenges to democratic participation (including the campaign to restrict the suffrage) in the Gilded Age. The American experiment with democracy in the nineteenth century was alarming to many, but all agreed that democracy was about more than just politics or a system of government. Democracy was also about values, culture, individual self-expression. Much of the richness of this nineteenth century debate has been lost in contemporary invocations of the democratic ideal. This course provides some historical perspective.

COURSE INFORMATION AND REGULATIONS

Course requirements

- The most important requirement is that you attend every class and participate fully in our discussions. If for some very good reason you are unable to attend a class please let me know as soon as possible by email. My email address is a.i.p.smith@ucl.ac.uk
- Most weeks we will discuss two short papers (no more than 1000 words) by members of the class that have been circulated in advance by email. Each member of the class will produce one of these short papers during the term. It is very important that you email your paper to me no later than 9am on the MONDAY preceding the Wednesday class in which they are to be discussed.
- Please read as widely as you can for seminars. Most of the key texts have been photocopied and are available to borrow from the History Department office. The seminar programme (below) includes some of the key questions that we will discuss in class each week. You should use these questions to help frame your thoughts before coming to class.

Assessment

- The course will be assessed by means of a 'take home' exam and an essay.
- The 'take home' exam will require one essay (of approximately 2000 words) from a choice of two questions, each of which will require you to develop an argument about some of the general themes of the course. You will have 24 hours to complete your essay. The essay will be set at 12 noon on WEDNESDAY 13th DECEMBER and will be due in at 12 noon on THURSDAY 14th DECEMBER. If you write the take home exam on a computer you should hand in two copies to the Departmental Office by the deadline. It is also permissible to hand write the exam if you prefer. If you hand write it, you do not need to produce two copies. In either case, you must complete a 3-part cover sheet, available in the office and make sure that one of the administrators date-stamps it. Any take-home exam that is submitted after 12 noon on THURSDAY 14th DECEMBER will be penalised by **5 MARKS PER HOUR LATE**. If it is not received by 5pm on THURSDAY 14th DECEMBER it will receive a mark of 0.
- The essay. You are responsible for devising the question for your second essay, which is due by 5pm on MONDAY JANUARY 8th and must be approximately 3000 words in length. Two copies of the essay must be handed in to the History Department office, with a completed 3-part coversheet, which will be date stamped. The pink copy of the cover sheet will be returned to you as a receipt/proof of submission. Please keep it in case of any query. Essays that are not stamped will receive a mark of 0. Any essay submitted after MONDAY JANUARY 8th will be penalised by **5 MARKS PER DAY LATE**, up to a maximum of **FOUR** days, after which it will receive a mark of 0. This will be included in the calculation of the overall mark.

- *For affiliate students only:* You must sit the take home exam as above, but your essay must be submitted by 5 pm on FRIDAY 15th December. Together these two essays should total about 5,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography).

Extensions

- Extensions to these deadlines can only be granted by the Chair of the Board of Examiners on the recommendation of the Departmental Tutor. **She is only likely to do so in cases of serious illness, which must be evidenced by a doctor's certificate, or bereavement. In particular, it is normal to expect up to two weeks' illness in the course of the two teaching semesters and applications for extensions on medical grounds received in the last two weeks of the second term, where the illness was clearly of less than two weeks' duration, will not be granted.**
- Students wishing to apply for an extension should complete a form (available from the Departmental Office) and make an appointment to see the Departmental Tutor. Please note that applications for extensions will not be accepted on the deadline day itself, or subsequently, except in cases of severe illness or bereavement.

Legibility

- All essays must be well presented and clear. Please leave wide margins and use double-spacing to allow teachers to write comments. Proof-read word-processed work carefully, and do not rely entirely on spell-checkers - they can introduce mistakes, particularly with proper names.

Plagiarism

- Essays, while based upon what you have read, heard and discussed, must be entirely your own work. It is very important that you avoid plagiarism, that is the presentation of another person's thoughts or words as though they were your own.
- Plagiarism is a form of cheating, and is regarded by the College as a serious offence, which can lead to a student failing a course or courses, or even deregistration. Please see the departmental student handbook for further guidance on avoiding plagiarism. (Students not registered in the History Department should ask at the Departmental Office for a copy of the Department's guidelines).
- Any quotation from the published or unpublished works of other persons must be clearly identified as such by being placed inside quotation marks and students should identify their sources as accurately and fully as possible in footnotes.
- Recourse to the services of "ghost-writing" agencies (for example in the preparation of essays or reports) or of outside word-processing agencies which offer correction/improvement of English is strictly forbidden and students who make use of the services of such agencies render themselves liable for an academic penalty.

- You should note that UCL has now signed up to use a sophisticated detection system (Turn-It-In) to scan work for evidence of plagiarism, and the Department intends to use this for assessed coursework. This system gives access to billions of sources worldwide, including websites and journals, as well as work previously submitted to the Department, UCL and other universities.

Key Texts

The following books will be of particular value during the course. You may wish to consider buying one or two of them.

- Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*
- Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*
- Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*
- Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America*
- Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars*
- James A. Morone, *The Democratic Wish*
- Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation*
- Michael McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*
- Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*
- Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*
- Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen*
- Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

* = copies are available to be borrowed from the History Department Office

† = copies are available in the Teaching Collection of the UCL Library

Items in bold are available on-line via www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucraasm or through the UCL library website.

Week 1. An introduction to the course

Week 2. Republicanism, democracy and the Constitution

TASK FOR THIS WEEK: In NO MORE THAN 400 words answer the following question:

“How ‘democratic’ was the US Constitution?”

Questions to consider:

1. What were the philosophical traditions underpinning the founding fathers’ conception of liberty and equality and how did they believe these two ideals could be reconciled?
2. What was the relationship between republicanism and democracy?
3. How did James Madison seek to protect minority rights in the new constitution?
4. Was the American Constitution democratic?
5. What was “republican virtue” and what was its importance?

HANDOUT:

James Madison, *Federalist No. 10 and no. 39*

James Mason, speech opposing the new Constitution, Virginia Ratifying Convention

George Washington, “Farewell Address,” extract

†*Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, intro & chapter 1

†*Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, chapter 2

James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*

Gordon S. Wood, “The Significance of the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (1988): 1-20.

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

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (2002)

Madison, *The Federalist* No. 10

Issaac Kramnick, Introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Federalist Papers*

Issaac Kramnick, "Republicanism" in Pole and Greene, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*.

Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, ch 1 & 2

Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chapters 1 & 2

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* esp. 80-112

Morone, *Democratic Wish*, introduction and ch. 1.

Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America* (1985), prologue, chapters 1-2.

Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*, chapter 11

Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*

John Murrin, "Gordon S. Wood and the Search for Liberal America", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 44: 3, (Jul., 1987), pp. 597-601.[JSTOR]

Week 3: The emergence of party politics

Questions to consider:

1. How do you explain the persistence of antipartisanship in the era of mass parties? How did their supporters legitimize political parties?
2. Who was included and who was excluded from the American polity in the antebellum period?

HANOUT:

Extracts from antebellum campaign songs

Comments on electioneering in the Antebellum period

COMMON READING: **Marc W. Kruman, "The Second American Party System and the Transformation of Revolutionary Republicanism", *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Winter 1992): 509-537**

†*Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, ch. 3

Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chapter 3

Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, chapter 4

Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America* (1985), prologue, chapter 4

Major Wilson, “Republicanism and the idea of party in the Jacksonian period,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (1989): 419-42 [JSTOR]

Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars*, chapters 1, 2&3

Gerald Leonard, *The Invention of Party Politics: Federalism, Popular Sovereignty and Constitutional Development in Jacksonian Illinois* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Donald J. Ratcliffe, *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic: Democratic Politics in Ohio, 1793-1821*

Ronald P. Formisano, “Political Character, Antipartyism and the Second Party System,” *American Quarterly* 21:4 (Winter, 1969): 683-709 [JSTOR]

Edward L. Mayo, “Republicanism, Antipartyism, and Jacksonian Party Politics: A View from the Nation’s Capital”, *American Quarterly* 31:1 (Spring, 1979), 3-20 [JSTOR]

Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, 1969)

Michael Wallace, ‘Changing Concepts of Party in the United States: New York, 1815-1828,’ *American Historical Review* 74 (1968): 453-91 [JSTOR]

Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation*, chapters 1-3.

*William Gienapp, “‘Politics seem to enter into Everything’: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860’, in Maizlish and Kushuma (eds), *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, pp. 14-69.

*Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*, chapter 1-2.

Paul Bourke and Donald DeBatts, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (1995),

Chambers, William N. and Phillip C. Davis, ‘Party Competition, and Mass Participation: The Case of the Democratizing Party System, 1824-1852,’ in Silbey, Bogue, and Flanigan, eds, *The History of American Electoral Behavior*, pp. 174-97.

***Jean Baker, “A Sense of Party: George Bancroft, Martin Van Buren and Samuel Cox,” *Affairs of Party*, ch. 3**

Daniel Walker Howe, “The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System”, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 4. (Mar., 1991), pp. 1216-1239. [JSTOR]

David Grimsted, "Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting," *American Historical Review* 77 (1972): 361-397 [JSTOR]

Week 4: Jacksonian Democracy

Questions to consider:

1. What did Jacksonian Democrats mean by "equality"?
2. How did Democrats and Whigs differ over the idea of representation and the role of government?

HANDOUT:

Letter from Edward Patchell to Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson, "Farewell Address"

Whig Platform, 1840

†*Richard J. Ellis, *American Political Culture*, chapter 4

†* Morone, *Democratic Wish*, chapter 2

†*Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party*, chapter 3

†*John Ashworth, "Agrarians and Aristocrats": *Party Political Ideology in the United States*, chapter 1

Kenneth Cmiel, "A Broad Fluid Language of Democracy: Discovering the American Idiom," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992) pp. 913-36 [JSTOR]

Ashworth, "The Jacksonian as Leveller", *Journal of American Studies* 14 (December 1980)

Henry Dathloff, ed., *Thomas Jefferson and American Democracy* (1971)

Hanson, *Democratic Imagination*, chapter 3.

Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*

Dan Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*

Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*

Edward Pessen "The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility, and Equality in the 'Era of the Common Man'" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 76, No. 4. (Oct., 1971), pp. 989-1034 [JSTOR]

Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, chapters 2-3.

Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, ch. 5

Ronald P. Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation of Jacksonian Politics: A Review of the Literature, 1959-1975" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 63, No. 1. (Jun., 1976), pp. 42-65. [JSTOR]

Week 5: Democracy's Critics: Calhoun, Cooper, Tocqueville

Questions to consider:

1. What were Tocqueville, Calhoun and Cooper's concerns about American Democracy?

HANDOUT

James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat*, pp. 170-174.

John C. Calhoun, excerpts from speeches and letters.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts

Lynn L. Marshall; Seymour Drescher "American Historians and Tocqueville's Democracy" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 3. (Dec., 1968), pp. 512-532. [JSTOR]

Cushing Strout, "Tocqueville's Duality: Describing America and Thinking of Europe" *American Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1. (Spring, 1969), pp. 87-99 [JSTOR]

Hugh Brogan "Alexis de Tocqueville and the Liberal Moment" *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2. (Jun., 1971), pp. 289-303 [JSTOR]

Curtis Stokes, "Tocqueville and the Problem of Racial Inequality," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 75, No. 1/2. (Winter - Spring, 1990), pp. 1-15 [JSTOR]

Daniel J. Elazar, "Tocqueville and the Cultural Basis of American Democracy" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 32: 2 (1999) [JSTOR]

Theodore R. Marmor, *The career of John C. Calhoun : politician, social critic, political philosopher* (1988)

Lacy K. Ford "Republican Ideology in a Slave Society: The Political Economy of John C. Calhoun", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 54, No. 3. (Aug., 1988), pp. 405-424 [JSTOR]

Anne C. Loveland, "James Fenimore Cooper and the American Mission", *American Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Part 1. (Summer, 1969), pp. 244-258 [JSTOR]

Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*, chapter 9.

--READING WEEK--

Week 6: The Cultural and Moral Impulses of Democracy: Whitman and Lincoln

Questions to consider:

1. How did Lincoln explain the relationship between the American republic and the idea of democracy?
2. What did Whitman believe a democratic society would look like?

HANDOUTS:

Lincoln, Abraham. 'The Gettysburg Address'

Whitman, Walt, 'I hear America Singing' and 'O Captain, my captain!' from *Leaves of Grass* (Penguin edition, 1973) and extracts from *Democratic Vistas*

Extract from David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*

*Kenneth Cmiel, "Whitman the Democrat" in David S. Reynolds, ed., *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, pp. 205-234

*James M. McPherson, "Lincoln and Liberty" from *The Second American Revolution*

Kenneth Cmiel, "A Broad Fluid Language of Democracy: Discovering the American Idiom," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992) pp. 913-36 [JSTOR]

Harry V. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*

Hansen, *The Democratic Imagination*, ch. 5.

Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, ch. 1

Gary Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, chapter 3 & 4.

Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*

Kimberly Smith, *The Dominion of Voice: Riot, Reason and Romance in Antebellum Politics*, ch. 3

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

Week 7: Race, class and the Crisis of Democracy

Questions to consider:

1. How did Henry George interpret the economic imperative of democracy?
2. What were the arguments for and against black suffrage?
3. How did the enfranchisement of African American men after the Civil War alter the meaning of voting?
4. “After the Civil War, class rather than race, became the new battleground in the debate over who should be included in the political nation”. Discuss.

HANDOUT:

Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, extracts

E. L. Godkin, “The Problem with Democracy,” extract

COMMON READING: †*Ethington, *The Public City*, introduction and **chapter 1**.

**Eric Foner, “The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation”,
Journal of American History 81:2 (1994) pp. 435-460 (JSTOR)**

Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chapter 4-5

Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, chapters 5-7.

Hanson, *Democratic Imagination*, chapter 6

Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, chapters 4-5

Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, ch. 6

Week 8: Party politics and the problem of political engagement

Questions to consider:

1. What was the relationship between electoral turnout and partisanship?
2. How and why did elites challenge the idea of democratic participation in the 1870s and 80s?
3. Should the period c1830-1890 be described as the “party period” in American history?

HANDOUT:

Walter Lippmann, “The Unattainable Ideal”

James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1889) Vol. 2, pp. 24-49

Goldwin Smith, *Essays on Reform* (1867)

*†Silbey, *The American Political Nation*, chapter 4 & 7

***David Quigley, ‘Suffrage restriction, Class Formation and the Tilden Commission of 1877’, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 3: 2 (2002) OR David Quigley, *Second Founding*, chapter 8.**

Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, chapter 4

Sven Beckert, “Democracy and its Discontents: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York,” in *Past and Present* (February 2002), pp. 114-155 [JSTOR] OR Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis* (2001), especially chapters 7-9.

William R. Brock, “*The American Commonwealth* and the Dilemmas of Democracy”, *American Nineteenth Century History* 2:1 (Spring 2001), pp. 75-104.

H. A. Tulloch, “Changing British Attitudes towards the United States in the 1880s” *The Historical Journal* 20: 4 (1977), 825-840 [JSTOR]

Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, chapters 5-7.

***†”Roundtable” on the “Party Period” in the *Journal of American History* 86:1 (June 1999)**

†*Altschuler and Blumin, “Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy”, *Journal of American History* 84 (December 1997), 878-79 [JSTOR]

Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*, chapter 4

*McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, chapter 1 & 2

Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation*

Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Period* (1986)

Silbey, *American Political Nation*, ch. 11.

Week 9: Was there a “golden age” of American Democracy?

Questions to consider:

1. What was distinctive about the American experience of democracy in the nineteenth century?
2. How plausible is the narrative of decline from a ‘golden age’ set out by Robert Putnam?
3. Why did the “democratic idea” take root in the United States more easily than in Europe?
4. How democratic was the United States in the nineteenth century?

HANDOUTS:

Louis Hartz, "The Rise of the Democratic idea"

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"

*Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (2000), chapter 21

*Alan Ryan, "My Way", Review of Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (New York Review of Books, 2000)

*Michael Schudson, Theda Skocpol, Rick Valelly, Robert D. Putnam, "Unsolved Mysteries: The Tocqueville Files," *The American Prospect* vol. 7 no. 25, March 1, 1996 - April 1, 1996

*Louis Hartz, "The Rise of the Democratic Idea", in Schlesinger and White, eds, *Paths of American Thought*, pp. 37-52.

*Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*, chapters 12-13

Robert Wiebe, *Self-Rule*, conclusion

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* esp. 80-112

Ryan, *Civic Wars*, chapter 7 and epilogue

Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (2003)

Week 10: Revision

N.B. THE 24-HOUR TAKE HOME EXAM WILL BE SET AT 12 NOON ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL CLASS. MEET AT 11am AS USUAL.