

History 699
Nineteenth Century U. S. Political History
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Early Republic

Scholars have come to view the years between 1789 and 1829 as a distinct era in American history. The years from the Revolution to the drafting of the Constitution have a coherence of their own. The Jefferson presidency, so it goes, marks the emergence of a democratic political universe that differed markedly from that of the federal era (Washington and Adams). The tendency among historians is to view the political struggles of these years in terms of polarity: on the one hand, Hamiltonian aristocracy, industrialism, and the supremacy of the national government versus Jeffersonian democracy, agrarianism, and states rights on the other. More recently, however, scholars have made connections that bridge the revolutionary era and the federal period. Some like Lance Banning, contend that the political thought of British Whigs, which characterized the outlook of the revolutionary generation, also informed Jeffersonian Republicanism. Historians of the liberal consensus, Joyce Appleby for one, dissent. They contend that Jeffersonian Republicanism, liberated from the bondage of civic humanism, invoked democratic values “to justify the abandonment of the authority traditionally exercised over them . . . so that individual citizens could be empowered to act on their own behalf.”

Well, which is it? Were the political debates of these years, rife with classical allusions, “little more than a desperate attempt to deny the obvious reality of Lockeanism?” Is Hamilton the closet royalist that many monographs and textbooks make him out to be? To what extent did anti-partyism inhibit the evolution of the first party system? Or can the argument be made that Jefferson was able to manipulate antiparty sentiment against Hamilton and to promote his own political organization? How did the political divisions of these years extend and reify the debate over the ratification of the Constitution? (This, in turn, raises the related question of periodization and continuity.) When you ponder this issue, remember that both Hamilton and Madison (Jefferson’s closest ally) were ardent supporters of the new government in 1787-88, and that both claimed to be defending that document and government during the Washington administration. What, therefore, are we to make of the current and very fashionable claim of “original intent”?

Saul Cornell, The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828

David Waldstreicher, In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820

Drew R. McCoy, The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (1980)

Catherine Allgor, Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government

Lance Banning, “Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberty and Classical Ideas in the New American Republic,” William and Mary Quarterly, 43 (1986): 3-19.

Isaac Kramnick, “Republican Revisionism Revisited,” American Historical Review, 87 (1982): 629-64.

Joyce Appleby, "What is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" William and Mary Quarterly, 39 (1982): 287-329.

Richard Hofstadter, The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840 (1969), chapters 1-3.

Ralph Ketcham, Presidents Above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789-1829 (1984), chapters 5-6.

John Murrin, "The Great Inversion, or Court Versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1600-1721) and America (1776-1816), in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776 (1980): 287-329.

Linda Kerber, "The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," American Quarterly, 37 (1985): 4784-95.

"Political Engagement and Disengagement in Antebellum America: A Roundtable" Journal of American History, 84 (1997): 855-909.*

Ronald Formisano, "The Party Period Revisited," Journal of American History, 86 (1999): 93-120.*

Joel H. Silbey, "'To One or Another of These parties Every Man Belongs': The American Political Experience from Andrew Jackson to the Civil War," in Contesting Democracy: Substance & Structure in American Political History, 1775-2000, ed. Byron E. Shafer and Anthony Badger (Lawrence, 2001), 65-92.

Class, Ethnicity, and Politics in Antebellum America

As we are now well aware, historians have moved ever further away from "a presidential synthesis of American politics," which they believe construe politics too narrowly. They are less interested in party-building, policy-making, and electioneering techniques. Rather, these scholars focus more on the restructuring of party organization and the emergence of new political ideologies in the early republic. Consequently, the field has moved beyond political and social elites to include groups and movements ignored by older historians and histories. In so doing, these historians have rejected the notion that Americans of this period, whatever their differences, shared an attachment to liberal capitalist ideas.

How do urban, working-class politics demonstrate the transition from the corporate, communal ideal of the eighteenth century to the democratic politics that presaged the emergence of the second-party system? To what degree do urban political movements (rioting included) reflect debates and conflicting ideologies that shaped national politics? To what extent, if any, are they a consequence of them? What role does race play in both the evolution of urban politics and the concomitant relationships between racialized ideologies and the growth of political institutions and practices in the period between 1790 and 1840?

Paul Gilje, The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834

Mary Blewett, "Work, Gender, and the Artisan Tradition in New England Shoemaking, 1780-1860," Journal of Social History, 17 (1983-94): 221-48.

Carl E. Prince, "The Great 'Riot Year': Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834," Journal of the Early Republic, 5 (1985): 1-19.

- Amy Bridges, "Becoming American: The Working Classes in the United States Before the Civil War," in Working Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton, 1986), 157-96.
- David Roediger, "Race, Labor, and Gender in the Languages of Antebellum Social Protest," in Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor, ed. Stanley L. Engerman (Stanford, 1999), 168-87.
- Lois E. Horton, "From Class to Race in Early America: Northern Post-Emancipation Racial Reconstruction," in Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic, ed. Michael A. Morrison and James Brewer Stewart (Lanham, MD. 2002), 27-52.
- James Brewer Stewart, "Modernizing Difference: The Political Meaning of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840," in Morrison and Stewart, eds. Race and the Early Republic, 113-133.

Jacksonian Era

To many Americans in the 1820s and 1830s, Andrew Jackson was a champion of democracy, a symbol of a spirit of anti-elitism and egalitarianism that was sweeping American life. In the twentieth century, however, historians have disagreed sharply not only in their assessments of Jackson himself, but in their portrayal of American society in his era. Progressive historians saw in Jackson their own battles with "corporate interests." This interpretation was taken to its logical extension by Arthur Schlesinger who saw enormous support for Jackson among eastern laborers. Richard Hofstadter flipped that coin on its head and argued that Jackson represented rising entrepreneurs. Marvin Meyers countered that Jackson and his supporters were uneasy about and opposed to the new industrial society. His interpretation stressed a restoration of agrarian, republican virtues. In the 1960s, an ethnocultural interpretation held sway, and Lee Benson's work is the definitive statement of this approach. This was expanded by Sean Wilentz who was interested—as were others—on broad social change and in particular the market revolution. Most recently scholars have turned away from a discussion of Jackson and the Democratic party toward society more generally. Histories of Indian removal and the obvious contradiction between expanding democracy and the reality of constricted rights for women, blacks and Indians lie at the heart of this new scholarship. Beyond the works of authors mentioned above you might also be interested in:

John Ashworth, 'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846

Harry L. Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America

Daniel Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs

Daniel Walker Howe, What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of American, 1815-1848

Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America

Daniel Feller, The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840

Ronald Formisano, The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861

Neil Harris, Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum

Thomas Hietala, Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America

Gerald Leonard, The Invention of Party Politics: Federalism, Popular Sovereignty, and Constitutional Development in Jacksonian Illinois

Rush Welter, The Mind of America, 1820-1860

John Larson, Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States

Democracy in the Old South

When historians blather on at length about the democratic assumptions that informed Jacksonian politics, invariably they conclude their observations with an arched eyebrow and the comment: "Except in the South." Since the days of Gog and Magog, antebellum historians have placed southern politics outside, apart from, and often in opposition to national political developments. Talk of honor, slaveholder hegemony, fire-eaters, slave culture, and the like have made the antebellum South not just "different" from, but alien to, Jacksonian political culture.

How does the form and substance of southern politics differ from that of the North? Slavery notwithstanding, are the class tensions that infuse southern politics substantially different from those in the free states? What connections or common cause could slave-state politicians have made with their northern colleagues?

Lacy K. Ford Jr. Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860

Fletcher Green, "Democracy in the Old South," Journal of Southern History, 12 (1946): 3-23.*

Thomas P. Govan, "Was the Old South Different?" Journal of Southern History, 21 (1955): 447-55.*

Edward Pessen, "How Different From Each Other were the Antebellum North and South?" American Historical Review, 75 (1980): 1119-60.*

William Gienapp, "'Politics Seems to Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860, ed. Stephen E. Maizlish and John Kushma (College Station, TX, 1982), 14-69.

James M. McPherson, "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question," Civil War History, 29 (1983): 230-44.

J. Mills Thornton III, "The Ethic of Subsistence and the Origins of Southern Secession," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 48 (1989): 67-85.

Women and Antebellum Politics

Scholars long argued that women simply did not participate in politics before the Civil War. They assumed that antebellum gender ideology and the persistence of ideas about female dependence dictated women's exclusion from the public sphere and mitigated any efforts by women themselves to participate in politics broadly or narrowly construed. These views have been challenged since the 1980s. Scholarly interest in women's agency has revised our understanding of women's role in and the significance of gender for antebellum politics. Women may not have had the right to vote, but they conducted petition campaigns, lobbied for legislation, engaged politics in public settings, and were mobilized by the parties.

But what does it mean to examine the politics of gender and the gendering of politics in antebellum America? Was women's vaunted moral authority an asset or a liability? Did the increasing professionalization of politics deprive rather than provide women opportunities to

discuss politics? Were some parties and political groups more (or less) open to women's voice and influence? What difference did women make when they expressed political opinions and sought to shape political events? Were women welcomed, tolerated, or ignored? Did women influence the content and direction of American politics even in the pre-suffrage era or did politics as it was influence the content and direction of women's participation?

Julie Roy Jeffrey, The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement

Lori Ginzberg, "Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash: Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," Journal of American History, 73 (1986): 601-22.*

Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," Journal of American History, 78 (1992): 1245-64.*

Elizabeth Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," Journal of American History, 82 (1995): 494-521.*

Ronald Zboray and Mary Zboray, "Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts," Journal of the Early Republic, 17 (1997): 277-315.

Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle Against Indian Removal in the 1830s," Journal of American History, 86 (1999): 15-40.*

Sectional Crisis

Working in shifts like coal miners, historians have labored to unearth the origins and meaning of the American Civil War. Debate originated among the participants and has lasted down to the present. An "irrepressible conflict" economic determinism, bungling politicians, modernization, and race have been offered alternatively to explain the greatest event in American history.

Since I have yet to see a general prelim exam that did not deal with the sectional crisis in some fashion, you might get ahead of the curve and ponder the coming of the war. How did western expansion, which began in 1789, create tensions between sections that broke the bonds of nationalism, of political parties, and a common heritage that had held the nation together? Why did white northerners beat up and murder abolitionists, yet elect a political antislavery candidate to the presidency in 1860? Was the war brought about by racists in both sections? What was the southern take on the sectional crisis, and how did it resemble or differ from that of the North? If the free states wanted the South barred from the common territories, why not let the slave states secede? If the south had consistently demanded access to them, why did they forfeit that possibility by leaving the Union? Which school of interpretation or combination of schools best explains the sectional crisis?

Reading:

"The Civil War: Repressible or Irrepressible," in Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, eds., *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives* (1967; 5th ed., New York: 1987), 390-429.

Eric Foner, "The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," *Civil War History*, 20 (1974): 197-214.

J. Mills Thornton, Power and Politics in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860 (1978), Part II.

Michael F. Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s (1978).

Michael A. Morrison, Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War (1997).

William W. Freehling, The Road to Disunion, Volume II, The Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-61 (2007)

Presidential Reconstruction

If hagiography is the determinant theme in Civil War mythology, demonization serves the same function in the mythology of Reconstruction. One was a heroic undertaking for all Americans, the other is a tragedy that left the North and reconstructed South scarred. We are now moving beyond that dichotomy and looking at this era in very different ways. Today the primary issues surrounding the reconstruction of the Union involve three interrelated issues: Was Reconstruction radical? Did it promote even for a time racial equality? Did Reconstruction effect significant changes in the South or was there marked continuity in southern politics and society? Let's begin with a simple question: How radical was "radical Reconstruction"? Was it, as Michael Les Benedict claims, essentially a conservative movement bent on preserving constitutional restraints? Or did it transform the shape and substance of southern politics down to redemption?

Text:

Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (1988).

Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," Reviews in American History, 10 (1982), 82-100.

Readings for first assignment—please pick and choose (or sample):

William C. Harris, With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union (1997).

Michael Perman, Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction, 1865-1868.

John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction: After the Civil War (1961).

David Herbert Donald, The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863-1867 (1965).

Mark W. Summers, Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under Radical Republicans, 1865-1877 (1984).

Paul Cimbala, Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedman's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870 (1997).

Michael Les Benedict, "Preserving the Constitution: The Conservative Basis of Radical Reconstruction," Journal of American History, 61 (1974), 65-90.

William B. Hesseltine, "Economic Factors in the Abandonment of Reconstruction," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 22 (1935), 191-210.

Suzanne Lebsock, "Radical Reconstruction and the Property Rights of Southern Women," Journal of Southern History, 43 (1977), 195-216.

Donald G. Nieman, "Andrew Johnson, the Freedman's Bureau, and the Problem of Equal Rights, 1865-1866," Journal of Southern History, 44 (1978), 399-420.

State-Level Reconstruction

During the 1960s and early 1980s, historians noted that the dream of equality for blacks was still unrealized and that those in charge of efforts to make blacks equal citizens in the late 1860s had views that were quite moderate by the standards of the post-civil rights era of the 1970s and 1980s. To them, Radical Reconstruction no longer seemed very radical. Not only did they criticize carpetbaggers and scalawags, but black politicians were chastised for working more for their won interests as members of a black middle class than for the kinds of policies—such as land reform—that would have met the vital needs of their impoverished constituents. On the other hand, historians as disparate as W.E.B. DuBois and Eric Foner have argued that Reconstruction was a noble and inspiring—though ultimately failed—effort to achieve racial democracy.

As you analyze the readings ask yourself whether that failure was due primarily to the deep-seated racism that drove the white South to carry on a guerrilla war against black participation in politics and prevented many white Republicans from identifying fully with the cause of black equality. Or did it result from the gulf between the economic interests of those in charge of implementing and managing Reconstruction and the poor people of the South who were supposed to be its beneficiaries? Put in reductive terms, assess the relative significance of “race” and “class” as explanations for the persistence of black disadvantage in the United States South (and elsewhere one might add).

Text:

Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (1988).

Eric Foner, “Reconstruction Revisited,” Reviews in American History, 10 (1982), 82-100.

Readings:

Howard Rabinowitz, ed., Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era (1982).

W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 (1935).

Thomas Holt, Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction (1977).

Roberta Alexander, North Carolina Faces the Freedmen: Race Relations During Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867.

Peter Kolchin, First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama’s Blacks to Emancipation (1972).

Lynda J. Morgan, Emancipation in Virginia’s Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870 (1992).

Barbara J. Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century (1985).

Donald Nieman, To Set the Law in Motion: The Freedmen’s Bureau and Legal Rights for Blacks, 1865-1869 (1979).

Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation (1984).

Gerald David Jaynes, Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882 (1986).

Howard Rabinowitz, Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890 (1978).

Julie Saville, The Work of Reconstruction: Free Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870 (1994).

Robert Ransom, and Richard Sutch, One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation.

Scott Reynolds Nelson, Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction

Heather Cox Richardson, The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901

The Era of Good Stealings: Gilded Age Politics

Richard L. McCormick has observed, “As organizations and as objects of loyalty, the major parties enjoyed their golden age during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.” Yet McCormick also contends, “At no other time were the claims made on party’s behalf so *great* or *the ambivalence and the quarreling so prominent*.” As one wag put it, “A scholarly treatise showing that Gilded Age politics was rife with graft and fraud” would be like providing “a pair of water-wings for a trout.” Historians now take seriously not only the limitations of the parties, but also their great appeal to loyalty. Yet if they provided inadequate solutions to the strains brought by the rise of industrial capitalism, the parties did pursue cultural politics that resonated with the voting public.

What issues divided the parties, and what positions did Democrats and Republicans take on them? What were the “natural constituencies” for Democrats and Republicans, and, by extension, in what environments (or geographic settings) did their respective strengths lie? To what extent did national public policy engender and facilitate the rise of liberal capitalism? What factors—political, philosophical, and structural—limited the parties’ ability to come to grips with the social, economic, and cultural conflicts engendered by industrialization?

Text:

Peter H. Argersinger, “The Transformation of American Politics: 1865-1910,” in Byron E. Shafer and Anthony A. Badger, eds., Contesting Democracy: Substance and Structure in American Political History, 1755-2000 (2001).

Vincent P. DeSantis, “The Gilded Age in American History,” Hayes Historical Journal, 7 (1988), 38-57.

Richard L. McCormick, “Anitparty Thought in the Gilded Age,” in McCormick, The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era (1986), 228-59.

Lewis L. Gold, “The Republican Search for a National Majority,” in H. Wayne Morgan, The Gilded Age (1970), 171-98.

Geoffrey Blodgett, “The Mugwump Reputation, 1870 to the Present,” Journal of American History, 66 (1980), 867-87.

Other Readings (sample as needed):

Mark W. Summers, Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884 (2000).

Mark Wahlgren Summers, Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics

Joel Silbey, The American Political Nation, 1838-1893 (1994).

Theda Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States (1992).

Gretchen Ritter, Goldbugs and Greenbacks (1992).

Michael E. McGerr, The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928 (1986).
 Margaret Susan Thompson, The 'Spider Web': Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant (1985).
 Stephen Skowronek, Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1900 (1982).
 Paul Kleppner, The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures (1979).
 Morton Keller, Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America (1977), part I.
 Robert D. Marcus, Grand Old Party: Political Structure in the Gilded Age, 1880-1896 (1971).
 Sidney Fine, Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State: A Study of Conflict in American Thought, 1865-1901 (1964), chapters 1-5.

Populism

American History offers few examples of successful popular movements operating outside the two major parties. Perhaps that is why Populism, which in its brief, meteoric life became one of the few such phenomena to gain real national influence, has attracted particular attention from historians. It has also produced deep disagreements among them. Scholars have differed in many ways in their interpretations of Populism, but at the heart of most such disagreements have been disparate views of the value of popular, insurgent politics. Some historians have harbored a basic mistrust of such mass uprisings and have therefore viewed the Populists with suspicion and hostility. Others have viewed such insurgency approvingly, as evidence of a healthy resistance to oppression and exploitation; and to them, the Populists have appeared as essentially admirable, democratic activists. Pick and choose from the following and assess their attitudes toward Populists and insurgent politics generally.

John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt
 C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel
 Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890
 Richard Hofstadter, Age of Reform
 Walter T. K. Nugent, Tolerant Populists
 Gene O. Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference in America, 1890-1900
 Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment
 Robert C. McMath, Jr. American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898
 Norman Pollack, The Populist Mind
 Peter H. Argersinger, The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics