“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 mitigating 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 entirely 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, 10:00-11:30, and by appointment

Books available for purchase:

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., 9/6  Zachary, The Natural Rights Republic
Wed., 9/7  Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution
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., 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