Day 2- Theoretical Considerations: Definition, Traditions, Thinkers
(Tuesday, May 16)


In the text, William F. Buckley Jr. attempts to define the term conservatism; this based on his experiences working for the National Review—a conservative journal. In Notes Towards and Empirical Definition of Conservatism, Buckley acknowledges the difficulty of providing an exact definition for the term conservatism. Instead, William F. Buckley attempts to provide a framework through which others can interpret modern conservatism. First, the author notes that despite differences among conservatives, there still remains a philosophical front to conservatism. Secondly, Buckley acknowledges his belief that the conservative movement thrives on the constant questioning of its basic principles. Thirdly, after rejecting any affiliations between conservatism and other social movements, Buckley comes to recognize that the conservatism he speaks about “is planted in a religious view of a man”; adding that there exists a different level of religiousness among different conservatives. Overall, William F. Buckley succeeds at explaining conservatism in terms of being a political movement.

Day 3- Theoretical Considerations: Definition, Traditions, Thinkers II
(Wednesday, May 17)


Russell Kirk attempts to explain how governments can best run themselves so that the people can experience genuine freedom. He starts by explaining how the existence of humans is completely reliant on the existence of authority. Kirk explains that for men “to exist together at all, some authority must govern them” (23). And if men “throw off traditional authority, the authority of church and precept and old educational disciplines and parents... are compelled to submit to some new and merciless authority” (23-24). Kirk then goes on to explain that “genuinely ordered freedom is the only sort of liberty worth having,” and he defines this as “freedom made possible by order within the soul and order within the state” (24). Next, Kirk explains how human nature is inherently flawed and that people have an “anarchic impulse” to rebel. Kirk says this corrupting influence makes it inevitable for people to rebel, but that people end up rebelling against things they really need, like the government in this case. Kirk moves on to the early liberal movement and explains that they always were seeking to overthrow government and replace it with another government. In the 1880’s, however, Kirk says “liberals came to accept a new authority, that of the omnicompetent welfare state; they continued to repudiate authority only in the sphere of private life” (25). In the twentieth century, Kirk says liberals still detest authority, “but this detestation has shifted from the political sphere to the moral and social” (26).

The next topic Kirk explains is how the government needs to have a heavy reliance on “ancestral wisdom” or prescription and tradition. Kirk furthers his argument and states that “all that we have and know is founded upon the experience of the (human) race” (27). In many ways Kirk explains why he feels prescription and tradition are so invaluable to society and authority. In explaining prescription and tradition, Kirk gives an explanation for why norms are so important and how they vary based on different places and communities. Norms, Kirk says, cannot be forgotten and ignored because “then every rising generation will challenge the principles of personal and social order and will learn wisdom only through agony” (29). After all of Kirk’s talk about how necessary it is to rely on prescription and tradition, Kirk explains that
unquestioning acceptance of prescription and tradition is not completely okay. He says that “authority, prescription, and tradition undergo in every generation a certain filtering process, by which the really archaic is discarded” (31). He uses norms as an example here and explains that norms change by the circumstances people are in at certain times.

Kirk moves on to another discussion and begins to analyze justice. He explains that a just society understands that all people vary greatly from one another and that a just society treats people differently depending on their differing “talents and appetites.” He challenges these notions with those of Marx and Communism and then, Kirk goes on to explain that an average American or Englishman put in the face of Communism will remain “a law-abiding traditionalist” and understands that “we have no right to cast away our tested civil social order; that monotonous uniformity of condition is contrary to deep ancient human aspirations,” and ultimately that the average American or Englishman would refuse to accept Communism as a form of government that they are willing to live under. In continuing his argument, Kirk explains that “government is instituted to secure justice and order, through respect for legitimate authority” (33). Kirk then outlines two uniform rules for good government:

The first principle is that a good government allows the more energetic natures among a people to fulfill their promise, while insuring that these persons shall not tyrannize over the mass of men. The second principle is that in every state the best possible or least baneful-form of government is one in accord with the traditions and prescriptive ways of its people.

(33)

In explaining the first principle, Kirk explains two ways that humanity can be injured if the principle is violated. He says that “talented persons (need) to realize their potentialities’” and the other as Ortega called it, is “‘the revolt of the masses,’ (where) the threat that mediocrity may trample underfoot every just elevation of mind and character, every hopeful talent for leadership and improvement” (35). This first principle allows for men to fulfill themselves and allows for the idea of “to each his own” to be attained. In illustrating the second principle, Kirk continues his explanations for the reliance of government on experience and states that political institutions need to grow out of the people’s “religion, their moral habits, their economy, (and) even their literature” (38). Kirk explains that “attempts to impose borrowed institutions upon an alien culture generally are disastrous” (38). The idea Kirk is reflecting here is very close to isolationism, in that states “must find their own paths to order and justice and freedom” not that of any other state’s.

Kirk closes his arguments in explaining that a perfect government is not feasible because of human nature’s inherent tendency to rebel, but that “with authority and prescription, a people may work their way towards the freedom of the true polity” (40).

Day 4- Conservative Movements: 19th Century (Founding-Civil War)
(Thursday, May 18)


In John Adam’s piece, Distrust of Democracy, Adams discusses his distrust of extreme forms of democracy. He is skeptical of both “excessive representation and insufficient representation.” He is also opposed to having many local governments with different “senators” elected in each district. He feels that this is not representative of the nation, and doing this is “giving up the idea of national merit and annexing the honor and the trust to an accident, that of living on a particular spot.” Throughout the piece Adams repeatedly questions how real “merit” can be known, and how everyone in an entire nation will be able to know enough about
someone to justify electing them into office. Adams seems to propose that aristocratic elite, that incorporates the voice of the people, is perhaps the best option for ruling a government. He refers to the superiority of Europe in his justification for this point, but also states that the common people were not given enough of a voice. He goes on to state that the common people alone cannot rule a government either. Adams basically proposes that the best form of government is a strong national government that incorporates both common people and an elite ruling class as the principle decision makers.


James Kent does not believe that everyone should have the right to vote. He believes our society has worked too hard to get to this point. In his view, there is nothing wrong with the current situation. And Kent argues that if you look at past situations in European republics, both ancient and modern, universal suffrage has led to corruption and injustice in government. He says that the people who own property have an invested interest in the growth and prosperity of America. With them, Kent believes we will always find honesty and justice. He does not want to throw these property distinctions to the winds. Furthermore, he predicts New York City will be the London of America. Kent does not believe you would want a city with a population of New York to be governed under universal suffrage. Kent ends his argument with the fact that once universal suffrage is granted, it cannot be taken back. So in his eyes, it will be an inerasable mistake.


This is a speech by Webster. Here he basically criticized the present and the past administrations. This criticism is especially focused on Andrew Jackson’s attempt to change the system of currency and finance in the country. Webster argues that Jackson should’ve left the system they way it was rather than pursuing an experiment, which has had negative results. In addition, Webster condemns what he sees as violations of states’ rights. He gives two examples: One, a group of men claimed they were elected to represent New Jersey in the House of Representatives, but they didn’t have a certificate from the chief magistrate of the State. According to Webster, the constitution requires a chief magistrate to sign a certificate for those who have been elected to Congress. These group of men also voted for a bill that Webster didn’t like. So Webster argues that men who are not officially part of Congress, or may not have even been elected, are voting for a law that could be disastrous to the country. Webster also links the administration with these bad elections. Another example is that the administration intended to train a militia but later chose not to. Webster argues that if the administration had done so, it would’ve been a violation of states’ rights because the responsibility of training a militia is reserved for the state.

Day 5- Conservative Movements: 20th Century (Prohibitionists- Neoconservatives) (Friday, May 19)

John A. Andrew “Introduction,” in The Other Side of the Sixties Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics. pp. 1-10

In John Andrew’s “The Other Side of the 60’s” he discusses the importance of the conservative movement of the 1960’s and how in the present day it is continually overshadowed by the liberal movement of the same age. Andrews explains that although each movement had different goals they did both have a wish for many of the effects of Eisenhower’s administration to be removed, and the times were ripe for such political change. Andrews discusses the importance of one group in particular, Young Americans for Freedom. This group he says,
although never as successful as its liberal counterparts, was similar to them in many ways and was an important stepping stone in building a strong conservative base in the years to come. Andrews also discusses how conservatism was often equated with radicalism in the media, and partly because of this, the ideas of Young Americans for Freedom were often dismissed by voters. Andrews’ chief goal is to alert his reader to the fact that there was a conservative movement in the 1960’s, and that it was central to establishing some of the conservative principles that would later be used by Ronald Reagan and others.


In his discourse, “False Liberalism”, Herbert Hoover discusses the dangers of the expansion of the federal government and bureaucracy. Hoover believes that the expansion of the federal government undermines the authority of state government and institutions. Furthermore, Hoover is alarmed by government interference with private business, because it infringes personal liberties. In his words, “free speech does not live many hours after free industry and commerce die”. He feels that government business is purchased at the cost of freedom. Hoover believes that the “very essence of equality of opportunity of our American system is that there shall be no monopoly or domination by any group or section in this country, whether it be business, sectional, or a group interest.” Hoover’s conservative ideology is evident through his belief that man is at fault for institutional failures, and his strong belief that we should build on our past experiences.


It is difficult to pinpoint the idea of conservatism and what makes one a conservative. Clinton Rossiter investigated and analyzed American conservatives and came to the conclusion conservatives share similar views, however, a distinction should be made between two different branches of the conservative ideology. Mr. Rossiter identifies these categories as conservative and ultra-conservative. He explains there are nine fundamental differences in temperament and intellect. Rossiter sums up his findings, “[the conservative] is basically optimistic, flexible, conscious of his responsibilities, charitable, co-operative, and democratic. The other is pessimistic, dogmatic, irresponsible (at least in speech and print), truculent, ruggedly individualistic, and ever more skeptical of democracy” (352). The conservative is viewed as moderate while the ultra-conservative is deemed more of a reactionary.


William F. Buckley’s article “Failures of Conservatism” is a slight prodding of his conservative counterparts. In the reading he explains some failures of the average conservative while conveying his message that “without economic freedom, political and other freedoms are likely to be taken away” (Buckley 354). He goes on to explain that conservatives have failed to realize the connection between economic freedom and freedom itself, saying that without the economic freedom, all other freedoms are incapable. Buckley continues his argument using examples of taxation and the welfare state as well as disestablishing social security and its influence in a “departure from sound principles of government” but concludes by saying that above all the best argument made by the conservative is when “he maintains that security does not equal freedom” and therefore it is important for the conservative to understand his/her freedoms and never allow those individual freedoms to be jeopardized (Buckley 359,360).
Day 6- Social Conservatism  
(Monday, May 22)


**Our religious and moralist origins.**

Morone asserts that Puritan religion and morality was the framework of the American polity and remains the essential underpinning at the heart of politics in America today. He claims that each era may focus on a different campaign, but all American history and campaigns center on defining “us” and “them” within the moralistic framework of American society and polity created by the Puritans over 300 years ago. Toqueville writing in the 19th century on the American polity claimed: “Religion never intervenes directly in the government of American society but it should be considered the first of their political institutions … Christianity reigns, without any obstacles, the universal faith.” Morone also cites that Chesterton “famously summed up the United States as a nation with the soul of a church.” (Morone: 4).

Morone argues that while American history is full of ideas about community and capitalism, “what leaps out, loudest and clearest, is the search for eternal salvation through Christ’s trace.” He asserts that what mattered most to early Americans was morality. And, he asserts further: “It still matters – enormously – today. … The Puritan trope lives on. The essential vision – a community of model citizens – continues to denote the American in us. … Americans constantly return to the heady image of a providential task…” (Monroe: 9). Morone claims that the story of America is a “moral tale” in which “moral dreams define the nation’s ideals; they inspire crusades at home and abroad – from the revolution of 1776 to the war on terror more than two centuries later.” (Morone: 3). Morone states that “political life constantly gets entangled in two vital urges --- redeeming ‘us’ and reforming ‘them.’” (Morone: 3). Morone argues that there is a “moral urge at the heart of American politics and society” and that the American community is defined by visions of vice and virtue as they “designate the worthy ‘us’ … and finger the dangerous ‘them.’” … They inspire the dreamers who turn the nation upside-down in the name of social justice.” (Morone: 5). “The idea of a redeemer nation still drives American politics. At first glance it appears to foster precisely the opposite of classical liberalism: moral politics rush into the private sphere, denying the boundary between public and private. The lawgiver suddenly has everything to do with vice and virtue. Private behavior becomes a public problem.” (Morone: 10).

**Challenges of being a nation of immigrants.**

Morone contends that “morality helps Americans answer those subversive questions at the heart of every community? Who belongs? Here’s where liberalism, community and morality reach their American symbiosis. Moral images set the boundaries around the liberal political process, around the American in ‘us’.” (Morone: 11).

“Every generation blames slack-virtued, un-American “them” for the social and economic problems in American society. At every turn another Jew or Chinese man steals (we used to say “shanghais”) our daughters or corrupts our land. Efforts to convert or control the dangerous “them” snap across the culture and remake the
regime.” (Morone: 3). How do Americans reign in these problematic peoples in order to preserve prosperity and virtue? “How do Americans get around all their constitutional safeguards and repress rivals, strangers, and scary others? Morality. … Each enemy clarified the settlers’ identity by demonstrating what they were not, what they must never become.” (Morone: 9).

“Each moral storm is unique. But across the crusading generations a rough cycle has evolved. First, groups spring up and try to convert the sinners they face. … But the stubborn sinners refuse to repent. … The second phase begins as reformers give up trying to persuade the incorrigibles. Instead, they turn to government and demand prohibitions. … After all, they see a nation teetering between right and wrong, salvation and perdition. Third, when moral campaigns break through and win, they leave their mark on the way government works. … campaigns leave deep legacies: they lead us to rewrite laws, reinterpret the Constitution, reshape the political culture, and create new public agencies.” Each era adds its variations to the moral cycle: persuasion → prohibition → state powers. (Morone: 11). “Moral trumpets call up deep-seated, bare-knuckle fights. Rights evaporate.” (Morone: 10).

Morone goes further in asserting that American moral campaigns to “improve the people” actually grew the government and its power and influence over citizens. He creates an image of a segregated American polity that needs much oversight and intervention if the providence of America is to be preserved. “The focus on sinners – not to say, predators—powerfully tilts the political debate. It sinks the communal urge by eroding our sense of common values and share fate. Instead, the policy problem turns to protecting us and controlling them.” (Morone: 17). “Reframe an issue as a moral cause and supporters being breaking down old rules and building up new ones. After all, a higher good lies in the balance.” (Morone: 24).

Day 7- Conservatism and the Economy
(Tuesday, May 23)


This selection from Milton Friedman was basically about the differences in efficiency of economies based upon the centralization of power in those economies. In other words, Friedman was comparing the efficiency of economies in Socialist societies to those in Capitalist societies. An example that he uses is the Soviet Union, explaining that they had severe problems with over and under-supplying goods. Comparatively, a less centrally controlled economy such as Yugoslavia was much more successful. Friedman believes that although more planning may go into the economies with central governmental control (such as the Soviet Union), these economies, in appearance, are more unplanned. Clearly Friedman is more in favor of capitalism and a free market economy.

In Culture Wars, Hunter makes the argument that despite Americans ability to recognize it, they are involved in a “deeply rooted and historically pivotal cultural conflict.” More simply, a culture war. He claims that this conflict can be traced back to Protestant hostility toward Catholicism in early modern American history. According to Hunter, America’s pluralistic nature gave/gives rise to a competition to define a social reality. This competition is between the minorities who are trying to carve their own place in American life and the Protestants and Protestant based populism who are “struggling” to maintain their advantage in “defining the habits of American culture.”

Hunter goes on to explain that this era of conflict is not coming to an end any time soon but rather it is taking shape along new lines. Hunter defines “cultural conflict” as, “political and social hostility rooted in different understandings of moral understanding.” He says that the conflict today is not the result of different theological and ecclesiastical views but rather it surrounds different worldviews. Though there is a range of issues debated in this “culture war,” from abortion and gay rights to education, the underlying factor is ultimately a matter of moral authority.

He cultural conservative also recognizes that while most Americans fall in the middle, there are two polarizing forces in America. The Orthodox and the Progressive. Hunter uses these respective terms as “formal properties of a belief system or world view.” He defines Orthodoxy as, “the commitment on the part of the adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority.” Progressivism then, tends to be defined by the spirit of the modern age, it is the “tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life. He addresses secularists and says that they are drawn to the orthodox particularly the secular conservative and neo-conservative intellectuals. Their commitment to natural law is a functional equivalent to the transcendent moral authority that is held so high by their Orthodox peers.

Hunter goes on to clarify that the in the orthodox impulse the cultural conservative is the dominant viewpoint. Secularists are usually more liberal or libertarian socially. Therefore he labels the two sides of the cultural war as moral conservatives or traditionalists and the liberals or cultural progressives.

He makes the claim that the differences in sides are not theological had that been true, the new alliances formed in the realignment, between groups that traditionally been agnostic towards one another, would not have been formed.

Hunter concludes with a number of “points of clarification” the first of which is that the culture war is not a matter of issues, it encompasses some issues however, the source of the conflict is, “found in different moral visions.” He also makes the clarification that it should not be viewed as a social referendum of presidents or their legacies. And finally that it is not a political/conservative debate or new church/old church debate. According to Hunter, “the culture war emerges over fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about the truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community and so on… [it] is ultimately a struggle over national identity.”


In this chapter, Evans discusses what he sees as the two general yet distinct Americas forming in the political climate. He first discusses the America people see through the media that demonstrates a liberal political world with liberal ideas solving problems and making it a better society. The second America is what Evans calls the “real” America. It is made of up actual people, most of whom are much more conservative then the first America would have one believe. 

Evans cites two examples of how the first America can distort the image of the “real America.” The first involves Republicans John Lindsay and Ronald Reagan. At the time, the former was running for Mayor of New York City while the latter was in a campaign for the Governorship of California. The media headlines and leads show the left-leaning member of the GOP, Lindsay, to be a rising star and the apparent future of the Republican Party. The latter, much more conservative Reagan was described as being an emotional wreck on the campaign trail whose opponents were picking up steam and whose political career was going nowhere. As Stanton points out, history has shown the opposite to be correct.

The second example highlights Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater seeking the 1964 Republican Presidential nomination. A campaign stop in Illinois by the liberal New Yorker was headlined as a rousing success when, in reality, it was a flop as none of the Republican Gubernatorial candidates wanted to be seen with the man seen as too much of a leftist for the core of conservative rural voters in their state.

Stanton concludes his argument saying the main reason for the media portraying liberals like Lindsay and Rockefeller in such a positive light was to drum up positive support for them to, in effect, “make them the favorites.” Given the liberal political climate of the 1960s, when this article was written, it is not very surprising. These values, however, were out of touch with much of the electorate and most of the Republican Party. These people would become the “silent majority” electing a Republican president into office in 1968.

Mark Brewer and Jeffrey Stonecash (2006) “Political Divisions in American Politics” in Class and Culture in American Politics. pp 1-22. *(will be distributed in class)

American politics is one that is heavily divided and to understand the overlying divisions one must examine the electoral bases and what the leading issues of each party tend to be. The article provides the basis of examining the two deviating sources of political affiliation being culture and class. The authors distinguish between culture and class by defining class as the means of taking advantage and gaining economic prosperity. Culture on the other hand, focuses on the role of government in defining personal practices. Stonecash and Brewer examine the initial causes of such a split and present the argument that there has been an inversion of class and culture and political ideology. It is important to determine what the public thinks so that to encourage a “responsive government.” Politicians, the press and interest groups must be clear of what the public thinks so that it can effectively carry out goals. Stonecash and Brewer argue that there are two interpretations of class and culture in the United States. One being that culture is replacing class and the other being that class is of rising importance. The first argument is presented by examining the New Deal to the Era of Civil Rights. The issue that surrounded economics has been replaced with issues revolving race. This seems to be the most general premise. When it comes to party politics of the past Democrats have been more associated with the working class and skilled labor this seems to have changed as more middle class workers tend to side with republicans. But as race became a greater issue, Democrats sided more with blacks which at times seems to have alienated middle class workers. This is one of the reasons presented that show how class was declining as a source of political division in American politics. There has been a transformation of political ideology that focuses more on progressive versus orthodox cultural reform. Stonecash and Brewer seem to agree that class is taking a more
important role within American politics. Stonecash uses polling data to show this. They state “…class divisions in electoral politics have increased and play a significant role in the partisan behavior of voters.”

Day 9- Conservatives in the Political System  
(Thursday, May 25)


Conservative USSC justices have long been known for their critique of “government by judiciary.” This fact was the reason many were surprised after the Florida recount in the Bush v. Gore election in 2000. Vote-counting in a democratic election represents precisely the sort of “political thicket” that conservatives had long urged courts to avoid. The standard conservative view of the Supreme Court has amounted to a critique of liberal “judicial activism” and a call for “judicial restraint” for decades, (Keck, 1). Many conservatives argue that the USSC justices actively enforce limits on governmental power where the original meaning of the Constitution text tells them directly to do so, and that they will deter to the political branches where the original meaning of the text is “silent,” (Keck, 2). An alternative explanation is a political one, some political scientists, for example, argue that the doctrine of judicial restraint is nothing more than a rhetorical cover for the judicial “deference” to policies that a justice happens to agree with, (Keck, 3). Both of these explanations are incomplete though. The fact remains that constitutional development does not happen with one smooth replacement of an existing constitutional order with an emergent one; all constitutional change proceeds upon ground prior constructed, (Keck, 4). Recently, justices O’Connor and Kennedy have been responsible for two of the most striking elements during Rehnquist Court’s constitutional jurisprudence: the survival of liberal activism, and the emergence of conservative activism, (Keck, 7). This is important to note because justices appointed by the Republican presidential coalition have been influenced by both modern conservative political ideals and interests, as well as the inherited traditions of constitutional discourse, (Keck, 8). Keck argues that the origins of contemporary judicial conservatism can be seen in both the ideological demands advanced by contemporary conservative political movements as well as in the critique of liberal activism, (Keck, 13). Keck’s book is written to help spark the conversations about the contemporary USSC and its actions, (Keck, 14).


Hacker and Pierson are concerned about the uneven polarization that is taking place in American politics today. They cite the Republican party’s remarkable success in achieving their principle goals in spite of the closeness of political divisions as their primary example. Hacker and Pierson believe that those who run our nation are committed to ideas that are at odds with the moderate center of American Opinion. The Republican party continues to move farther and farther right. Hacker and Pierson are concerned with the term polarization because it suggests and equal depart from the center by both parties. This is not the case at all. It is the Republican Party that is moving so far from the political center. Politicians are no longer scared to move from the center in fear that they will lose support of the moderate voters. Voters are becoming less and less informed and political leaders are feeling more and more confident that they
can achieve their very right of center policies without losing voter support. Hacker and Pierson acknowledge the existence of "New Power Brokers". These Power Brokers are Republicans that are very influential in policy making and committed to a conservative cause. Off-center policy making that departs from the center of public opinion is a real threat to democracy. Hacker and Pierson believe the way to overcome this, is by providing accurate and direct information to the voters.


Gottfried and Flemming covered a wide range of conservative trends and examples in their The Conservative Movement. The chapter assigned, Post Script: Reagan and Beyond, begins with 1980 and Reagan’s New Right initiatives. The Reagan administration was criticized by the remnants of the Old Right. This is because of Reagan’s inability to protect colonial regimes in countries such as South Africa. This ideal stems all the way to British colonization and manifest destiny. Southern conservatives also became disconnected with the Reagan presidency for not protecting the Mexican border and established Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday. Furthermore the New Right was associated with anti-Semitic scholars and writers of the time. Bigotry was threatening to poison the spirit of amity that developed in the 1970s’. However, the symbols of this time, freedom and equal opportunity, connected with many Americans and helped garner much blue-collar populist and ‘yuppie’ support. Concerns for the futures were based on the question: would the Republicans retain the populist support they had accumulated over the Nixon and Reagan year.