

512:318 and 790:349

Political Corruption in America

Fall 2017

Frelinghuysen Hall A5 Tuesday and Thursday 2:50 – 4:10 p.m.

Professor Richard L. McCormick

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Course Description

Political corruption has a long history in America. The same is true of efforts to combat corruption, often called **reform**. Indeed, many of the most important events and transformations in American history have been deeply entangled with corruption and reform: the American Revolution, the development of democracy, the Civil War and Reconstruction, Progressivism, the growth of the 20th century American state, and, throughout American history, the rise and triumph of a capitalist economy.

But corruption is not simple, and the meaning of corruption has changed over time. Our course will begin with the United States today. We will probably argue a bit about whether certain of today's political practices are corrupt and whether they should be reformed. Then, because this is a history course, we will turn to the past to look for answers and will trace the history of corruption and reform from the 18th century to the present.

Along the way we will see that some characteristics of corruption have remained familiar over time. These include greed, secrecy, and conspiracy; the exploitation of public office for private gain; the search for loopholes in the law; and the habit of hurling accusations of corruption against political enemies. Other features of corruption have changed, and many forms of behavior that used to be widely accepted are now severely proscribed. But corruption remains dangerously commonplace in America today, and some practices that are perfectly legal probably ought to be considered corrupt.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students will be expected to attend every class and to participate in class discussions. Each of the reading assignments listed below should be completed before the class in which it will be discussed. There will be unannounced quizzes covering the lectures and the reading approximately six times during the semester. Class discussions and quizzes will count altogether 30% toward the student's final grade.

Students will be required to write two five-page papers on a choice of topics to be assigned. In writing their papers, students should draw upon the assigned readings, classroom lectures and discussions, and (if appropriate) other relevant materials. **The papers will be due on the dates shown below** and should be submitted through the course website on Sakai (see below). A student who wishes to revise a paper and resubmit it for a potentially higher grade may do so, providing the paper is resubmitted within a week after it was first returned to the student. Each paper will count 20% toward the student's final grade.

There will be a final examination at the end of the course. The exam will count 30% toward the student's final grade.

Required Readings

The required readings for each week are listed below in the Weekly Schedule for the Course. I suggest that you purchase the four books listed here. They are available in paperback at the Rutgers Barnes & Noble Bookstore.

Lawrence Lessig, *Republic Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress—and a Plan to Stop It*

Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the America Revolution*

William L. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Watergate: A Brief History with Documents*

The additional required readings listed below are on the course website on Sakai.

During several of our classes, students will read and discuss documentary materials related to political corruption; these materials will be handed out in class.

Course Website

The course website is on Sakai <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>. Please log on to Sakai and make sure that you can access the Sakai site for the course. As noted above: (1) some of the assigned readings will be posted on Sakai and (2) students should submit the two assigned papers on Sakai. If you are having difficulty accessing the course website, please ask the Teaching Assistant, Andrew Salvati, for assistance.

Classroom Etiquette and Other Expectations

Students will be expected to arrive in class on time, to treat their fellow students respectfully, and to give their undivided attention to the work of our learning community for the duration of the class period.

A student who expects to miss a class for a compelling reason should inform either me or Andrew Salvati via email.

Cheating on tests or plagiarizing material in your papers deprives you of the educational benefits of preparing these assignments appropriately. It is also personally dishonest and unfair because it gives you an undeserved advantage over your fellow students who are graded on the basis of their own work. In this course cheating and plagiarism will be treated as the serious offenses they are. Suspected cases will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs.

Weekly Schedule for the Course

Week 1 September 5, 7

Introduction to political corruption

Corruption in the United States today

Read: Lessig, *Republic, Lost*, Preface and pages 1-39

Week 2 September 12, 14

Political corruption in early England

Corruption in colonial America

Read: Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, pages 22-93

Week 3 September 19, 21

The American Revolution to preserve liberty against corruption

Constitutional remedies for corruption

Read: Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, pages 94-159

Week 4 September 26, 28

Corruption in the Early Republic

Andrew Jackson and the “corrupt bargain”

Read: Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, Chapters 2 and 3 (Sakai)

Week 5 October 3, 5

Ante-bellum political parties and corruption

An era of corruption: The 1850s

Read: Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power*, Chapter 5 (Sakai)

G. S. Borritt, “Was Lincoln A Vulnerable Candidate in 1860?” (Sakai)

David E. Meerse, “Buchanan, Corruption, and the Election of 1860” (Sakai)

Week 6 October 10, 12

Corruption, slavery, and the Civil War

Corruption, race, and Reconstruction

Read: Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, Chapters 8 and 9 (Sakai)

Week 7 October 17, 19

Railroads and corruption

Urban party machines

First paper due on October 17

Week 8 October 24, 26

Political reform in the Gilded Age

Awakening to corruption in the Progressive Era

Read: Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

Week 9 October 31, November 2

Progressive political reforms

A turning point in the history of political corruption

Read: *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, Volume II, pages 365-373, 407-415, 443-449, 454-463, 470-481, 489-501 (Sakai)

Week 10 November 7, 9

Teapot Dome and corruption in the 1920s

The uses of political corruption in the 20th century

Read: Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*, Chapter 6 (Sakai)

Week 11 November 14, 16

A gallery of 20th century corruptionists: Frank Hague, Nucky Johnson, Robert Moses, Huey Long, Lyndon Johnson

Money in elections

Read: Lyle W. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses*, pages 3-20, 98-116 (Sakai)

Kutler, *Watergate*, pages 1-39

Week 12 November 21

Richard Nixon and Watergate

Read: Kutler, *Watergate*, pages 41-133

Week 13 November 28, 30

The effects of Watergate on politics and government

Scandal in modern American politics

Read: Kutler, *Watergate*, pages 135-206

Week 14 December 5, 7

Small **c** corruption in New York and New Jersey

Big **C** corruption in America today

Read: Lessig, *Republic Lost*, pages 41-124

Second paper due on December 5

Week 15 December 12

What can we do about corruption (in the light of history)?

Read: Lessig, *Republic Lost*, pages 125-247

The final examination for this course will be given during the regularly scheduled exam period. Information about the contents of the exam will be provided to students around a week beforehand, so they will have an opportunity to prepare well for the exam.