512:318 and 790:349

Political Corruption in America

Fall 2020

To Be Taught Remotely with Synchronous and Asynchronous Components

Zoom Sessions: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:50 – 4:10 p.m.

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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—and vice versa.   But corruption remains dangerously commonplace in America today, and some practices that are perfectly legal probably ought to be considered corrupt.

<u>A Summary of the Course's Synchronous and Asynchronous Components</u>

The class will meet synchronously via Zoom for discussions and break-out groups at the regularly scheduled times on Mondays and Wednesdays. I will divide the class into two equal groups of students. Each group will convene virtually for 40 minutes on both days. On Mondays Group A will go first, and on Wednesdays Group B will go first. Our discussions will cover the assigned readings, lectures, videos and other visual materials, most of which will be posted on the Canvas website for our course. Some of the reading assignments will be found in books to be purchased or consulted (virtually) at the Library. (See below for more details on the reading assignments).

Each week I will post two forty-minute lectures on the Canvas website. You should watch the first lecture before our Monday discussion and the second lecture before our Wednesday discussion. I will also post a lecture outline and very full notes for each lecture. You should refer to these as needed throughout the course. Most of the **assigned readings** will also be posted on our Canvas website, together with many other **visual materials**. You should complete the readings in accordance with the schedule below and view the visual materials as directed on the Canvas website.

Each student will be required to prepare **two brief writing assignments each week** and to post them on the Canvas website. Before each Monday discussion each student should write approximately one page of **Weekly Reflections** on whatever he or she finds most interesting and important in the lectures, readings, and visual materials. Students should write about whatever they want, and, if they see fit, make occasional comparisons between the historical events we will be studying and current events. I will read and comment on every student's Weekly Reflections, but I will not grade them.

Each student will also take an **open book quiz every week.** On Mondays I will ask a question that can be answered in a single paragraph (two paragraphs at most) using the course materials (lectures, readings, and videos) for that week. Students may refer to any of these materials while answering the quiz question, and they must post their answer no later than Friday. I will comment on the quizzes and grade them.

<u>Course Requirements and Grading</u>

Students will be expected to participate in our **class discussions** twice each week. The class discussions and weekly **quizzes** will count altogether 40% toward the student's final grade.

Students will be required to write **one five-page paper** on a choice of topics to be assigned or, in consultation with the instructor, on another topic of the student's choice.   In writing their papers, students may draw upon the assigned readings, lectures, videos, class discussions, and on Internet-based materials relevant to their paper topics. Papers should be submitted via the Canvas website on **November 11**. The paper will count 30% toward the student's final grade.

There will be a **final examination** at the end of the course. Detailed information about the exam will be provided to students about a week beforehand, so they will have an opportunity to prepare well for the exam.   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. Most of the readings will be posted on Canvas, but some of the readings will be found in the three books listed here. You should purchase these books at the Barnes & Noble Bookstore or online (where some inexpensive copies may be found).   Alternatively you may read these as ebooks on Library Reserve.

Lawrence Lessig, *Republic Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress—and a Plan to Stop It* (First edition, 2011)

William L. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

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

Course Website

The course website is on Canvas https://canvas.rutgers.edu.   Please log on to Canvas and make sure that you can access the Canvas site for the course. As noted above: (1) most, but not all, of the assigned readings will be posted on Canvas; and (2) students should submit all their written work via Canvas. If you are having difficulty accessing the course website, please ask the Teaching Assistant, Jackson Snellman, for help.

Classroom Etiquette and Other Expectations

Students will be expected to log onto our Zoom sessions on time 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 Jackson Snellman via email.

Plagiarizing someone else's material without attribution deprives you of the educational benefit of preparing your assignments yourself. Plagiarizing 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.

<u>Weekly Schedule for the Course</u>

Week 1 September 2

Introduction to political corruption

Week 2 September 8, 9

Corruption in the United States today

Political corruption in early England

Read (for September 8) Lessig, *Republic, Lost*, pages to be assigned

Week 3 September 14, 16

 Corruption in Colonial America

The American Revolution to preserve liberty against corruption

Read (for Sept. 14) John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters* Number 38 (on Canvas)
Read (for Sept. 16) John Adams, *Novanglus* (selected passages on Canvas)

Week 4 September 21, 23

 Constitutional remedies for corruption

 Corruption in the Early Republic

Read (for Sept. 21) The United States Constitution (selected passages on Canvas)
Read (for Sept. 23) John Taylor, *An Enquiry into the Principles and Tendency of Certain Public Measures* (selected passages on Canvas)

 Week 5 September 28, 20

 Andrew Jackson and the "corrupt bargain"

 Ante-bellum political parties and corruption

Read (for Sept. 28) John Eaton, *The Letters of Wyoming* (selected passages on Canvas)
Read (for Sept. 30) Jackson's Bank Veto Message (selected passages on Canvas)

Week 6   October 5, 7

An era of corruption: The 1850s

Corruption, slavery, and the Civil War

Read (for Oct. 5) Lincoln's "House Divided" Speech (selected passages on Canvas)
Read (for Oct. 7) G. S. Borritt, "Was Lincoln A Vulnerable Candidate in 1860?" **OR**
        David E. Meerse, "Buchanan, Corruption, and the Election of 1860" (on Canvas)

Week 7   October 12, 14

Corruption, race, and Reconstruction

Railroads and corruption

Read (for Oct. 12): Selected tracts on corruption during Reconstruction (on Canvas)

Week 8   October 19, 21

Urban party machines

Political reform in the Gilded Age

Read (for Oct. 19) Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, selected chapters to be assigned
Read (for Oct. 21) The 1892 Populist Party Platform (selected passages on Canvas)

Week 9   October 26. 28

Awakening to corruption in the Progressive Era

Progressive political reforms

Read (for Oct. 26) Theodore Roosevelt's message to Congress, January 31, 1908
(selected passages on Canvas)
Read (for Oct. 28) *Robert La Follette's Autobiography* (selected passages about
the direct primary on Canvas)

Week 10 November 2, 4

 A turning point in the history of political corruption

 Teapot Dome and corruption in the 1920s

 Read (for Nov. 4) Thomas J. Walsh, "What the Oil Inquiry Developed" (on Canvas)

Week 11   November 9, 11

The uses of political corruption in the 20th century

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

Paper due November 11

Week 12   November 16, 18

Money in elections

Richard Nixon and Watergate

Read (for November 18) Kutler, *Watergate*, pages to be assigned

Week 13   November 23

The effects of Watergate on Politics and Government

Read Kutler, *Watergate*, pages to be assigned

Week 14   November 30, December 2

Scandal in modern American politics

Small **c c**orruption in New York and New Jersey today

Read (for November 30) Lessig, *Republic, Lost*, pages to be assigned
Read (for December 2) Lessig, *Republic, Lost* pages to be assigned

Week 15   December 7, 9

Big **C C**orruption in America today

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

Read (for December 7) Lessig, *Republic, Lost*, pages to be assigned