The Institute for Constitutional History Seminar

New-York Historical Society

Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic Constitutionalism

Seminar Leaders: Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf

Schedule and Readings

Most of the Jefferson documents listed below may be found in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., Thomas Jefferson Writings (New York: Library of America, 1984).

* readings available on password-protected website

September 30: Law

(special guest: David T. Konig, Washington University)

I. Enlightened Reformer

2. Slavery

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* Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf, ‘Most Blessed of the Patriarchs’: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination (New York: Liveright, 2016), Chapters 2 (Plantation) and 3 (Virginia)


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Petition of George Mason for Warrants for Lands in Fincastle County [June 1774] http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22Petition%20of%20George%20Mason%20for%20Warrants%20for%20Lands%20in%20Fincastle%20County%22

TJ, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (any edition), Queries XIII (Constitution); XIV (Laws); XVII (Manners)

Bill to Enable Tenants in Fee Tail to Convey Their Lands in Fee Simple, Oct. 14, 1776 [http://founders.archives.gov/?q=Bill%20to%20Enable%20Tenants%20in%20Fee%20Simple][1]

Bill for Dividing the County of Fincastle into Three Distinct Counties, Oct. 26, 1776 [http://founders.archives.gov/?q=County%20of%20Fincastle][2]

*Revisal of the Laws*, reported June 18, 1779:

20. A Bill Directing the Course of Descents [http://founders.archives.gov/?q=Bill%20Directing%20the%20Course%20of%20Descents][3]


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**October 14: Nation and Race**

I. Nation-Making

II. Race-Making

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TJ, *Summary View of the Rights of British America* [July 1774] [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffsumm.asp][6]

October 21: Interpreting the Constitution

I. Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton

II. Jefferson and Marshall

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* Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf, ‘Most Blessed of the Patriarchs,’ chapter 6 (Politics)


Lance Banning, Jefferson and Madison: Three Conversations from the Founding (Madison: Madison House, 1995), chapters 1 (Parchment Barriers) and 3 (Public Spirit)


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Alexander Hamilton, Speech in the Constitutional Convention, June 18, 1787 (Madison’s version). http://founders.archives.gov/?q=Ancestor%3AARHN-01-04-02-0098&s=1511311111&r=3

Publius (Hamilton), Federalist (any edition) No. 78 (“The Least Dangerous Branch”)


TJ’s Fair Copy of the Kentucky Resolutions [before Oct. 4, 1798] http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22Jefferson%27s%20Fair%20Copy%22&s=1113111111&sa=&r=2&sr=

Compare with Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, Nov. 10, 1798 http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22Resolutions%20Adopted%20by%20the%20Kentucky%20Gener al%20Assembly%22&s=1113111111&sa=&r=1&sr=

TJ to Spencer Roane, Sept. 6, 1819 http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_8_18s16.html

November 11: Democracy

I. Presidential Power

II. Radicalism

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Banning, Jefferson and Madison: Three Conversations from the Founding, chapter 2 ("The Earth Belongs to the Living")


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TJ, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801 http://founders.archives.gov/?q=First%20Inaugural%20Address%20Author%3A%22Jefferson%2C%20Thomas%22&s=11113111111&sa=&r=1&sr=


TJ to Samuel Kercheval, July 12, 1816 http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/jefferson-the-works-vol-12-correspondence-and-papers-1816-1826