**James Madison’s Influence on American Politics**

A course offered through JMU and conducted at

Montpelier’s Robert H. Smith Center for the Constitution

2015-2016

Instructor on Record: Lynn Uzzell ([luzzell@montpelier.org](mailto:luzzell@montpelier.org))

Office hours: Instructor is available at all times via email

Instructor will be available to meet, formally or informally, during all Montpelier modules or email to arrange an appointment

*“Mr. Maddison is a character who has long been in public life; and what is very remarkable, every Person seems to acknowledge his greatness. He blends together the profound politician, with the Scholar. In the management of every great question he evidently took the lead in the Convention, … he always comes forward the best informed Man of any point in debate.”*

– William Pierce, describing James Madison’s contributions

to the Constitutional Convention, 1787

*“… notwithstand[ing] a thousand Faults and blunders, [James Madison’s] Administration has acquired more glory, and established more Union, than all his three Predecessors Washington Adams and Jefferson put together.”*

– John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, February 2, 1817

*“It is from such papers as [Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance”], that posterity will draw their maxims of Religious, as from the early papers of our Revolution, their axioms of political & civil Liberty.”*

– George Mason IV to James Madison, July 6, 1826

*“If Washington was the Father of our Country, Mr. Madison is entitled to be considered the Father of that Constitution, by which it has accomplished eminent prosperity and power.”*

– Charles Jared Ingersoll, from a toast delivered in 1827

**I. Course Description**

James Madison’s influence on America’s political system is enormous. Madison’s contemporaries understood his importance very well, but in today’s historical imagination, the bookish and soft-spoken politician is often overshadowed by the more regal Washington or the more flamboyant Jefferson. This course will attempt to pay the great political thinker and political operator his due: by probing his most significant contributions to American political thought and exploring the ways that those contributions have continued to shape our political activities and our political discourse to this day. The course will give special attention to two of Madison’s most important contributions to American politics—his defense of America’s unique approach to federalism and his influence on religious freedom—but it will also explore his political thinking more generally.

The instruction takes place in three 3-day modules, each one focusing on different aspects of Madison’s creative genius. These seminars will be held at Montpelier, the bucolic and inspiring home of James Madison, and offered through Montpelier’s Robert H. Smith Center for the Constitution. Each module includes lectures, activities, tours, meals, and accommodation, all on-site. Top-notch instructors drawn from colleges and universities ranging across the United States will do most of the teaching, but the instructor on record will be on hand at all of the modules; she will take part in some of the instruction; and she will superintend the course as a whole. Descriptions of the three modules are as follows:

**Module 1: American Federalism**

Taught by Gene Hickok, author of *Why States? The Challenge of Freedom*

October 23–25, 2015

Federalism is one of the animating themes in American constitutional history and politics. Born of compromise at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, it was the primary focus of the debate surrounding the ratification of the Constitution. Madison’s *Federalist* No. 39 was one of the most extensive expositions of this entirely new concept of federalism, and the debate over its meaning continued during the formative years of the Republic. The Civil War was, in part, a fight over the relationship of the national government and the states. The civil rights movement of the mid 20th century has been described as a struggle between those seeking equal rights and those seeking to protect “states’ rights.” The debate over the proper balance of power between Washington and the states continues to this day.  This seminar will explore the roots of that debate, how it has shaped American politics and history, and why the political principle of federalism still matters. For many, a respect for the authority of the states is essential to the maintenance of freedom and self-government. For others, states have come to be viewed primarily as administrative units of the national government. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in between. Understanding federalism from its inception can help us better understand many contemporary political disputes and perhaps provide some insights into how to resolve them.

**Module 2: Political Thought of James Madison**

Taught by Colleen Sheehan, Professor of Politics at Villanova University and author of *The Mind of James Madison: The Legacy of Classical Republicanism*

March 18–20, 2016

James Madison is often admired as one of the greatest political thinkers during the American Founding (indeed, some would argue that there has never been a greater exponent of America’s constitutional system). Today, pundits frequently appeal to him to settle contemporary controversies. But few people have a very comprehensive (sometimes not even an accurate) understanding of what Madison believed. This seminar will trace Madison’s thinking on a variety of political issues, such as: the separation of powers, constitutional government, popular government, the influence of government on public opinion and public opinion on government, constitutional interpretation, and slavery. We will also explore the enduring relevance of Madison’s political thought today.

**Module 3: Religious Freedom in America**

Taught by Vincent Phillip Muñoz, University of Notre Dame and author of *God and the Founders: Madison, Washington, and Jefferson*

July 20–22, 2016

James Madison made numerous contributions to America’s political understanding, and not least was his elucidation and defense of religious freedom. His dedication to the principle was spawned when he returned from college and witnessed firsthand the “diabolical Hell conceived principle of [religious] persecution” in his home state of Virginia. As a young college graduate in 1774, the powerless Madison merely “squabbled and scolded, abused and ridiculed” the persecutors, but he could do little to improve their lot. Later, as he gained influence, Madison would make his mark as the new nation’s most ardent defender of religious freedom. In Virginia, he framed the world’s first “free exercise” clause in that state’s Declaration of Rights; he thwarted Patrick Henry’s attempts to impose religious assessments by drafting his celebrated “Memorial and Remonstrance”; and he ensured passage of Thomas Jefferson’s Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. Later, when proposing amendments to the U.S. Constitution, he included safeguards for religious freedom in the First Amendment, and he even tried (unsuccessfully) to extend those protections to all state governments. No other Founder did more to promote the ideal of freedom of conscience.

This seminar will provide an expansive look at the development of religious freedom throughout American History. It will begin with the laws and practices of the original colonies prior to the American Founding, giving a faithful portrayal of the diversity of opinion regarding the proper relationship between Church and State at this time. It will give special emphasis, however, to the clauses in the Constitution relating to religious freedom and to the development of that principle throughout American history.

**II. Objectives of the Course**

By the end of the course, all students should be able to discuss intelligently the scope, depth, and enduring relevance of James Madison’s political thought. The student will be able to place Madison’s thinking in the context of his own time, and they will also be able to explain which parts of thinking have continued relevance, which parts have been altered by subsequent events, and which parts have completely fallen by the wayside. The student’s competency in the course material will be tested through the exams given at the conclusion of each module. But the student’s deeper grasp of the subject will be demonstrated in a research paper which addresses a complex question about a specific topic related to Madison’s political thought, a paper which analyzes and evaluates both primary and secondary source material to develop and defend its thesis.

**III. Assignments and Grading**

Because this course is based on Montpelier’s module schedule, it is not possible that the requirements for this course can be completed within the usual semester framework. The individual modules begin in the fall of 2015 and conclude the summer of 2016. Exams and papers are due as described below, and extensions on these assignments will be granted only for exigent circumstances and with the approval of the instructor on record.

**A. Online Course, Montpelier Modules, and Exams**

The student must actively participate in each of the three Montpelier modules. Upon completion of each of the three seminars, the student will take an open-book exam from home and send the answers by email to the instructor on record. The completed exam will be due 2 weeks after the completion of each module. Each exam will be worth 10% of the final grade (in other words, the three exams will constitute 30% of the overall grade).

**B. Final Paper**

After completing the module participation requirements, the student will write a scholarly 20-page research paper on a topic approved by the instructor on record. The instructor will provide the student with basic guidelines that delineate what a good essay should look like, as well as suggested paper topics, but students are encouraged to write on a topic of individual interest (so long as it relates to the course). Original paper topics must receive prior approval, but they are cheerfully accepted. The term paper is due August 5, 2016. The essay is worth 70% of the final grade.

**A Few Examples of Essay Topics:**

* How did James Madison’s thinking on “federalism” evolve over the course of his life? Explain in detail what he believed to be the relationship between state and federal governments as embodied in the Constitution. How did he believe that relationship needed to be maintained? Is today’s federalism the same as what James Madison described? If so, provide examples of these similarities. If not, name the dissimilarities and explain the historical reasons that explain why the United States departed from its original model.
* Explain Madison’s political approach to slavery. Give some account of his personal involvement in the institution, but give greater emphasis to his account of slavery as a political problem. Explain and evaluate Madison’s solutions to the problem of slavery. If they were they too timid or unrealistic, explain what political course would have been better. If they were reasonable given the circumstances, then explain the circumstances that prevented bolder measures.
* Where does Madison’s thinking on religious freedom fit into the diverse opinions on the subject developed during the Founding period. How did Madison’s thinking and actions influence religious freedom in America? Do Americans see religious freedom the same way today, or has the meaning of this right changed over time? Does it reflect Madison’s thinking above all, or does it reflect the thinking of someone else more?

**IV. Texts**

The reading material will be contained in reading packets to be read in preparation for the on-site modules. Each Montpelier module will provide a separate reading packet, which will be composed chiefly of primary documents, and which will be compiled by the instructor(s) leading that module and distributed to the participants three weeks prior to each module. The reading packet is included in the cost of the course. Below are representative examples of documents that would be required for the course:

* The Articles of Confederation
* The Constitution of the United States and of individual states
* Passages from political philosophers and jurists influential to the American Founding (Locke, Montesquieu, Blackstone, etc.)
* Selections from the notes of the debates during the Constitutional Convention, the ratifying conventions, or sessions of Congress
* Selected letters and speeches of James Madison
* Selected *Federalist* essays
* 2-3 Additional academic essays per module treating historical or theoretical aspects of the subject