

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY

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Part I : GOVERNMENT

Overview North American governments have been, in many cases, grand social experiments that have served as the model for other nations and communities. However, the idealistic notions that went into the structure of governance has often led to conflict and eventual collapse. In this unit, we will take a look at the changing face of governance throughout the history of North America.

ANCIENT PERIOD

Prehistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): Small tribal units organized around sustainable levels of population; primarily hunters and gatherers, with a great dependency on turtles.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AC): There were 70 or more Pueblo villages before the arrival of the Spaniards. Each was politically autonomous, and they were governed by tribal councils. The heads of the councils were also religious leaders. Many of the activities were communal, including farming and rabbit hunts.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): Clans were the smallest organizational unit, and they were grouped by village “bands.” Each village band had a Chief or Headsman, who was a part of the governing family lineage. The Iroquois formed confederacies with the different clans and village bands. The Eastern Algonquians maintained more autonomy. Ancestry was traced back through the females.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The governance was structured around a religious elite, who governed in conjunction with chiefs and chiefdoms. The highest rank was that of the “Paramount Chief,” who was able to demand tribute from the people. The lower-ranking elites were often related by blood to the Paramount Chief. Because the chiefdoms relied on authoritarian rule, they tended to dissolve or fragment when there were any threats to the Paramount Chief.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Native Americans: Native American tribes or groups were those separated by language, tradition, culture, and leadership. The tribes were governed by different bands, usually related by family, and they were self-sufficient. Some tribes selected their chiefs through councils, while others selected them based on their prowess in war and raiding.

French Colonial Empire: The French colonies in North America were governed by the king of France, who was an absolute monarch, and also by a strict notion of cultural uniqueness, resulting in the imposition of Christianity (Catholicism) and French culture. The French were interested in protecting trade routes and the acquisition of furs and other exportable items, and so they were quick to establish a court system and a rule of law. The ultimate authority rested in the King of France. The French set up a system of fortifications along the Mississippi River that also served as protected trading posts.

English Colonial Governments: The British colonies were divided into separate colonies, and each had its

Governor, court system, and systems of collecting taxes, as well as providing protection against attacks by Indians and the pesky French. The British government sought to encourage permanent settlements and the establishment of prosperous businesses that would result in increased wealth in Britain.

Spanish Colonial Governments: The Spanish monarchy was most interested in gold and silver, and so their system of government had much to do with establishing Viceroyalties and “latifundias” that maintained connections to Spain. Most important positions were filled by “peninsulares” (people from the Iberian Peninsula), and they were required to maintain order as well as to collect “la quinta” or the 20 percent tax on all production.

Dutch Governance: The Dutch established cities and trading networks along the Hudson River in the state of New York. Their goal was to establish trade as well as a financial network, which included joint stock companies. Much of New York City’s unique character was shaped by a sense of identity that based itself on creating joint stock companies and supporting trade networks.

Early Post-Revolutionary Government: The breakaway colonies formed a Continental Congress and a Continental Army. When the final battle of the Revolutionary War was fought (the Battle at Yorktown), and the Continental Army, together with French military members, Prussian mercenaries, and other, the United States was formed, which was in essence, a loose confederacy between the 13 colonies, now states. They were united through the U.S. Constitution, but the States preserved their right to have maintain control over local laws and government, although Federal government would supercede it.

Nineteenth Century

The United States of America: The early United States of America started with 13 states, but quickly grew as it added states. Unifying the States was often a messy affair due to the vastly different forms of economy and also the core values possessed by the framers of each individual State’s constitution. For example, the state of Virginia established itself as the Commonwealth of Virginia, and its legal framework is quite different than that of its neighbor, Maryland. Later, as some of the states prospered with new technologies allowing plantations to thrive, and other states started to become industrial, differences in the idea of labor, labor rights, the abolition of slavery, and competition for manufactured goods became very serious. The states eventually divided into the Union and the Confederacy.

The Union: The Union consisted of states above the Mason-Dixon line, and united by the idea of opposing slavery. In addition, Union core values tended to favor entrepreneurship, industrialization, employment for immigrants, and upward mobility.

The Confederacy: The southern states seceded from the Union in protest over what they considered to be an abrogation of states’ rights, which is to say that the states wished to maintain the ability to follow their own policies and laws over such items as taxation and slavery.

Communism and Socialism / Utopian Settlements: Independent communities have often set up their own governments within that of states and the United States as a whole. They have sought to establish their own mores, norms, and even laws. However, many have come in conflict with state and federal laws, usually in the rights of individuals (failure to protect minors, practicing polygamy).

Indian Nations: After a series of wars and then treaties, many Indian nations were removed to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), where they were divided into separate nations and given sovereignty. The nations such as the Cherokee went as far as to develop their own constitution written in their native language. Later, as the United States government seized lands or polluted waterways, the nations sued the government for broken treaties and tortious damages to tribal property. Lawsuits stemming from injustices and damages inflicted in the 19th century have been the foundation of some tribes’ prosperity.

Twentieth Century

Federal Government: The federal government expanded its influence in three important pulses in the 20th century. First, the anti-monopoly legislation and the breakup of the trusts into government-controlled smaller companies, in

conjunction with the establishment of the Federal Reserve System streamlined and connected businesses in ways that had not been connected before. Second, the New Deal of the 1930s which was designed to combat the Great Depression resulted in social safety nets, such as Social Security. In the 1960s, the War on Poverty and the Civil Rights movement resulted in the creation of new agencies, which administered federal funds to states and communities, thereby further influencing communities.

State Governments: Each state has its own constitution, and also its own three-part government, with an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch. There is a great deal of difference between the states. For example, the Louisiana judicial system is modeled after the French and is quite different than any other in the nation.

Tribal Nations: Indian nations are sovereign and have their own tribal governments, with an executive branch, a judicial branch, and a legislative branch. They are not subject to all the taxation or trade restrictions of the U.S. federal government, and so are able to sell tax-free cigarettes, establish casinos, and have other types of business. Individuals in the nations are often paid headrights.

City Governments: City and municipal governments are smaller units of government, tasked with providing infrastructure, protection, education, and the other services that a community wishes to fund through tax dollars, which could include hospitals, clinics, recreation centers, family welfare centers, and more. City governments have many different structures. Most have either a mayor as the chief executive officer or a city manager.

Judicial Branch: The judicial system is a system of courts designed to administer the law and to provide both punishment and protection under the law. The judicial branch is a part of checks and balances, designed to keep one group from dominating the others.

Legislative Branch: This is the law-making side of the government. In it, lawmakers pass laws. In the federal government, the bicameral system means that there is a House of Representatives and a Senate. In many states, there is only a single group of legislators, called, in some states, “assemblymen.” In other states, there are two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Executive Branch: In the early years of the United States, the Executive Branch was smaller than the other branches, and the President had limited power. However, in the 20th century, the Executive Branch has expanded to the point that it intrudes into the other branches of government because it is able, through its cabinets, agencies, and Executive Orders, to pass regulations (which are forms of legislation) and to enforce the regulations with fines, injunctions, and even prison sentences. The power and disproportionate size of the 21st century Executive Branch has set the stage for a dictator or autocrat to run the country, with only fragile and dysfunctional judicial and legislative branches to resist them.

Discussion/Questions

1. The early societies in North America flourished when they had responsive systems of organization that allowed them to be flexible. For example, the clans and tribal groups in the northeast were able to establish confederacies that allowed them to trade with each other and also provide defense against common enemies. Discuss how and why having religious leaders made sense in their agriculturally-based economies.
2. The colonial governments were required to serve the needs of the imperial nations. For example, the French government benefited from trade networks that yielded very valuable furs as well as being able to establish control over waterways such as the Mississippi River. The British empire was dependent upon taxes to subsidize a series of very expensive wars. The Spanish relied on the quinta (20 percent tax) for their expenses at home. Describe how a dependency on funds from the colonies led to mistrust and poor relations between the colonists and the colonizing nations.
3. In the 19th century, conflicts over the right that the federal government had to exercise control over a state, community, or group of people led to profound differences and conflicts. The conflicts included those between the North and South states, conflicts with utopian communities, and also with Indian nations. Please select four examples of conflicts and describe the reason for the differences of philosophy, and what the ultimate outcomes were.

4. In the 20th century, populist and grassroots movements have had profound effects on the structure and rights of the government. Take a look at the following movements: Anti-Trust, the New Deal, Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty. Describe the impact that each had on the structure of the government, and the way it interacts with its people.

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Part II : MILITARY

Overview North American civilizations have required security – from protecting themselves to aggressively

ANCIENT PERIOD

PreHistory

Clovis culture (18,000 – 8,000 BC): Although the main source of information about the Clovis people comes from Clovis, New Mexico, there is evidence of two separate groups of Clovis people who came from Asia across the Bering Strait (which was a land bridge at that time). They were well known for their finely crafted obsidian and flint arrow points, knives, and daggers. Because of the juxtaposition of skeletons and arrow points, there is some evidence that warriors raiding other tribes, stealing resources and potentially kidnapping members for either tribal genetic enhancement or human sacrifice.

Arctic Inuit (The Dorset People): There is evidence that prehistoric Inuit whalers had an impact on Arctic freshwater systems. There is evidence of organized hunts and fishing expeditions. The Dorset people believed in animal spirits who could help them be more effective hunters, and they carved hunting weapons such as harpoons in a way to try to imbue them with magical properties. For example, the harpoon could be carved in the shape of a flying bear, intended to strike the target with a great deal of force. There is no evidence that the harpoons were used against people.

Classical

Southwest Pueblo (1200 BCE – 1300 AD): Cliff dwellers in the American Southwest (Colorado, New Mexico) constructed kivas (living spaces) in the cliffs and they were considered sacred. Each kiva had a separate function, and were inhabited by different types of people. There were tower or citadel kivas where warriors lived. They constructed holes in the walls through which they could shoot arrows, and could follow commands of the warrior in chief. The military function was primarily defensive.

Eastern Woodlands (1000 BCE – 1000 AD): The Abenaki people were typical of the indigenous peoples living in the eastern woodlands. They practiced subsistence farming in what is now Quebec, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and northern New York. They hunted, fished, trapped, picked berries, and grew corn, beans, squash, potatoes, and tobacco. They also wove baskets from local sweet grass. Known as the “People in the Rising Sun,” the Abenaki had no military or warrior classes until the arrival of the French and the English, who wanted their lands, as well as help in obtaining furs and driving away rivals.

Mississippian (800 – 1500 AD): The Mississippian culture was very sophisticated, and had mastered the construction of extremely complex engineered earthworks, pyramids, drainage systems, and waterworks. Their economy was reliant upon trade, and both the trade routes and the territories were coveted, not just for access to supply of goods, but also as markets. So, there were warriors and a standing military that functioned to protect the trade routes. Similar activities occurred in contemporaneous cultures such as the Toltecs and Maya, to the south.

Colonial (Early Modern)

Eastern Woodlands Native Americans: The Native Americans in the Eastern Woodlands of northeastern North America were militarized by the French, who used them to attack the English who were competing for the territory. The French also attacked the Native Americans at times when they were not able to completely subjugate the Native Americans so that they provided furs and assistance in their own exploration and trapping ventures.

Continental North America Native Americans: Although some of the tribes created confederations in order to bolster their force size and impact and they strategically planned attacks on settlers and English / French troops, in general the Native Americans were positioned as underdogs and their stance was largely defensive. They were simply trying to keep from having their lands confiscated and their peoples enslaved or humiliated.

Spanish / English conflicts in the South: At first, some of the local tribes which came in contact with the Spanish explorers offered hospitality. After word spread of the Spanish explorers’ disappointingly bloodthirsty and culture-extermimating interactions in New Spain (Mexico), the local tribes did everything possible to defend their territories and their way of life. They were not successful in the end, but they were a feared and fearful adversary, mainly through their skillful use of guerrilla tactics and their adept use of gruesome tactics which were highly effective in psychological warfare.

Revolutionary War -- new methods: Perhaps developed from masters in the tactic, the Eastern Woodlands tribes during the French-Indian wars, guerrilla warfare, was adopted by the Continental Army. While some of the Continental Army followed the agreed upon Rules of Engagement, many did not. The Continental Army was the most formal. They had uniforms and even were paid stipends by the States. They were issued uniforms and weapons, and many were well funded. However, the American Militia troops were in a different category. Hessian (German) mercenaries constituted around one-third of the combatants on the side of the Colonists (the belligerents). They were paid by the German government, who loaned money to the Americans. French soldiers also served, and were regarded by all as the most decent and unlikely to commit war atrocities or steal property from civilians. They were provided by Louis XVI, who was promised repayment (it never happened, and the Americans never paid their debt). Finally, Americans at home got caught up in the war. Many of the American citizen-soldiers wore home-spun clothing. They were self-funded, and often gained their weapons by attacking the British and stealing their supplies. They had a reputation for cruelty. In addition to other guerrilla techniques both the Continental Army and the American Militia relied heavily on spies and spy networks

Black Market and Informal Trading Networks: Outlaws, Pirates, Buccaneers, Corsairs: The informal economy (contraband, smuggling, piracy, counterfeiting) thrived in the loose and lawless new nation and its territories. Because of the fragile fabric of self-defense in the colonial era and the early years of the new Republic, it was often necessary for the criminal (or at least illicit) enterprises to have their own security. In many cases, the security for the criminal enterprises was much better funded, manned, and equipped than the military forces that were supposed to keep criminal activity at bay.,

Nineteenth Century

War of 1812: The War of 1812 was between England and the United States, and represented unfinished business with respect to territorial disputes along the border between the U.S. and Canada. It is important because it was a proving ground for the new U.S. Navy, and represented control over the Mississippi River in the Battle of New Orleans. However, most textbooks do not mention that both this war and the Revolutionary War were marked by atrocities committed by both the U.S. and the British troops. They included sexual assault, the burning of civilian property, and theft of civilian property.

Mexican-American War: General Santa Anna was considered one of the leaders who most failed the newly independent nation of Mexico. He made critical military mistakes which resulted in strategic defeats with the Texas Revolution (triggered by Santa Anna's repeal of the Mexican Constitution, and increasing taxes on the area now known as Texas, which was part of the nation of Mexico), and then later in battles with the U.S. military (navy and army) from 1846-48. Santa Anna's leadership meant Mexico lost one third of its territory to the U.S. Santa Anna had to flee Mexico after 1848 and live in exile in Cuba.

Forts and the American West: The U.S. Army expanded throughout the American West by means of a series of forts that were designed to protect settlers from attacks by Indians. The fort system was innovative because it allowed local solutions for local problems. The forts became important for protection and also as locations for future bases for training and housing of regular troops.

Civil War (1861-1865): The American Civil War was a long time in the making, and it had to do with a conflict between those States that accepted federal control, versus states that wanted more autonomy. At the heart of the issue was a moral and economic one: slavery. The industrial North was against slavery, not only on moral grounds, but because of fears of labor price competition. The war was remarkable for its brutality, thanks to the use of new technology such as the Gatling Gun (early machine gun) and new types of mortars and bombs. Further, a new "scorched earth" policy of the North resulted in a wide swath of plantations, homes, and cities burned to the ground. When the South finally surrendered, 640,000 soldiers died. There were many civilian deaths, and several million refugees, who moved to Texas and the American West.

Spanish-American War (1898): This war, fought between the United States and Spain for control of far-flung island nations (Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, among others) was unique in that it was the first one to be instigated and fomented by "yellow journalism" – inflammatory, incendiary journalism by a newspaper magnate who had a vested interest in the war. The war had vicious battles in conditions where malaria, yellow fever, dengue and other tropical diseases took their toll. The United States prevailed, which was a very important step in making the United States an empire.

Twentieth Century

War in Central America / Mexico: The Mexican Civil War included many skirmishes on the border of Mexico. Large corporations and oligopolies took advantage of the state of chaos in Mexico and invaded the Gulf of Mexico port of Veracruz with the aim of gaining control of oil and gas resources. For the most part, the efforts of the Americans was rebuffed. The Mexican attacks were led by Pancho Villa, who combined the tactics of vigilante avengers with those of a militia.

World War I: The American participation in World War I resulted in a number of military innovations, including improved submarines, airplanes, and different types of chemical warfare. Not all innovations were destructive; in World War I, more effective gas masks were developed, and for the first time, motorized vehicles were used to transport equipment, troops, and supplies.

FBI / Al Capone -- Prohibition - organized crime wars: Federal Bureau of Investigation came into prominence starting with Prohibition (making alcohol illegal) during the 1920s. The FBI was unique in that it was essentially a Federal law enforcement agency, with jurisdiction for the entire country, making coordination much more efficient.

World War II: Rocketry, radar, aircraft carriers, and nuclear weaponry are generally viewed as groundbreaking technologies in World War II. In addition, new fabrics were developed such as rayon, which could be used for parachutes and other pieces of equipment used during the war.

Korean War: The U.S. involvement in the Korean War was a time of technological advancement. During the 3-year war, the U.S. dramatically increased its use of helicopters, particularly in medical evacuations and to deliver key supplies to isolated pockets of military personnel. Battlefield medicine was revolutionized by the use of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit, combined with the aeromedical evacuation. In the Korean War, the fatality rate for seriously wounded soldiers was cut to a new low: 2.5 percent.

Cold War: The Cold War, which was both an arms / influence race and a complex spy game, saw breakthroughs in the use of satellite technologies, various types of surveillance technologies. The production of propaganda was an important area of contention, with both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. participating in both open and sub rosa operations. For example, student rebellions were often subsidized by communist coffers.

Vietnam War: The justification for United States involvement in the Vietnam War was the “domino theory” – the U.S. needed to help countries resist communist infiltration and domination. In many ways, the Vietnam War was an unethical “proxy war” and one of the first of its kind. In it, the main entities in conflict (Communist China, the Soviet Union vs. the United States) fought their conflict in a smaller country (Vietnam). The cruelty of this approach was not lost on anyone, and it was a war which provoked a great deal of protest. However unethical the proxy war might be, however, no one seemed to prefer direct nuclear conflict with the two main belligerents.

Desert Storm: A war fought over directional drilling (supposedly Iraq was using new directional drilling techniques to burrow under Kuwait and tap into their vast oil reservoirs), it there were questions from the beginning why the U.S. should be involved. So, this war was one of the first where the U.S. was supposedly the prominent global police force. It was also one that was remote-controlled, with rockets and other weapons launched via computer from remote control centers. There were other firsts as well: this was a war that was broadcast live on CNN, What was broadcast was a fireworks display of primarily rocket attacks, which gave it a rather sterile, bloodless character.

War on Drugs: Accompanied by publicity “Just Say “NO” and the spectacle of Nancy Reagan, the so-called “War on Drugs” was spectacularly unsuccessful if the real goal was to reduce the level of drug addiction as well as the activity of narcotraffickers in the U.S. What made this law enforcement effort, dubbed a “war” unique was the way in which satellite imagery based on hyperspectral, multispectral, and infrared sensors, was used to detect marijuana and poppy cultivation, as well as the location of rural methamphetamine labs.

Discussion/Questions

1. The Olmecs and other Mesoamerican economies were more complex than they might appear, and their success had much to do with their militarism. Open trade routes and the health of manufacturing required a well-equipped and prepared security force. Describe the dependence of the Olmecs on their war-like stance.
2. The Incas “franchised” their brand through an extensive confederation of city states, tribes, and outlying groups. Trade networks were held together by common beliefs, but more than that, by their “quipus”, the knotted string accounting, messaging, and inventorying system that allowed the groups to communicate by means of the language of math and calculations. Describe the potential strengths and weaknesses of an economy based primarily on relationships and accounting.
3. In the 19th century, the leaders of countries like Paraguay believed that isolating their populace from the outside world would strengthen it and make it less likely to be corrupted by outside influences. Import restrictions stimulated the production of import substitutions, such as the hand-tatted “spiderweb lace” (called “ñanduti” in native Guaraní) and other artisan items. However, there were several disadvantages to isolationism. Please describe a few of them.
4. In certain parts of Colombia during the height of the cartels, the underground “informal” economy was much larger than the formal economy. What this meant in functional terms was that while there was some circulation of the money used in trafficking (money spent in food, fiestas, rent, clothing, transportation, etc.), the flows were not official, and it was impossible to properly apply an income tax or to assure that the business contributed to the general good. Explain why it is problematic for a country to have informal trade networks (cartels, etc.) and discuss

how they can have a devastating impact on legitimate trade.

Guiding Questions

1. The first need for military forces had to do with protection. The protection had to do with communities, but also with the lifelines, which is to say trade routes. Describe how the early North American civilizations protected their communities and their trade routes.
2. The American Revolution was fought by regular military forces (the Continental Army and the British), but it was won by informal forces – the Prussian mercenaries, the French consignees, and finally, the militia, which consisted of a ragtag collection of pioneers defending their own homes. Explain the ways in which the British forces had difficulties in winning the war.
3. The American Civil War is often described as a war over slavery. But, that's just part of the explanation. Explain how the economic realities of immigration, industrialization, plantation economies, and vertical integration (ownership of the raw materials, the factories, and the distribution) made conflict almost inevitable.
4. Describe the role of technology in WWI and WWII. How did the U.S. contribute to technological changes in warfare?
5. Describe the role of surveillance in the Cold War and also in subsequent wars or police actions.

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