

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION

It is hard for many to appreciate that American Democracy, contrary to our self-perpetuated myths regarding its existence, was and continues to develop and evolve, albeit on the foundation laid down by a group of exceptional men and some women, who believed passionately in the ideals and ideas of the Enlightenment.

It is often against this myth of American Democracy that the relatively new nation-states of Africa are compared as they struggle to create or coalesce national institutions and the state administrative capacity for implementation of democratic/representative governance.

The following readings begin with some background on building the institutional structure for democracy in the United States, and England. The importance of institutions, defined as rule based behaviors that have been normalized/adopted by the group, and the evolution of institutions is important. Therefore I have included readings on group/associative behavior and collective action. Without understanding the reason(s) individuals choose to form into associative groups and undertake collective action at the micro level, we may fail to appreciate the obstacles we face when trying to engage at a macro level for purposes of democratic state building.

For purposes of the discussion I recommend the following:

1. Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787 (Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier (First Ballantine Books Edition) (1987 or subsequent years.) Chapter 23 entitled "The Most Remarkable Work". I can make copies of this chapter available.
2. Empirical Studies in Institutional Change Edited by (L.J. Alston, T. Eggerstsson and D. North) Cambridge University Press (1997): Chapter entitled "Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century England" I can make copies of this chapter available.
3. Associations and Democracy (Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers) (Verso 1995). Chapter One: A proposal for Reconstructing Democratic Institutions. I can make copies of this chapter available.
4. Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action (Elinor Ostrom) (Cambridge University Press 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995). Chapter 1: Reflections On the Commons-The tragedy of the commons; The prisoner's dilemma; The logic of collective action. I can make copies of this chapter available.
5. The materials will be sent o volunteers separately.

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