

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Class Notes

I. "Democracy is . . . ?"

- A. **Democracy** - rule by the people; the people hold sovereign power
1. Direct Democracy - people decide all issues with direct voting on every issue EX: New England town meetings; Switzerland
 2. Representative Democracy - small group of officials elected to represent the people
 3. Republic - Roman term - describes any government in which the people exercise their political power through elected representatives, and no public offices are inherited).
*The U.S. is both a democracy and a republic.
- B. Basic Ideals /Values of Democracy
1. *Popular Consent or Popular Sovereignty* - government derives its powers from the consent of the people it governs
 2. *Respect for the Individual* - every individual has the potential for common sense, rationality and fairness and are entitled to "certain unalienable rights"
 3. *Equality of Opportunity* - "all men are created equal," but what kind of equality? Economic, political, legal, social?
 4. *Personal Liberty* - "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" >>> self-determination

II. Democracy and Power: What is power, who has it and how they use it

- A. Four "Power" Theories
1. Marxist Theory - govt. is a reflection of economic forces, primarily ownership of means of production: Economic Capitalist (*bourgeoisie*) v. workers, farmers (*proletariat*)
 2. Elite Theory (C. Wright Mills) - govt. controlled by a few, very powerful elite >>> corporate leaders, military leaders, small group of key political leaders, key people in the media (ex: Rupert Murdoch)
 - Counterculture of the 1960s referred to the elite as "The Establishment;"
 - President Eisenhower in his Farewell Address in 1961 warned of the corrupting power and influence of the "military industrial complex"
 3. Bureaucratic Theory (sociologist Max Weber) - appointed, not elected government officials control government >>> government agencies like Dept of Agriculture, Commerce, that carry on a day-to-day basis because government institutions have become so complex
 4. Pluralist Theory - resources (money, prestige, access to media) so widely scattered in our society that no single elite has a monopoly >>> competing interest groups