The Center Page

A LOOK AT THE CENTENNIAL CENTER FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Centennial Center for Political Science and Public Affairs is an invaluable resource to political and social scientists. Since its opening in September 2003, the Center has housed more than 100 scholars. The center, located in the APSA headquarters near Dupont Circle, provides a great base of operations for scholars researching in the DC metro area. The Center offers visiting scholars furnished work space, telephone, fax, computers, Internet access, conference space, a reference library, and access to George Washington University's Gelman Library. Visiting scholar stays range from a few days to 12 months. Space is limited to APSA members and is available for faculty members, postdoctoral fellows, and advanced graduate students from the United States and abroad. Scholars are expected to cover their own expenses and a modest facilities fee for the use of the center. Prospective visiting scholars may apply at any time. Positions are awarded on a space-available basis. Full details on the center and the Visiting Scholars Program are online at http://www.apsanet.org/centennialcenter. You may also contact Veronica Jones at APSA: (202) 483-2512; vjones@apsanet.org.

APSA Centennial Center: My Sabbatical Home Away From Home

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Only a few months into my first sabbatical leave from the history department at the University of Virginia, my husband accepted a new job and we unexpectedly decided to relocate to Washington, DC. Knowing how important community is to productive scholarship, I scrambled to find an office in the DC area, but I had already missed every fellowship deadline in my field. Then a contact at a DC think tank mentioned APSA's Centennial Center, which had ample room for scholars in the marvelous neighborhood of Dupont Circle.

Though I am a historian rather than a political scientist, my specialty is American political history. My first book, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford, 2009), is an intellectual biography of the famous libertarian novelist and philosopher that charts her influence upon the conservative movement and her impact on seminal figures like Alan Greenspan. For years, I've been a regular at the Policy History Conference, a semi-annual conference at which historians and political scientists meet, greet, and collaborate. Through seminars and talks sponsored by UVA's Miller Center of Public Affairs, I have come to appreciate the overlap between political science and history and how the border between the two disciplines can be the site of innovative scholarship and unexpected insight. For all these reasons, I thought that a residency at the Centennial Center would be immensely beneficial to my work, and I was thrilled when APSA accepted my application for a 10-month stay and offered me additional support through the Warren Miller Fellowship for Electoral Affairs.

At the Centennial Center, I've found the time and resources needed to transition from one major project to the next. Rand drew my attention because she was the rare intellectual who managed to create a social movement around her ideas. I was also intrigued by how her ideas about religion and morality clashed with the beliefs of many conservatives, even as their economic ideas were similar. My next work builds on these dynamics to examine the longer history of American conservative thought and the political coalition that underlies its success.

Modern American conservatism has often been described as a "marriage of convenience" between free-market thinkers and conservative Christians who are brought together on the grounds of political expediency. As such, the durability and cohesiveness of political conservatism is always subject to question, particularly by liberal commentators. But periodically, libertarians, too, become restive with this political alliance, and conservatives worry about a "conservative crack up." At these moments of crisis, both conservatives and their opponents wonder how long this unstable coalition can last.

My project looks beyond these periodic rumblings to the longer history of Anglo-American thought, tracing out the ways in which free market thought and Christian social beliefs came to be seen as reinforcing rather than contradictory. Although there is a rich literature on the historic origins and development of progressivism, little scholarly work has been done on the other side of this story. I begin my inquiry by tracing the shifting fortunes of a key intellectual concept, the idea of objective truth. In the late nineteenth century, the idea of objective, unitary truth was undermined by developments in science, particularly Darwinian evolution, which transformed the intellectual landscape. By the close of the nineteenth century, most intellectual elites had signed on to the modernist questioning of absolutes, which would culminate in a political philosophy of liberalism that was experimental, experiential, and fundamentally pragmatic. Standing alone in defense of the older ideal of objective truth were two significant parties:

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