Constitutional Errors: What the "Founding Fathers" Got Wrong

a discussion with

Joseph White Ph.D.,
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September 6 2019 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.
Kelvin Smith Library Room LL06, 11201 Euclid Ave

"Constitution Day" approaches, and universities around the country are required to offer programs about the founding document of the United States. Normally, as at CWRU, they focus on constitutional law and questions of interpretation, rights, or liberties.

Joe White helps sponsor our program, but he worries about sending the wrong message. After all, the U.S. political system does not look so good at the moment, and that might have some relationship to the constitution.

Over the centuries many reformers have said the constitution was flawed. But if you read the Federalist Papers, the authors sure seem like exceedingly smart and practical people. They were not dealing with an ideal world, and critics should not hope to be. For example, Madison made very interesting excuses for how the Senate is apportioned, but also said up front that each state had two senators because that was the only way to form a United States. His discussions of political ambition and divisions remain classics that professors keep assigning for good reason.

Yet he and his colleagues did misjudge how the system they designed would work. Some errors are obvious: expectations about how the electoral college would work were disproved as soon as Washington stepped down. Others were undone by the founders themselves, who quickly created political parties. And some are more subtle: how could a system justified as blocking selfish special interests encourage so many interest groups? So Joe will suggest what the brilliant men who wrote the Federalist missed, and what that means for us.

The Friday Public Affairs Discussion Lunch is an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, emeriti and other members of our communities to learn and question each other about public policy issues at the international, national, and local levels. Faculty and other speakers share their research and experience to get beyond the headlines and repetition in the mass media, and the wild rumors of the internet. Lunch is brown bag, but cookies and some beverages are provided by the Center for Policy Studies of the College of Arts and Sciences.

http://fridaylunch.case.edu/