Study Questions for Abbott, *Political Thought in America*

**Introduction**

I1. What is the central premise of this book?

I2. What *American traditions of discourse (Languages)* does Abbott identify and explain? How do they relate to the central premise of the book? Why does he emphasize only three of the five identified and do you agree with him?

I3. What is the “basic and often unintentional consensus” (*common moorings*) of the *Three Traditions*? Why is this consensus important?

I4. What are the nine major crises of American political thought and how do they relate to the central premise of the book?

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**Chapter 1 – Inventing New Communities**

1-1. What are the three settlements used to capture the essence of the American colonial experience as “experiments” in *invented community*?

1-2. What were the political, economic, and religious conflicts to which each of America’s *invented communities* owes its initial formulation?

1-3. Why was *unity achieved through persuasion and consensus* such an important feature in the Massachusetts Colony? What practices were employed to foster unity? Why were Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams regarded as such serious threats to unity?

1-4. What sort of community did the Quakers seek to establish in Pennsylvania and why, eventually, did they largely have to withdraw from public life in the communities they invented?

1-5. How was the Virginia Colony similar to those founded in the North—yet ultimately very distinctive?

1-6. In what sense did these “invented” communities fail?

1-7. What were the long-term influences of the three invented communities upon American political culture?

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**Chapter 2 – Revolution**

2-1. Why was America an exception to the “natural history of modern revolution”?

2-2. What common elements of Western political thought produce *American Republicanism*?
2-3. What were the varieties of republicanism found in America and how were these reflected in the protests of Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia?

2-4. What American Republican Synthesis eventually produced a “republican consensus”?

2-5. What was the Loyalist Critique of the republican consensus?

2-6. What are the “several consequences” for subsequent political theory produced by the special character of the American Revolution?

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Chapter 3 – Founding

3-1. What is a Founding? What were the First and Second American Foundings?

3-2. Why are John Adams’s Defence of the Constitutions of the United States (1776) and James Madison’s “Vices of the Political System of the United States” (1787) important?

3-3. What are the 3-major interpretations of the Constitutional Convention as a new founding?

3-4. What are the major arguments offered in The Federalist?

3-5. What are the major arguments offered in Letters of a Federal Farmer?

3-6. Abbott concludes, “Republicanism lost in 1787.” What does he mean? If Republicanism lost, what won?

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Chapter 4 – Faction

4-1. Why did national factions emerge despite the hostility of prominent Americans to them?

4-2. What were the basic principles of Federalist political thought?

4-3. What were the basic principles of Republican political thought?

4-4. What were the basic principles of the Democratic political thought?

4-5. What were the basic principles of Whig political thought?

4-6. These parties held what “basic consensual beliefs”?

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Chapter 5 – Civil War

5.1 What are the “three primary forms of political thought” that help us understand the conflict that led to the Civil War?

5.2 What were the “staggering constitutional, economic, political, and moral problems” that created the “Dilemma of Reconstruction”?

5.3 What is the “enduring legacy” to Lincoln’s political thought? What liabilities adhere to Lincoln’s “political religion”?

5.4 What does the experience of Reconstruction illustrate?

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Chapter 6 – Industrialization

6.1. How did the “New America” that emerged from the Civil War challenge “republican virtue”?

6.2. What was “Social Darwinism” and what was its promise?

6.3. How was Social Darwinism “Americanized”?

6.4. What was “Applied Social Darwinism”?

6.5. What were the three challenges to Social Darwinism that arose in America and what were their principles?

6.6. In what sense can it be said that the New America came to resemble Rome rather than Greece?

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Chapter 7 – Depression

7-1. What are the types of events in a nation’s history that are so “traumatic” that they produce sudden massive changes in its belief system?

7-2. What “symbols of American political culture” were smashed by the Depression?

7-3. What was Herbert Hoover’s contribution to American political thought and why has it gone largely unacknowledged and unappreciated?
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7-4. What three classic works of American political thought emerged from the early Depression-era crisis over the “value of individualism” and what were their central ideas?

7-5. How did FDR use the American political tradition in articulating his approach to dealing with the Depression? Why was he so successful?

7-6. Who were the major critics of the New Deal and what were their basic criticisms? Why did they “fail”? In the end, FDR and the “New Dealers” won—why?

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Chapter 8 – Cold War

8-1. Who were the “Cold Warriors” of American political thought?

8-2. Who were the Cold War critics?

8-3. What were the two strands of American political thought synthesized by Reagan to form the *Reagan Revolution*?

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Chapter 9 – Discrimination

9-1. What are the “four pillars” that must be “exposed” by political theorists in order effectively to protest against a discriminatory system?

9-2. What are the central tenets of the political thought supporting black protest?

9-3. What are the central tenets of the political thought supporting feminist protest?

9-4. What difficult dilemma do theorists of political protest almost always confront?

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