John Vile’s Suggested Readings for Osher class on U.S. Constitution

**Formative documents:**

I took most of my first lecture from a book that I am preparing for ABC-CLIO entitled *Documents Decoded: The Founding Period*, but it has not yet been published.

The best account of the actual deliberations at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 is a 4-volume work (available in paperback), edited by Max Farrand, entitled *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1966). The backbone of these volumes consists of notes that James Madison took at the Convention and these are available in a number of one-volume paperback books.

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. *The Federalist or The Federalist Papers*. These were originally published in 1787-1788 in advocacy of the Constitution. They are now available in a variety of paperback editions. There are also numerous collections of Anti-Federalist writings, many in paperback. The best summary is probably Herbert A. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For: The Political Thought of the Opponents of the Constitution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). He also published several volumes of Anti-federalist writings.


Marvin Meyers, ed. *The Mind of the Founder: Sources of the Political Thought of James Madison* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1978). I do not think that Madison should be identified as the Founder, but this is an excellent collection of his writings, including those prior to the Convention.


The U.S. Constitution is easily accessible on the internet.

**Declaration of Independence**


Historical Analysis:


The Delegates to the Constitutional Convention:

There are many excellent treatments of the subject. A recent addition to the literature, which is relatively cheap, is Denise Kiernan and Joseph D. Agnese, *Signing Their Rights Away* (Quirk Books, 2011). I object strongly to the title (I think the Convention enhanced protection of rights), and this does not include the contributions of non-signers, but it is cheap and reads well.


One of you asked about Benjamin Franklin. For a great story of Franklin’s fall from grace in Great Britain, by a local author, Kenneth Penegar. see *The Political Trial of Benjamin Franklin: A Prelude to the American Revolution* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2011).


Deliberations at the Constitutional Convention


John R. Vile, *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: An Comprehensive Encyclopedia of America’s Founding*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005). This is far too expensive to buy but it will give you an idea how obsessed I am with the topic!

**The U.S. Constitution**


John R. Vile, *A Companion to the United States Constitution and Its Amendments*, 5th ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010). There will be a new edition at the end of March, which should be available in both paper and hardback, so I would not really recommend buying the current edition unless you can get it cheap!


There are numerous books on the U.S. Constitution. I would advise against getting any that try to weave giant conspiracies and stick to those that give a historical or a clause-by-clause analysis.

**U.S. Supreme Court Decisions**

Especially as we get to the text of the Constitution, we will be talking about Supreme Court decisions.


**The Bill of Rights**


**Subsequent Constitutional Amendments**


Kris E. Palmer, *Constitutional Amendments, 1789 to the Present* (Detroit, MI: Gale Group, 2000).

John R. Vile, *Encyclopedia of Constitutional Amendments, Proposed Amendments, and Amending Issues: 1789-2005*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015). Again, this is expensive and will soon be coming in a new edition so I would not advise buying it, but it is helpful in showing my obsession with the subject!

As we go through the Constitution, I hope to discuss possible alternatives. I have just published a book on the subject entitled *Re-Framers: 170 Eccentric, Visionary, and Patriotic Proposals to Rewrite the U.S. Constitution* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014). As the title suggests, some of the suggestions are quite novel. I am currently finishing a book that will be published by the University of Georgia Press that will examine the unused Article V mechanism for calling a convention to propose constitutional amendments.

Please Note: You are not required to ready any of these, and even if you were in a college class, I would not expect you to try to read all of them. I have barely scratched the surface of the books that are available and welcome any suggestions that you might have.