

THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON VERMONT

R E S E A R C H - I N - P R O G R E S S S E M I N A R #227

“Vermont as a Civil Society: The Search for a Genetic Code”

By Frank Bryan
Political Science, University of Vermont

Wednesday, March 24, 2010, at 7:30 p.m.
Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building
University of Vermont

Many are the reasons for the study of human history. As a social scientist, however, **Frank Bryan** (Political Science, University of Vermont) believes that history’s utility is the evidence it contains—evidence that may be applied scientifically to hypothesize about human behavior. Why do we act as we do? Indeed, it is profoundly unfortunate (in his view) that social scientists pay so little attention to history and the historians who labor to provide us with evidence we so desperately need.

Political science has worked mightily in the last half century to discover the roots of civil society and the democratic structures that have accompanied its rise and fall. But we agree on very little. To wit: one of the defenses of the “Bush doctrine” was that “democracies don’t go to war.” But is this so? The answer lies in the careful investigation of democracies throughout history. Dr. Bryan’s intention in this seminar is not to deal with this particular question. It is, however, an attempt to contribute to the development of the literature on the origins and behavior of civil societies. For, if it turns out that civil society, democracy, and the behavior of human aggregates (from community to nation) do vary in predictable ways, is there a more important question for the future to ask than “What are the origins of civil society?”

It is hard to name an American state that could shed more light on this subject than Vermont.

Dr. Bryan will begin by defending an assertion: Vermont is unique, profoundly unique, in its status as a civil society. Given this, he will seek to explore one causal sequence of variables that might explain why this is so. In so doing, he will present some new evidence of his own and comment on some of the literature that has proffered explanations of Vermont’s socio/political development such as Paul Searls’s impressive new interpretation of Vermont history, *Two Vermonts: Geography and Identity, 1865–1910* (2006). He will end with a brief normative recommendation.

Frank Bryan is the John G. McCullough Professor of Political Science at the University of Vermont. He has published extensively on democracy, Vermont state politics, and Vermont history including *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How it Works*, *The Vermont Papers: Recreating Democracy on a Human Scale*, *Yankee Politics in Vermont*, and several articles in *Vermont History*.



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