

**AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEAS VIEWED  
FROM THE STANDPOINT OF UNIVERSAL  
HISTORY; THREE LECTURES DELIVERED  
AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT  
BRITAIN IN MAY, 1880**

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American Political Ideas Viewed from the Standpoint of Universal History; Three Lectures  
Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in May, 1880 by John Fiske

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**JOHN FISKE**

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# AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEAS

VIEWED FROM THE STANDPOINT OF  
UNIVERSAL HISTORY

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

Three Lectures

DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN  
IN MAY 1880

By JOHN FISKE

*Voici un fait entièrement nouveau dans le monde, et dont  
l'imagination elle-même ne saurait saisir la portée*

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MAN

TO

**EDWARD LIVINGSTON YOUMANS**

NOBLEST OF MEN AND DEAREST OF FRIENDS

WHOSE UNSELFISH AND UNTIRING WORK IN EDUCATING THE AMERICAN

PEOPLE IN THE PRINCIPLES OF SOUND PHILOSOPHY

DESERVES THE GRATITUDE OF ALL MEN

**I dedicate this Book**

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## PREFACE.

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IN the spring of 1879 I gave at the Old South Meeting-house in Boston a course of lectures on the discovery and colonization of America, and presently, through the kindness of my friend Professor Huxley, the course was repeated at University College in London. The lectures there were attended by very large audiences, and awakened such an interest in American history that I was invited to return to England in the following year and treat of some of the philosophical aspects of my subject in a course of lectures at the Royal Institution.

In the three lectures which were written in response to this invitation, and which are now published in this little volume, I have endeavoured to illustrate some of the fundamental ideas of American politics by setting forth their relations to the general history of mankind. It is impossible thor

oughly to grasp the meaning of any group of facts, in any department of study, until we have duly compared them with allied groups of facts; and the political history of the American people can be rightly understood only when it is studied in connection with that general process of political evolution which has been going on from the earliest times, and of which it is itself one of the most important and remarkable phases. The government of the United States is not the result of special creation, but of evolution. As the town-meetings of New England are lineally descended from the village assemblies of the early Aryans; as our huge federal union was long ago foreshadowed in the little leagues of Greek cities and Swiss cantons; so the great political problem which we are (thus far successfully) solving is the very same problem upon which all civilized peoples have been working ever since civilization began. How to insure peaceful concerted action throughout the Whole, without infringing upon local and individual freedom in the Parts,—this has ever been the chief aim of civilization, viewed on its political side; and we rate the failure or success of nations politically according to their failure or success in attaining this supreme end.

When thus considered in the light of the comparative method, our American history acquires added dignity and interest, and a broad and rational basis is secured for the detailed treatment of political questions.

When viewed in this light, moreover, not only does American history become especially interesting to Englishmen, but English history is clothed with fresh interest for Americans. Mr. Freeman has done well in insisting upon the fact that the history of the English people does not begin with the Norman Conquest. In the deepest and widest sense, our American history does not begin with the Declaration of Independence, or even with the settlements of Jamestown and Plymouth; but it descends in unbroken continuity from the days when stout Arminius in the forests of northern Germany successfully defied the might of imperial Rome. In a more restricted sense, the statesmanship of Washington and Lincoln appears in the noblest light when regarded as the fruition of the various work of De Montfort and Cromwell and Chatham. The good fight begun at Lewes and continued at Naseby and Quebec was fitly crowned at Yorktown and at Appomattox. When we duly