Commentary #1 Assignment:

What? You will be expected to complete four (4) short (1-3 typewritten pages) essays this quarter in which you will examine and discuss the American constitutional experience and specific conflicts that have dominated that experience. Each will be based on a reading(s) and will ask you to think through the topic or issue and comment on it. (25 points each)

How? For the first Commentary, read the article by Richard Hofstadter entitled, *The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism*. The article may be found at the Notes link on our course web page. This is a now classic review of the philosophical and moral viewpoints of the authors of the US Constitution-----Who were these people? What did they hope to accomplish? What was their view of democracy? What was the logic of their construction of government? and so on. This is not an easy read. Go slow and take on the ideas deliberately and carefully. Your discussion should reflect the complexity of the issues.

Your essay should be organized as follows:

1. **Introduction**: provide a brief overview of the author’s main points and conclusions.
2. **Respond specifically and directly to the two questions below.** I have included supporting material from the Notes link and Lieberman. You should consult these as you prepare your essay.

   a. **Richard Hofstadter** (*The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism*) suggests that in the view of the Founders, democracy and liberty were not necessarily compatible. In fact, they thought that liberty “was menaced by democracy.” Briefly explain this view. (be clear about what they meant by liberty)

      *(Notes: Necessary Evil v. Evil Necessity; Lieberman: Constitution, Framers of; Majoritarianism; Anti-Federalists, Consent of the Governed)*

   b. **Hofstadter** (*The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism*) points out that to preserve liberty, the Founders wanted a balanced government. Generally, what did they mean by balance? Identify and briefly give the rationale for the three “constitutional devices” designed by the Founders to achieve what Madison called, “a harmonius system of mutual frustration.”

      *(Notes: Necessary Evil v. Evil Necessity; Lieberman: Checks and Balances; Separation of Powers; Federalism; Consent of the Governed)*
3. In general, discuss any ideas and observations that seem particularly important in helping you understand the “Fathers” and their purposes. Also, identify any parts of Hofstadter's that you find perplexing and/or questions you are left with.

4. Write a conclusion commenting on (your views, conclusions, concerns, questions) what you learned about the Founders, the Constitution, and the society and system they created.

**When?** Your commentary is due no later than the end of the day, Friday, January 23, in my office (T-212)