

Editor's Introduction

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The American Political Science Association is a global organization, and currently counts among its almost 15,000 members nearly 3000 individuals who are citizens of nation-states other than the US. And only half of its 1600 institutional subscribers are North American. At the same time, the contemporary political science discipline that it represents, however cosmopolitan, is deeply rooted in the distinctive historical experiences of the United States. As Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner observed in their 2002 Centennial edition of *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, the professional association responsible for publishing the words you are now reading was born in the United States during the Progressive Era, as an effort to more scientifically and thus more usefully understand the evolving American state and its national citizenship: "American political science has specialized in developing particular kinds of social knowledge. The modifier *American* has to be taken seriously" (3–4).

Indeed, as Raymond Seidelman and James Farr pointed out in their widely-cited 1993 anthology *Discipline and History: Political Science in the United States*, the first American professor of political science, Francis Lieber, was preoccupied with the emerging American national identity during the time of the Civil War. And yet this progenitor of our *American* political science was himself a *German émigré*, steeped in European traditions of political thought and shaped by the experiences of Continental Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Talk about hybridity! Both the identity of our discipline and the identity of the state to which it is genealogically linked—revealingly bearing the pluralistic designation "the United States"—have always been in question, compounds made up of diverse and ever-changing elements.

What is "American politics"? What are its boundaries, and are they marked by the water's edge (surely not)? What is American political science, and to what extent are its problems and concepts and methods encompassed by its "American" identity? We political scientists don't ask these questions often enough. We are typically too busy doing the work of political science to engage in speculation of this kind. And yet the questions present themselves, and in certain situations and at certain moments they become unavoidable.

I raise them now because the current issue of *Perspectives* features a theme that brings them to the fore—the theme of the Obama Presidency. Not yet two years in office, President Barack Obama has become the topic of intense and often vitriolic controversy. The first African-American President in US history, his election seemed to symbolize an "audacity of hope" about the future. And yet within virtual days of taking office, amidst a serious financial crisis that clearly predated his election, President Obama—seemingly by virtue of his very existence—provoked the heightened agitation first of a "Birther" movement raising questions about his very identity as an authentic American citizen, and then a broader "Tea Party" movement that has regarded him as a veritable King George III visiting a "long train of abuses" upon the American people. The titles of a number of recently-published conservative books speak volumes: *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular Socialist Machine* by Newt Gingrich (Regnery 2010); *Conservative Victory: Defeating Obama's Radical Agenda* by Sean Hannity (Harper Collins 2010); *The Manchurian President: Barack Obama's Ties to Communists, Socialists and Other Anti-American Extremists* by Aaron Klein (WND Books 2010); *Power Grab: How Obama's Green Policies Will Steal Your Freedom and Bankrupt America* by Christopher C. Horner (Regnery 2010); *Obama Zombies: How the Liberal Machine Brainwashed My Generation* by Jason Mattera (Thresholds Editions 2010); *The Blueprint: Obama's Plan to Subvert the Constitution and Build an Imperial Presidency* by Ken Blackwell and Ken Klukowski (Lyons Press 2010); *Culture of Corruption: Obama and His Team of Tax Cheats, Crooks and Cronies* by Michele Malkin (Regnery 2009); and *Obama in Wonderland: Inside Insane Hussein's Looking Glass: A Silly Book for a Serious Time* by Joe Sansone (CreateSpace 2010).

The question of the "meaning" of the Obama Presidency has thus been linked to the question of the very identity and authenticity of the individual, Barack Obama—an African-American male, former community organizer, law professor, and intellectual who was born in Hawaii and raised in Indonesia and hails from Chicago and is a street baller with a penchant for smoking cigarettes with a Muslim middle name, etc., etc., etc.—who occupies the office.

This issue of *Perspectives* comes out roughly two months prior to the November 2010 midterm elections that will be widely considered, especially by pundits and commentators, as a gauge of Obama's political standing. It thus seems appropriate for this journal of the American Political Science Association to focus attention on the controversies surrounding the Obama Presidency, which occupy the attention of the US, as well as a world whose fate is bound up with that of the US. Fortunately we had a number of articles and essays in the publication queue that spoke directly to these issues, and we were able to solicit additional essays to round out the discussion. The issue you are reading is the result.

The issue's two lead research articles both explicitly address Obama-related themes.

Jennifer Hochschild's and Vesla Weaver's "There's No One as Irish as Barack O'ama: The Policy and Politics of American Multiculturalism" is a powerful historical account of the relationships between identity classifications and civic status in the US. Proceeding from the symbolism of the election of Obama—an "African-American" and "multiracial" individual whose racial identity was repeatedly raised as an issue—Hochschild and Weaver insist upon the constructed nature of racial identity (a topic also discussed in this issue's Critical Dialogue between Robert Gooding-Williams and Melanye T. Price; in Keally McBride's review of George Shulman's important *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture*; and in historian Nell Irvin Painter's just-published *The History of White People* [Norton 2010]), and proceed to engage the more general phenomenon of multiracialism in US politics. Outlining a number of the key dimensions of multiracialism, they argue that while multiracial identity is growing in the broader society, this does not necessarily translate into political identification and organization. Hochschild and Weaver show how quickly Americans' self-understanding of race is changing, consider the role that public policy has played and might play in fostering such change, and comment on the ways this may in turn reshape or fail to reshape American politics. If one possibility is that "Obama" is the harbinger of the relaxing of politicized racial identities, another is that the symbolic politics of "Obama" signals a resurgence of a populist identity politics focused on fears of immigration and "terrorism."

Peter Dreier and Christopher R. Martin's "How ACORN Was Framed: Political Controversy and Media Agenda-Setting," is a careful descriptive account of the ways in which conservative media outlets "framed" the community organization Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now [ACORN] as a symbol of left-wing corruption and "socialist" power-grabbing, thereby destroying the organization and tarnishing the reputation of activist community organizing (and, indirectly, of the President who, in an earlier incarnation, had himself worked for ACORN). Drawing on theories

of media framing and social movement/community organizing, Dreier and Martin argue that a combination of liberal weakness and conservative mobilization made possible the success of a right-wing "echo chamber" that has helped to stymie the Obama policy agenda.

Our "Reflections" section consists of five substantial essays focused on the current political balance of forces and the challenges facing the Obama Administration.

Larry Jacobs' and Desmond King's "Varieties of Obamaism: Structure, Agency, and the Obama Presidency" is a critique of the widespread tendency in public and pundit discourse to discuss the Administration in terms of the personal attributes of the individual, Barack Obama, who currently occupies the Presidency. Instead, Jacobs and King develop the notion of "structured agency" and explain how and why it is important to focus on the state and economic institutions that both enable and constrain Presidential action and political decision-making more generally. Writing in the midst of the early 2010 fiscal crisis, they underscore in particular the importance of banking institutions and the complex ways that class power is organized and exercised. Indeed, like Jeffrey A. Winters and Benjamin I. Page's December 2009 "Oligarchy in the United States?" their piece—and many of the essays that follow it—recalls debates of the early 70's, centered around Marxist theories of the state, that occasioned Charles Lindblom's 1982 APSA Presidential Address, "Another State of Mind," and led to the "bringing the state back in" movement in political science.

Suzanne Mettler's "Reconstituting the Submerged State" offers a compelling account of "The Challenges of Social Policy Reform in the Obama Era." Mettler focuses on Obama's agenda of reform in three areas of social policy—taxation, higher education policy, and health care—and argues that the fundamental obstacle to reform has derived not from partisan opposition or legislative gridlock but from the specific character of the policy regimes associated with what she calls the "submerged state": "a conglomeration of existing federal policies that incentivize and subsidize activities engaged in by private actors and individuals. . . . [which] fostered the profitability of particular industries and induced them to increase their political capacity, which they have exercised in efforts to maintain the status quo." Mettler concludes that "Obama confronted an existing state that is at once formidable and elusive, and thus the quest required engagement in treacherous political battles. Remarkably, his Administration has now succeeded in achieving several of its major goals with respect to social welfare policy. Even so, for much of the public, the delivery on those promises fails to meet the high expectations that surrounded the president when he first took office."

In "Institutional Strangulation: Bureaucratic Politics and Financial Reform in the Obama Administration," Daniel Carpenter similarly analyzes the structural constraints

limiting the Obama Administration's efforts to reform the financial system in response to the banking crisis. Drawing upon a broader understanding of bureaucratic politics, Carpenter argues that "the organizations that mark the target of financial reform count as the richest and most powerful organizations on the planet, not simply the private banks and hedge funds that contribute millions of dollars to political campaigns, but the national and international financial agencies that enjoy privileged institutional positions in law and culture. Furthermore, the diversity and opaqueness of these organizations and their products renders the task of reform much more difficult. The targets are ever moving and adaptive, new species of capital emerging constantly and defying simple definition and application of laws and regulations." Like Mettler, Carpenter argues that the complexity and opacity of the policy domain itself is a fundamental obstacle to reform. Also like Mettler, he notes the (limited but significant) success of the Administration in the face of these obstacles. At the same time, he concludes that "the paths not taken in this saga remain as informative as the those that were followed."

Dorian T. Warren's "The American Labor Movement in the Age of Obama: The Challenges and Opportunities of a Racialized Political Economy" complements these structural analyses by considering the historical sources of the relative weakness of the US labor movement as a political force. Drawing on recent work on race and American political development, Warren underscores the ways in which the US political economy has always been structured by race, as well as by class, and the ways in which this structuration has reinforced racism, racialized public policy (e.g., the Wagner Act's exclusion of agricultural and domestic labor), and fragmented working class organizations. Warren also discusses the failure of the principal organizations of the US labor movement—the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and later the combined AFL-CIO—to understand the ways that race has weakened them, and to pursue general strategies of empowerment rather than make their peace with dual labor markets that advantaged white workers at the expense of workers of color. By linking race and class, Warren's piece makes an important contribution. While most of the discussion of race and Obama has focused on questions of racial identity (important to be sure), Warren maintains that the most important questions of race relate to class—and to the forms of collective organization, labor market policies, and social provisions that can most impact the life chances of people of color. Warren concludes by considering the ways that the changing demographics of American society present the labor movement with new opportunities to organize workers of color based on new strategies of community organizing.¹

Jacob Hacker's "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened or Why Political Scientists Who Write

about Public Policy Shouldn't Assume They Know How to Shape It" was written late this spring, as an effort to explain the machinations, compromises, and broader structural and institutional forces behind the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in March 2010. Hacker's piece is both a work of political science and a personal reflection, as his own efforts as a public intellectual and policy analyst (he was widely billed in the media as the "inventor" of the "public option") thrust him to the center of the health care debate. Hacker carefully explains the Act and the ways in which it was the product of legislative compromises and of savvy efforts on the part of the Administration to preemptively co-opt partisan and ideological opposition. He concludes that "America's distinctively privatized system gave rise to resourceful and entrenched organized interests that fought vigorously to preserve their turf. It also created fault lines and vulnerabilities in public support for expanded government coverage, causing many Americans otherwise sympathetic to reform to worry that increased government involvement would negatively affect *their* coverage . . . By strategically forgoing a more robust attempt to steer the bill or make the case for it, the White House largely accommodated, rather than pushed back, against the elite focus of the debate that left many Americans alienated about the product and the process." Hacker's essay offers a nuanced account of the accomplishments and limits of the reform legislation. It also makes a compelling argument about the ways in which scholars of American politics can profitably move beyond their normal academic comfort zones by engaging pressing public issues, to the advantage of both their scholarship and the quality of American democracy.

Indeed, the quality of democracy in general is a key concern of many of the books discussed in our Review section, which features a special section of books from across the discipline that deal with the theme of "Democracy and Democratization"—a core theme of great theoretical importance to the study of contemporary politics, and a major "foreign policy problem" confronting the Obama Administration.

Adeed Dawisha's review essay, "The Long and Winding Road to Iraqi Democracy," discusses four important recent books on the prospects for the democratization of Iraq in the wake of the US Occupation. He focuses on the challenges of supporting "constitutional engineering" and "democracy" while simultaneously fighting a counter-insurgency and promoting Iraqi "state-building (see also this issue's review of David Kilcullen's widely cited *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*). The books offer widely varying assessments of the success of these efforts, and Dawisha's discussion of them is a nuanced account of the many failings of US policy and of democratization efforts in Iraq, but also a consideration of the possibility that recent elections might

hold promise for a new beginning in Iraq. Dawisha's essay makes clear that while political scientists might disagree about the current situation and its likely outcomes, such disagreements can contribute greatly both to policy debates and to public enlightenment.

This is also underscored in Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchick's critical review of Michael McFaul's *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We Should and How We Can*, a powerful brief written by a long-time proponent of US "democracy promotion" who currently serves as a principal foreign policy adviser to President Obama. Bunce and Wolchick carefully consider both practical and normative limits of this policy, making clear that "promoting democracy" is a complex matter that necessarily invokes contested conceptions of "democracy" (a point also nicely developed in Karuna Mantena's review of Adrian Little's *Democratic Piety: Complexity, Conflict and Violence*). They also make clear that while the US may have its own foreign policies of "democracy promotion," there exists a broad and heterogeneous network of democracy-promoting organizations, from NGOs to a range of European states to supra-national institutions such as the European Union. Most significantly they argue—drawing on their own published research on the so-called "Colored Revolutions" in Georgia, the Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan—that the most important source of democratization is the creative praxis of domestic civil society groups drawing on a broader base of transnational support.

This is also the major theme discussed in our symposium on Pierre Rosanvallon's important book *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Rosanvallon is a major French scholar and public intellectual, and he has written a series of acclaimed books on the history of democratic theory and practice. *Counter-Democracy* is a reflection on the complexity and multi-dimensionality of "democracy" and particularly on the forms of political agency beyond the ballot box whereby citizens have sought to enforce the public accountability and responsiveness of officials. Rosanvallon is at once an empirical political sci-

entist and a "theorist," and our symposium brings together three prominent commentators—Phillippe Schmitter, Donatella della Porta, and Mark E. Warren—whose own work exemplifies the fruitfulness of this combination. Indeed, the range of articles, essays, and reviews contained in this issue of *Perspectives* make clear that democracy remains an unfulfilled aspiration in most places on the earth—from China to Iraq to Romania to the US—and that political scientists, working from a range of perspectives and engaging in critical and constructive argument, can shed much light on the contemporary challenges of democratization.

Indeed, it could be argued that broad and sustained attention to these challenges has always characterized American political science at its best. The reasons for this are no doubt complex, related both to aspects of "American exceptionalism" and to the twentieth century role of the U.S. as what Raymond Aron called an "imperial republic" on the world stage. A concern with "democracy" and with "making the world safe for democracy" has long been a staple of American public discourse and of the political science that has evolved in tandem with it. This history is no simple morality tale—as the Bunce and Wolchick review makes clear. But reflecting on it, and helping to improve upon it, is surely a worthy aspiration for a discipline as rich in intellectual resources as our own. Doing this, of course, means truly engaging the world beyond the U.S., as a source of experience and of theoretical insight. In that sense, political science, by its very nature, is a global and cosmopolitan pursuit.

Note

- 1 Paul Frymer's review essay on labor in the March issue of *Perspectives* also sheds light on this theme. We note with regret a number of typos in this piece; in particular, line nine of the first paragraph should read "economic inequality" and not "economic equality."