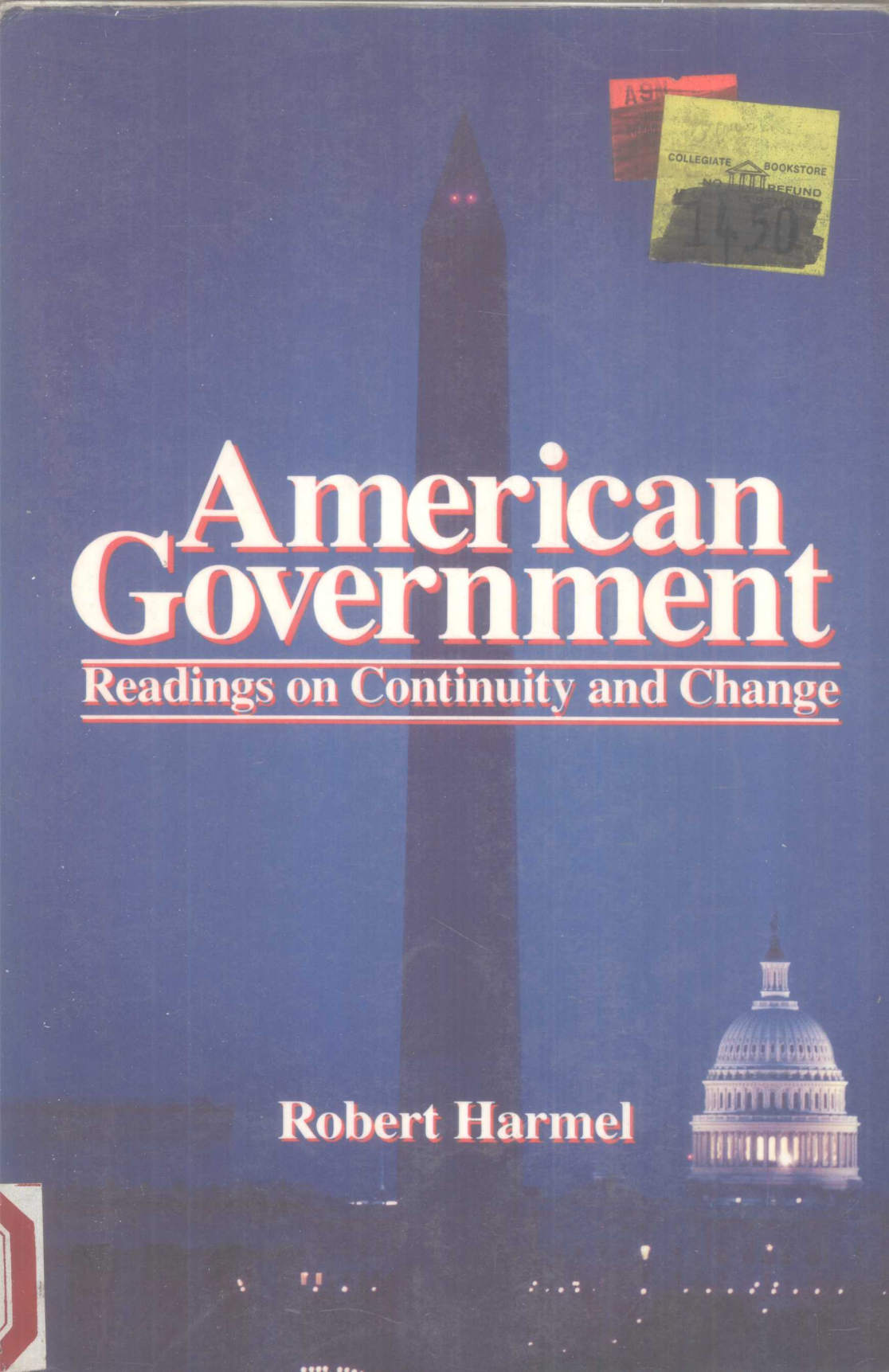
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American Government
Readings on Continuity and Change
Robert Harmel

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To these future participants in American politics:
Matt, Mike, Jenny, and Chris Dale
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Rachel, Kayme, Naomi, and Paul Fritz
Jenna and Bruce Holman,
and Kim Reimer

Preface

As Madison Avenue would say, *American Government: Readings on Continuity and Change* is an American Government reader "with a difference." In many respects, it resembles a number of fine readers already in print: its contents cover the broad range of topics normally covered in American Government classes; it is organized according to the standard outline for such classes; and it includes some classics and important historical documents along with a majority of contemporary pieces. The "difference" is the book's emphasis on continuity and change, which runs throughout the various sections of the book, and which highlights the dynamic quality of American politics. Collectively, the sixty readings provide a picture of a political system that has undergone tremendous change, but within a basic framework that has endured for over two centuries. More than half of the readings deal directly with change. Others provide important historical background, and some, such as William A. Rusher's piece on two-partyism, deal primarily with significant continuities in American politics. Change within continuity has been one of the most important features of the American political system, and this book has been specifically designed to reflect that quality.

It has also been specifically designed to be *useful* in American Government classes. Although students will learn a great deal simply by reading the selections, the class as a whole will benefit even more from actively discussing them. And as readings on change are inherently well suited to generating discussion, so the emphasis of this book should contribute to its usefulness. Some of the readings will raise questions concerning the likely consequences of certain changes that have already been implemented; others will stimulate thinking about the possible impacts of proposed reforms. In addition, a number of readings with potentially controversial content are offset by others with alternative points of view (for instance, Michael Parenti and David G. Smith, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, Edward S. Greenberg and Susan Love Brown et al.); such readings can support "debate" on important topics. In selecting the readings, I placed a good deal of emphasis on their "discussibility." If a reading could not easily be used to stimulate class discussion (or discussion outside of class, for that matter), I chose not to include it.

The book is also organized to maximize usefulness in a variety of class structures. The organization uses the standard, systems-analysis approach of setting-inputs-institutions-outputs. However, instructors whose courses are structured differently will have no difficulty rearranging the various chapters.

To facilitate this, I have written *separate chapter introductions,* rather than broader introductions to the four main parts. In addition, brief introductions to the selections themselves add even greater flexibility by equipping each reading to "stand alone."

Besides the chapter and selection introductions, I have also provided a brief introduction to Part Four, "The Outputs." While there is a general understanding of what constitutes the setting, the inputs, and the institutions of American government and politics, the concept of *outputs* is treated in a variety of ways in some texts and classes, and often it is not treated at all. The five readings in Part Four do not cover a range of specific policy areas, but instead deal with two of the broadest questions concerning the policy process and its outputs: who rules and who wins? The readings provide alternative answers that should serve to stimulate discussion and debate.

The book's emphasis on continuity and change clearly involves looking at the past as well as the present of the American system. An underlying assumption of this anthology is that we cannot fully understand current institutions and events without taking history—whether recent or distant—into account. For instance, many references are made in these pages to the experiences and intentions of the Framers. And because their concerns influenced the shaping of the Constitution, including the document it replaced, both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of the United States of America are provided in full in the *Documents* section at the end of the book.

An anthology is, by definition, a collective effort. The authors of the readings in this book deserve the bulk of the credit for whatever success it has. I, of course, bear full responsibility for the choice of material and for any internal deletions, as well as for changes in many of the titles and removal of many footnotes that appeared in the selections when they were first published. I am grateful to the publishers of the original works for granting permission to reprint them.

I have incurred many intellectual debts in the process of selecting readings and writing my own introductory material. For their good counsel, I would like to thank my colleagues Keith Hamm, George Edwards, Daniel McCool, Charles Wiggins, Edward Portis, Chi Huang, and Arthur DiQuattro, and especially Charles Johnson, Wilbourn Benton, Jon Bond, Roberto Vichot, and John Robertson. I am also indebted to the four reviewers of the manuscript for St. Martin's Press: Larry Elowitz, Georgia College; Richard H. Leach, Duke University; Joseph Rudolph, Towson State University; and especially my former colleague at Texas A&M, Michael Levy. While any errors in this book are of my own doing, many of the good things are the results of the information and advice I received from these people.

A special acknowledgment is due to the two editors who have been responsible for this book at St. Martin's. Peter Dougherty first suggested the work and participated in the earliest discussions. Larry Swanson, acquiring editor, has done a superb job of guiding the book. That it has been completed is due,

in no small part, to Larry; to his able assistants, Sara Rosenthal, Judy Tropea, and Elizabeth Caldwell; to the project editor, Beverly Hinton; and to my own graduate assistants at Texas A&M, David White, Susanne Marrs, and David Whipple.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to the students of Political Science 206 at Texas A&M, who have been the inspiration for this book.

Robert Harmel

Contents

Introduction

For approximately two centuries, Americans have lived under the same governmental system that was outlined by fifty-five men in Philadelphia in 1787. During the same time span, Denmark has had three different political systems, Russia five, Austria seven, France nine, and Greece twelve.* Of the political systems existing today, only the United Kingdom's is older. There is no denying the fact that America's basic political system has had remarkable "staying power." But that, in turn, is not to deny the equally important fact that *within* the basic arrangement, there has been much change.

The story of change in American government and politics must begin with the writing of the Constitution itself, which was, first and foremost, a document *of change*. The framers were sent to Philadelphia to *change* the Articles of Confederation, which had served for six years as the structure for a loose collection of sovereign states, much as the United Nations structures a collection of sovereign nations today. National government under the Articles consisted only of a one-house Congress; it was intended to be "small" government. Passage of any law required agreement of nine of the thirteen states; it was intended to be a weak and nearly powerless national government. The framework provided by the Articles of Confederation had served an important function for the first few years of independence, allowing time to mold a national identity from thirteen separate, colonial states. But it had not served well the needs for security and efficient commerce. So the framers met to *amend* the Articles, but soon arrived at the conclusion that the necessary changes were so many and so fundamental that it would be preferable to *replace* the Articles with a completely new document.

Some things were carried over, including preservation of important policy areas in which the states could exercise independent action, continuation of an important role for Congress within the national government, and most importantly, continued rejection of monarchy in favor of republican government. But now, states would no longer be the only powerful governmental actor. Congress would be joined by a separate executive and an independent judiciary, and "government by the people" would be extended (through popular election of the House of Representatives) to the national level.

The Constitution that was written in Philadelphia has proven to be abnormally durable. But the primary reason for the persistence of this document *of*

*Based on the editor's analysis of data collected by Ted Robert Gurr for his study of Polity Persistence and Change (data available From the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research, study #5010).—*Editor's Note.*

change is that it allowed so much room *for* change. In other words, the key to its longevity has been its *adaptability*.

Not only was an amendment process provided for changing the document itself, but even more importantly, room was provided for changing *within* the system. The Constitution is not a rigid document, as compared to other constitutions. The "gaps" and "holes" that were left to be filled in later, and the "vague language" that was open to interpretation and re-interpretation, have resulted in a system that could be adapted to changing needs and circumstances. Such time honored "institutions" of American politics as political parties and the Supreme Court's power of judicial review were not even mentioned in the Constitution, but both were developed anyway, as they were needed. The president's cabinet is only indirectly referenced and the very important committee system of Congress is not mentioned at all, and so it has been possible to alter both of them over time without changing the Constitution. It is commonplace today to acknowledge growth in the powers of the presidency and of the national level of government, presumably in response to the changing nature of demands being placed upon government. To the extent that these observations are correct (and the weight of the evidence suggests they are), the changes have taken place gradually *within* the system provided by the Constitution.

Indeed, a case can be made for the argument that what the framers wrote into their Constitution has been no more important, in providing durability, than what they left out. The gaps, the holes, the vague language—all have been important in providing room for adapting government and politics to changing needs and circumstances. Allowances for change under the Constitution, along with the ability to amend it when necessary, have reduced any need to replace it.

This book is about continuity and change in American politics. Many of the readings mention continuities; almost all deal with change. The imbalance in favor of change undoubtedly reflects, in part, the editor's impression that it is more interesting to read and to write about change than about continuity. Nonetheless, it is also true that by studying change we are also, in a way, studying continuity. Any thorough review of the continuities and changes in the American political system must ultimately arrive at this conclusion: the single greatest *continuity* in American politics is *change!*

PART ONE

The Setting

CHAPTER ONE

The Framers and the Constitution

That the framers were meeting in Philadelphia to structure change in the political system is not debatable. They had, after all, been chosen by their states to attend a convention called by Congress "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation." *Why* they made the particular changes they did, on the other hand, is and has been the subject of much debate. At least since Charles Beard wrote his now classic and much maligned (and defended) *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* in 1913, debate has raged over the motives and intentions of the framers. Were they altruistic men, driven by a philosophy of what would be the good and wise thing to do for society as a whole, or were they, as Beard argued, a group of monied businessmen, bankers, and landowners, whose primary interests were those of the class they represented? Three of the four readings in this chapter offer different answers to that question. Michael Parenti concludes, as did Beard, that the Constitution is basically an elitist document, while David Smith argues that the framers were motivated more by national than self interests. Calvin Jillson and Cecil Eubanks find merit in both arguments, but as applied to different parts of the Constitution.

As the framers went about the business of deciding whether or not to change certain elements of the American system, one of the topics for heated discussion was the implementation of democracy itself. Though it is taken for granted today, not all of the delegates in Philadelphia assumed that "the people" could or should be trusted to make important political decisions. The first reading in this chapter is a small portion of James Madison's personal notes on the debates in the Constitutional Convention, and recounts some of the debate over "democracy."