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# *The American Democracy*

THOMAS E. PATTERSON

McGraw-Hill  
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Special Student Value

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# *The American Democracy*

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THOMAS E. PATTERSON

*Professor of Political Science  
Maxwell School of Citizenship  
Syracuse University*

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To Ellie, Alex, and Leigh

**THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

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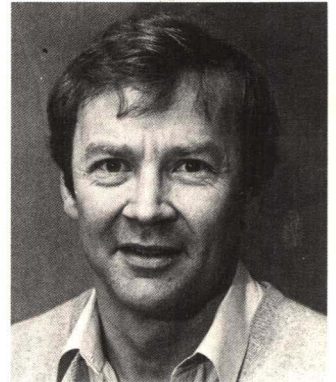
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**T**homas E. Patterson is a professor and past chairman of the department of political science in the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University. Raised in a small Minnesota town, he received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1971. He began his graduate training four years earlier upon return from Vietnam, where he served as a U.S. Army officer.

Patterson is the author or coauthor of several books and dozens of articles, most of them based on his research on political communication. His most extensive research project culminated in *The Mass Media Election*, which was named an Outstanding Academic Book, 1980-81, by *Choice*. He has lectured at many universities and colleges in the United States and in Europe.

He is married to Ellen Bifano, a pediatrician, and they are raising two young children, Alex and Leigh.



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## PREFACE

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Politics is so alive and immediate that it is hard to imagine why anyone would think it is dull or remote. By the same token, it is also hard to imagine why anyone would think that today's college students, who are otherwise so eager to learn, are unable or unwilling to study politics carefully and systematically. I have taught American government for twenty years and have found that, when politics is expressed in lively and meaningful terms, students invariably take a keen interest in it.

Fortunately, political science has been served through the years by some very good introductory American government texts. These texts have been distinguished, not so much by the raw material they contain, as by their ability to hold the interest of students and help them to integrate the wide array of concepts, facts, and principles that make up the study of American government. My ideal type in some ways is one that I read as an undergraduate, V. O. Key's *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*. Last published in 1964, Professor Key's wonderful book was chock full of ideas, of politics, and of a lucid prose that belied the laborious effort that is required to turn the raw material of American government into a compelling whole.

This book is my version of an introductory text written to inform and motivate today's generation of college students and as such is a fusion of accepted practice and innovation. On the one hand, I have tried my best to respect the way that most instructors approach the introductory course. My text surveys the whole of American national government, beginning with constitutional issues

and then moving on to mass politics, governing institutions and officials, and public policy. The text is also conventional in that it uses the several forms of analysis that are common to political science—the philosophical, historical, behavioral, legal, policy-analytic, and institutional. Each form of analysis has its benefits and its place in the study of American government.

On the other hand, the text incorporates some distinguishing features, each of which represents a conscious effort to respond to the instructional needs of those who teach and take the basic course. There are four features that set *The American Democracy* apart:

1. Although political scientists have developed a deep understanding of American government, this knowledge exists largely as a set of more or less unrelated observations. When presented in this form in a text, fact is piled upon fact and list upon list, which is almost guaranteed to dull student interest and thought. I have tried to follow the cardinal rule of always telling students where they are in the text, why they are there, and where they are going. As part of this effort, several unifying themes appear in the text:

- that American politics from the nation's earliest years has been shaped by a set of governing ideas, which, although subject to dispute in practice, have served as Americans' common bond;
- that the American political system is characterized by an extreme fragmentation of authority that has far-reaching implications for the exercise of power and the making of public policy;
- that the United States has an extraordinary range of interests of all kinds—economic, religious, ethnic, regional, and so on—and that this diversity is fundamental to the nature of political conflict and consensus in America; and
- that Americans tend to draw sharp distinctions between what is political (and therefore to be decided in the public arena) and what is economic (and therefore to be settled through private relations).

These guiding principles are augmented by a listing at the beginning of each chapter of its main points and by an opening example or story in each chapter that illustrates the significance of these points.

My approach permits frequent use of the narrative form of writing, which has been shown by pedagogical research to be a superior method of teaching students a "soft" science such as politics. Each chapter contains plenty of facts, but they are always presented in context. If students soon forget many of the details, as they invariably will, they may at least remember the main points.

2. This text has twenty-nine shorter chapters rather than the twenty or so longer ones found in other introductory American government texts. The instructional purpose of this innovation is to give each chapter a clearer focus. Rather than a single chapter on political parties, for example, I have written one chapter on U.S. party organizations and another on the American party system. When a text's chapters are few in number—one each on parties, Congress, the Constitution, and so on—they tend to be diffuse. When more chapters are used, they can convey a sharper message and, I would argue, a message that flows more "naturally" from what political scientists have discovered about American politics. My chapter on the party system, for example, looks squarely at two-partyism: why it exists in America and how fully it channels political

competition and choice. These points are stated in the chapter's introduction, developed in the chapter's body, and restated in the conclusion, thus driving home to students their central importance.

I believe that most political science professors will find that a text of shorter chapters is a more flexible teaching tool and provides students a more satisfying way of studying American government. Each chapter of this text can be read in an hour or less, and thus each lecture's reading assignment can reasonably consist of a full chapter. My experience with teaching American government suggests that many students find it unrewarding to be assigned to read just part of a chapter at a time because that approach makes it very difficult for them to see the chapter's argument in its entirety. My text makes it easier for students to see each chapter through from beginning to end in a single reading.

3. This text includes special materials that are designed to encourage students to step back and think about what they have just read, thereby changing a passive form of learning into a more active one. These materials include the following:

- At the end of each of the book's seven parts is a pair of brief original essays. These essays, written by some of America's best political scientists, are intended to direct the student's attention back to a recurring point in the section's chapters. For example, Part Six features one-page essays by Professors Hugh Heclo and Martin Shapiro on the issue: "Is Too Much Public Policy Decided by Nonelected Officials in the Bureaucracy and Judiciary?" The authors of the other original essays are Benjamin R. Barber, George C. Edwards III, Morris Fiorina, Louis Fisher, Richard Flathman, Charles M. Hardin, Stephen D. Krasner, Jane Mansbridge, Bruce Russett, Robert H. Salisbury, Frank Sorauf, and James Sundquist.
- Each chapter has a "How the United States Compares" box that compares the United States with other countries on a subject emphasized in the chapter. American students invariably gain perspective and a deeper understanding of their own politics when they recognize how it resembles and how it differs from politics elsewhere.
- Each chapter contains several "Analyze the Issue" boxes that ask students to relate current issues or personal experiences to material presented in the chapter. These boxes invite students to connect the world outside to the one described in the text—an intellectual exercise that is designed to promote both better scholarship and better citizenship. In addition, throughout the text other boxed discussions profile key historical and contemporary issues.

4. Early in the writing of this text, I concluded that it would be enormously helpful if a way could be found to bring into each chapter the judgment of those political scientists who, like myself, teach the introductory course year in and year out. Any insights that exist for improving the pedagogical value of an introductory text are concentrated among these instructors. This recognition led me to undertake what is, as far as I have been able to determine, the most thorough review process ever undertaken for a new American government text.

We went beyond the normal process of having the draft chapters reviewed by a select number of expert scholars who are recognized experts in the subject matter. After these reviewers had critiqued a chapter, I revised it and we then

sent it to as many as ten faculty members at U.S. colleges and universities of all types—public and private, large and small, four-year and two-year. These political scientists, 213 of them in all, have well over a thousand years of combined experience in the teaching of the introductory course. Each of them was asked, in effect, two questions: “How well does this chapter instruct your students in what they need to know about its subject?” and “How can the chapter be changed so that it better serves your students’ needs?”

They had a plenty of ideas. For example, after noting that “it is unusual for authors to be interested in the thinking of those of us on the ‘frontline’ of undergraduate teaching,” a professor at a state university suggested three major adjustments in the chapter he had read. I spent the better part of two years rewriting the text in response to such suggestions. My rule of thumb was that if more than one introductory instructor said something was a problem, it likely *was* a problem. I am very thankful for their help.

Since I began work on this book six years ago, I have viewed it as a personal and ongoing commitment to the education of students of American government, who are also about to become active citizens. I hope you will conclude that the text contributes significantly to their development. I invite comments, favorable or otherwise, on the text material. I cannot promise that your ideas will alter the next edition, but I can promise that they will receive my careful attention.

*Thomas E. Patterson*

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# Chapter 11

## THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM: DEFINING THE VOTERS' CHOICE

*Political parties created democracy and . . . modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.*

E. E. Schattschneider<sup>1</sup>

They were the kind of strange bedfellows that American politics regularly produces. One of them stood for gun control, busing, and an end to the death penalty and proposed that the United States terminate its Star Wars project, MX missile construction, and aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. His running mate held the opposite position on each of these issues. They were the 1988 Democratic ticket, Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts and Lloyd Bentsen of Texas.

The Dukakis-Bentsen partnership was a product of the country's two-party system, which compels candidates and voters with diverse opinions to find common ground. Because the Republican and Democratic parties have dominated U.S. elections for so long and are the only parties with any realistic chance of acquiring political control, Americans nearly take their two-party system for granted. However, most democracies have a **multi-party system**, in which three or more parties have the capacity to gain control of government separately or in coalition. Even democracies that have what is essentially a two-party system typically have important smaller parties as well. For example, Great Britain's Labour and Conservative parties have dominated that nation's politics since early in this century, but they have had competition from the Liberal party and, more recently, the Social Democrats. At present all four of these parties have representatives in Parliament. In contrast, the U.S. Congress consists entirely of Democrats and Republicans.

<sup>1</sup>E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Rinehart, 1942), 1.

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### FOCUS POINTS

Three or four sentences appearing at the beginning summarize the major ideas of the chapter. These brief statements present its *major themes*.

### ANALYZE THE ISSUE

Over 100 boxes in the margins present searching questions in order to stimulate the students to analyze critically what they are reading.

## A GUIDED TOUR TO THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

### OPENING ILLUSTRATION

Intriguing narrations of compelling events introduce the concepts of the chapter to follow.

### DEFINITIONS

The first occurrence of each major concept is signaled by bold type and accompanied by a concise definition. A complete list of these concepts is found at the end of each chapter, as well as in the end of book Glossary.

### PART TWO • INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

concentrates on groups because the history of civil rights has been largely one of group claims to equality. The chapter emphasizes the following main points:

- ★ *Americans have substantial equality under the law.* They have, in legal terms, equal protection of the laws, equal access to accommodations and housing, and an equal right to vote. Discrimination by law against persons because of race, sex, religion, and ethnicity is now largely a thing of the past.
- ★ *Disadvantaged groups have had to struggle for equal rights.* Blacks, women, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans have all had to fight for their rights in order to come closer to equality with white males.
- ★ *Legal equality for all Americans has not resulted in de facto equality.* Blacks, women, Hispanics, and other traditionally disadvantaged groups have a disproportionately small share of America's opportunities and benefits. Existing inequalities, discriminatory practices, and political pressures are still major barriers to their full equality. Affirmative action and busing are policies designed to help the disadvantaged achieve full equality.

### ANALYZE THE ISSUE

**The Impact of Federalism on Equality**  
Disadvantaged groups have achieved a greater degree of equality primarily through federal laws and federal court rulings, rather than through state and local measures. What do you think are the main reasons for this development? Do James Madison's arguments (in *Federalist No. 10*) about the greater diversity of the nation under a federal system apply to the situation? Do issues of equality affect your opinion about whether a federal system is preferable to a unitary one?

### Equality under the Law

Equality has always been the least completely developed of America's founding ideas. Not even Thomas Jefferson, who had a deep admiration for the common man, believed that broad meaning could be given to the claim of the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Jefferson rejected any suggestion that people should be equalized in their possessions, interests, positions, or opinions. To Jefferson, "equality" had a restricted, though significant, meaning: people are of equal moral worth and thereby deserving of equal treatment under the law.<sup>1</sup> Even then, Jefferson made a distinction between free men, who were entitled to legal equality, and slaves, who were not.

Since Jefferson's time, Americans' beliefs about equality have changed substantially, but the emphasis on legal equality has not. The catchphrase of nearly any group's claim to a fairer standing in American society has been "equality under the law." The importance that people attach to legal equality is understandable. When made into law, claims to equality assume a power that they do not otherwise have. Once people are secure in their legal rights, they are in a stronger position to seek equality on other fronts, such as in the economic realm. In addition, once encoded in law, a claim to equality can force officials to take positive action on behalf of a disadvantaged group. For example, some communities refused to allow the children of illegal aliens to attend public school until a 1982 Supreme Court ruling required those communities to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Americans' claims to legal equality are contained in a great many laws. Among the most noteworthy are the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights acts of 1964 and 1968, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

<sup>1</sup>Robert Nisbet, "Public Opinion versus Popular Opinion," *Public Interest* 41 (1975): 171.  
<sup>2</sup>*Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).



If presidential appointees are to influence career bureaucrats, they must gain their confidence. However, career bureaucrats are likely to be more committed to their agencies' goals than to the president's.<sup>28</sup> The civil service system protects careerists, so they cannot easily be removed from their positions even if they work against the president's objectives. To gain their cooperation, presidential appointees must achieve a working compromise between the president's goals and those of the bureaucratic organizations. Such delicate maneuvering requires managerial skills that many inexperienced appointees lack. Chapters 22 and 23 examine more closely the relationship between presidential appointees and career bureaucrats.

#### ORGANIZING THE EXTENDED PRESIDENCY

Effective use of appointees by the president requires two-way communication. The president cannot possibly meet regularly with all his appointees or personally oversee their activities. Yet if he is to be in control, he must receive essential advice from his subordinates and have means of communicating his views to them.

#### Patterns of Organization

Presidents have relied on a variety of techniques to regulate the flow of information to and from the Oval Office. One arrangement, used by Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, resembles the way the military and most corporations are organized. It places the president at the top of an organizational pyramid and his closest personal advisers, each of whom is assigned specific responsibilities, at the second level (see Figure 20-2). All information and

<sup>28</sup>Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "Clashing Beliefs within the Executive Branch," *American Political Science Review* 70 (June 1976): 461.

#### ★ HOW THE UNITED STATES COMPARES

##### Heads of State and Heads of Government

Most democracies divide the executive office between a head of state, who is the ceremonial leader, and a head of government, who is the policy leader. In Great Britain these positions are filled by the queen and the prime minister, respectively. In democracies without a hereditary monarchy, the position of head of state is usually held by an individual chosen by the legislature. West Germany's head of state, for example, is a president, who is elected by the Federal Assembly; the head of government is a chancellor, who is chosen by the majority party in the

lower house (Bundestag) of the Federal Assembly. The United States is one of a few countries in which the roles of head of state and head of government are combined in a single office, the presidency. The major disadvantage of this arrangement is that the president must devote considerable time to ceremonial functions, such as dinners for visiting heads of state. The major advantages are that the president alone is the center of national attention and that his power as head of government is enhanced by his prestige as the personification of the American state.

| Country       | Head of State   | Head of Government |
|---------------|---|--------------------|
| Canada        | Governor general (representative of the British monarchy) | Prime minister     |
| France        | President   | Premier            |
| Great Britain | Queen   | Prime minister     |
| Italy         | President   | Prime minister     |
| Japan         | Emperor   | Prime minister     |
| Mexico        | President   | President          |
| Sweden        | King  | Prime minister     |
| United States | President   | President          |
| West Germany  | President   | Chancellor         |

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## HOW THE U.S. COMPARES

A series of boxes compares the United States with the other major western democracies with respect to a variety of political characteristics.

#### PART FOUR ★ POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

#### Summary

America's political parties are relatively weak organizations. They lack control over nominations, elections, and platforms. Candidates can bypass the party organization and win nomination through primary elections. Individual candidates also control most of the organization and money necessary to win elections and run largely on personal platforms.

Primary elections are the major reason for the organizational weakness of America's parties. Once the parties lost their hold on the nominating process, they became subordinate to candidates. More generally, the political parties have been undermined by election reforms, some of which were intended to weaken the party and others of which have unintentionally done so. Recently the state and national party organizations have expanded their capacity to provide candidates with modern campaign services and are again playing a prominent role in election campaigns. But this role is less influential than it once was, because party organizations at all levels have few ways of controlling the candidates who run under their banner. They assist candidates with campaign technology, workers, and funds, but cannot compel candidates' loyalty to organizational goals.

America's parties are decentralized, fragmented orga-

nizations. The relationship among local, state, and national party organizations is marked by paths of common interest rather than lines of authority. The national party organization does not control the policies and activities of the state organizations, and they in turn do not control the local organizations. The fragmentation of parties prevents them from acting as cohesive national organizations. Traditionally the local organizations have controlled most of the party's work force because most elections are contested at the local level. Local parties, however, vary markedly in their vitality; today only a few can be described as active, powerful machines, while most are understaffed and underfunded.

America's party organizations are flexible enough to allow diverse interests to coexist within them; they can also accommodate new ideas and leadership, since they are neither rigid nor closed. However, because America's parties cannot control their candidates or coordinate their policies at all levels, they are unable to present the voters with a coherent, detailed platform for governing. The national electorate as a whole is thus denied a clear choice among policy alternatives and has difficulty influencing national policy in a predictable and enduring way through elections.

#### Major Concepts

candidate-centered politics      party organizations  
nomination      primary election (direct primary)  
party-centered politics

#### Suggested Readings

Allsop, John. *Roses, Machines, and Urban Voters*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. A penetrating study of the party machines that once flourished in America's cities.  
Broder, David. *The Party's Over*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. One of America's leading journalists discusses the declining influence of parties on election campaigns.  
Crotty, William, ed. *The Party Symbol*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1980. A series of articles by leading scholars on the activities and influence of contemporary American parties.  
Davis, James W. *National Conventions in an Age of Party Reform*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983. An

assessment of how the role of national conventions has changed as a result of the changes in the parties and nominating system.  
Eldersveld, Samuel J. *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964. A behavioral study of the activities of the Democratic and Republican organizations in Detroit.  
Epstein, Leon D. *Political Parties in Western Democracies*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980. A comparative analysis of political parties, with special emphasis on those of the United States and Great Britain.  
Frantzich, Stephen E. *Political Parties in the Technological Age*. New York: Longman, 1989. An insightful analysis of how parties are adapting to the information age.

## SUMMARY

A short essay strengthens ties between the chapter's major concepts and those of the rest of the text.

## KEY TERMS

A list of the chapter's boldfaced terms facilitates review.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Annotated references encourage further pursuit of "real" political science: both classic studies and recent research.

## DIALOGUES

In these *original* essays following each of the text's seven parts, prominent political scientists discuss a major issue of the American system.



BRUCE M. RUSSETT

*The basic interests of the United States, and the values that Americans cherish, are more secure than ever.*

As an individual nation-state, the United States probably has passed its peak of power. But the Western alliance, which the United States leads and has nurtured, is still rising in power and influence. As a result, the basic interests of the United States, and the values that Americans cherish, are more secure than ever. In November 1988 British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared, "The cold war is over." And the West has won.

Immediately after World War II the United States was the world's dominant military and economic power. Europe and Japan were devastated and economically exhausted; Germany and Japan were also defeated and occupied; the Soviet Union was victorious and had vast new territories under its control, but it too was devastated by the war and remained technologically backward. Against this low point, subsequent American power would necessarily look diminished as the war-torn economies recovered. Just as important, the United States chose to help many of its wartime allies and enemies rebuild, thereby hastening its own relative decline from its temporary solitary splendor.

In so choosing, American leaders acted in the true long-term interests of the country. The United States needed strong allies to help contain the perceived threat from Soviet communism. It also needed a prosperous world economy that could serve as both a market for American goods and a source of competitors to supply American markets and keep American

producers on their toes. American policy ends, and achieved them.

Communism, by contrast, has been a economic failure—in the Third World, China, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union itself. Communist countries of the Third World have stagnated, and some have turned to the West for capital and technology. China's economy has prospered only since it became more open to the West and began to abandon socialist ownership and central planning. Mikhail Gorbachev and many East European leaders have begun to realize that their own stagnant economies cannot prosper unless they adopt many features of capitalism. They also know that in order to grow, their economies need political liberalization and a greater degree of democracy. Even noncommunist Third World countries have moved away from state control of the economy as well as from authoritarian political rule. After decades of military dictatorship, many Asian and Latin American countries have returned to democratic government.

Democracy and free-market capitalism are central American values; they are what the cold war was all about. As these values have become entrenched around the world, American security has increased. American military power is no longer superior to the Soviet Union's, as it was just after World War II, but it has not become inferior, either. The Soviet-American military balance has in fact helped maintain peace between the two countries. Neither that balance nor the military superiority of either superpower over any other state is really now in question.

True, both the United States and the Soviet Union risk losing economic competitiveness if they continue to devote so much of their resources to the military. The United States must raise its rate of saving and investment if it is to maintain its technological edge. In the decades ahead, Japan and other countries may surpass it in important respects. But if that happens, it will do so in a world that is basically the one that the leaders of postwar America hoped would come into being.

*Bruce M. Russett is Dean Acheson Professor of International Relations and Political Science at Yale University. He is the author of Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security.*

## DIALOGUE

## Is the United States Past Its Peak as an Economic and Military Power?



STEPHEN D. KRASNER

*The United States has not yet adjusted to its new, more vulnerable international position.*

At the end of World War II the United States was the most powerful country in the world. In fact, it was the most powerful state that had ever existed in the 300-year history of the modern international system. It was the only country that possessed nuclear weapons. Its gross national product was three times that of the Soviet Union and six times that of the United Kingdom, the next most economically productive nation in the noncommunist world. American industries held the commanding heights in high-technology industries. The United States was a net exporter of petroleum.

These extraordinary resources made it possible for American leaders to adopt very ambitious foreign policies. The United States created a system of alliances designed to contain the Soviet Union's expansionism. America fought bloody wars in Korea and Vietnam, countries that had few economic resources and were of little strategic importance. Large numbers of American troops were more or less permanently garrisoned in Western Europe and Japan. Defeats, especially the communist victory in China, were attributed to internal betrayal, not to any limitations of American power.

In the past two decades, however, American power has declined, in some areas dramatically. The gross

national product of the United States is now only about 40 percent larger than that of Japan, which has half our population and few natural resources. Germany and Japan export more manufactured products than does the United States. The Soviet Union has achieved parity in nuclear weapons. Japan has challenged America's supremacy in high-technology industries. The United States has been a net importer of petroleum since 1970. Even though the United States remains very powerful, it can no longer consider itself able either to control the international environment or to extricate itself from it.

The United States has not yet adjusted to its new, more vulnerable international position. Even crushing setbacks, most notably the loss of the Vietnam war and the quadrupling of oil prices in the 1970s (which could have been prevented if the United States had had surplus productive capacity), have not prompted a fundamental reassessment of American policies. Commitments that were made forty years ago have not been radically changed. Half the American army is still dedicated to the defense of Western Europe, even though Western Europe's gross national product is now higher than that of the United States. American leaders continue to treat trade and financial relations with Japan as purely an economic issue, rather than a matter of national power, except in some rare instances where American defense capabilities are directly affected by Japanese control of specific technologies. The stability of the American economy is now hostage to the public and private foreign-investment decisions made in Japan, because neither the American people nor American leaders have been willing to adopt fiscal policies that would close the budget and trade deficits. Hard choices are ahead for Americans, but our attitudes, our history, and our institutions are not particularly well suited to make them.

*Stephen D. Krasner is Chair of the Department of Political Science at Stanford University. He is the author of Structural Conflicts: The Third World Against Global Liberalism.*



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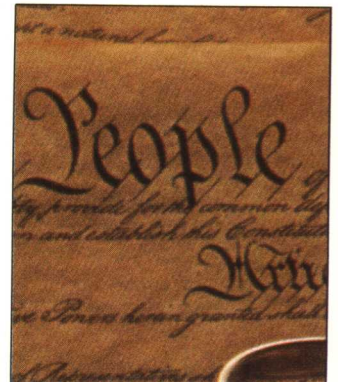
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