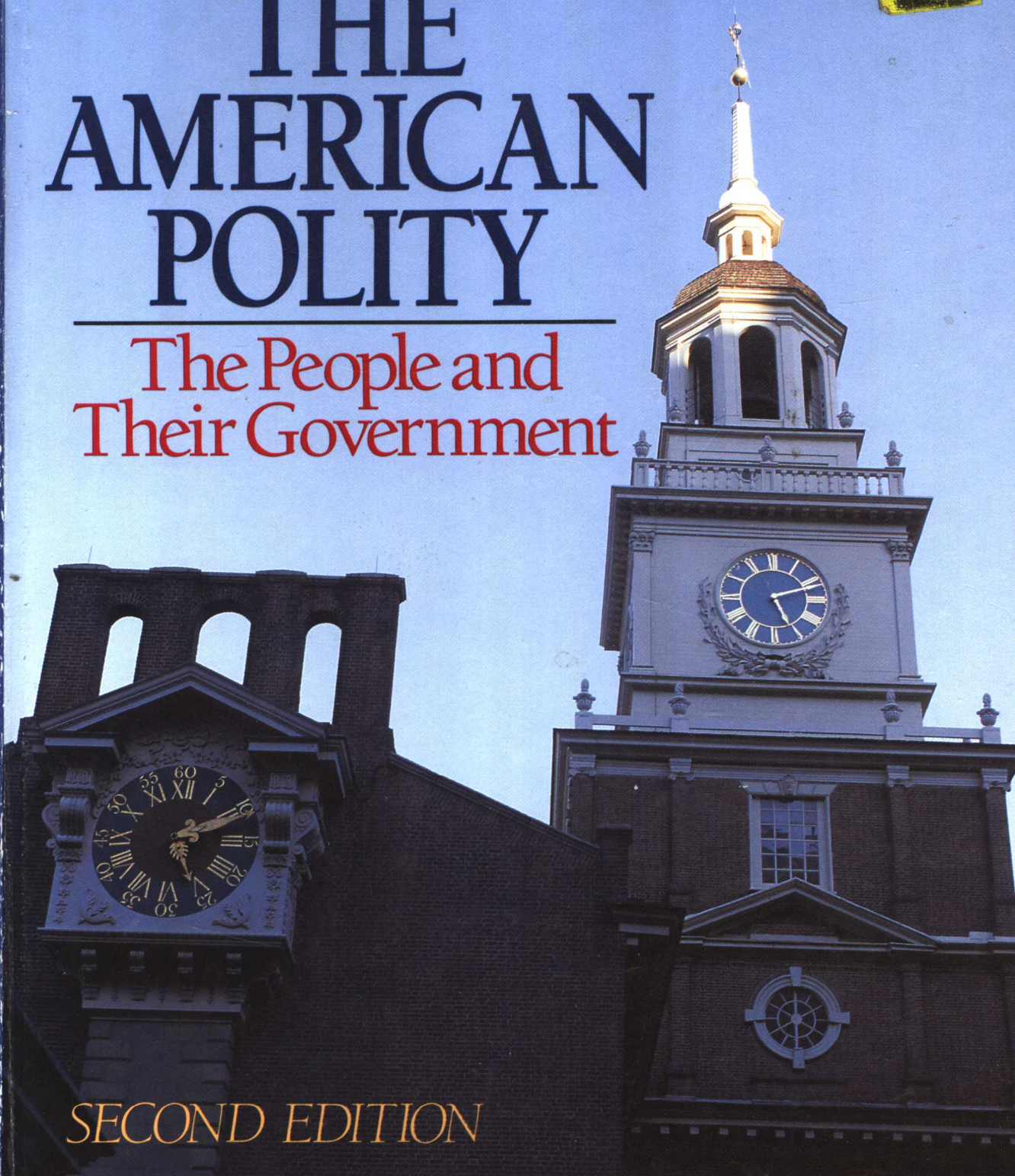


Everett Carll Ladd

# THE AMERICAN POLITY

The People and  
Their Government



SECOND EDITION

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SECOND EDITION

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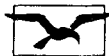
*The People  
and Their Government*

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Everett Carll Ladd

*University of Connecticut*

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# Preface

The United States is now celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of its greatest political accomplishment: the writing and implementing of the Constitution. The fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia completed their work on September 17, 1787.

The leaders who came together in Independence Hall to draft the new constitution faced formidable problems. Though the war of independence from Great Britain had been won, the future of the new nation was hardly secure. Could successful new political institutions be firmly established? Could the nation's security be maintained, in a world where it was by no means the strongest of nations? Above all, perhaps, could the dream of America as a land of individual liberty be realized and sustained?

When set against those of 1787, our own special political challenges seem less daunting. But they are as real and demand the best of us. Will we be able to do as much as the founding generation did to enlarge the idea of human liberty, at home and abroad? Will we extend opportunity in our society as they did in theirs? Will we be as successful in *perfecting* the performance of our democratic institutions as the founding generation was in *establishing* sound institutions? The need for political courage, intelligence, imagination, and integrity are as great today as ever.

I call this text *The American Polity*. With the same Greek root as the word politics, polity is a more succinct way of saying political system, and the two expressions are used interchangeably throughout this book. But there is reason beyond stylistic convenience for calling this an inquiry into the American polity. The greatest writer on politics in all of antiquity, and one of the most profound theorists of all time, was the Athenian philosopher Aristotle (384 to 322 B.C.). The first

to write systematically on democracy as a system of government, Aristotle distinguished between two basic forms of democracy: one involved direct rule by the people, which he thought carried with it great threats to personal liberty and minority rights; the other was based on constitutionalism and the guarantee of individual rights, which he thought held promise of being the best of all government. Aristotle called the latter *πολιτεία*, or *politeia*, translated as polity or constitutional government.<sup>1</sup>

The American system of government is a polity in Aristotle's sense of the term: a particular type of democracy established on the principles of constitutionalism and representation, with safeguards for minority rights. It deserves to be studied as a whole, as something more than a collection of separate institutions and processes. It is in the meshing of diverse political activities and the interplay of people and their government that we most clearly see what is distinctive about our polity.

## The Second Edition

The American political parade is marching along faster than ever these days, and texts on government and politics have to hustle lest they get left far behind, unable to view the action. My decision to revise the text substantially every two years is in large part a necessary response to the quickened pace of change in a nation and a world shrunk by satellite communication, computer networks, and jet air travel. Too much happens too quickly for three- or four-year revision cycles to be acceptable any longer.

Revisions of an American government textbook must also be tailored to the schedule of our national elections—which are a recurring watershed. While our basic governmental institutions show great stability and continuity, the conduct of government and the course of public policy reflect the biennial shift in the partisan balance that elections produce. Voting in presidential-election years gets the most attention, of course, because it decides who will occupy the White House, but voting in the so-called “off-years” is important as well. In November 1986 voters chose all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, 34 senators, and 36 governors. The Democrats made a net gain of eight seats in the Senate, wresting control of that chamber from the Republicans who had held a majority since 1980. The Republicans made a net gain of eight governorships, drawing about even with the Democrats who had previously enjoyed a big edge. This second edition of *The American Polity* reports upon and analyzes the results of these contests.

Beyond that, the text has been revised to bring students the latest available information on politics and policy in the U.S. and on the

<sup>1</sup>*The Politics of Aristotle*, H. Rackham, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 206–7.

larger setting—which includes social and economic experience—in which they are shaped. Charts and graphs throughout have been updated. More importantly, new material has been added on key developments affecting each institution of the national government and encompassing the main areas of public policy.

For example, William H. Rehnquist was confirmed as the new chief justice of the United States Supreme Court on September 17, 1986, replacing Warren Burger, who retired after 17 years. The confirmation hearings in the Senate were a bruising battle, reflecting not only a division of opinion on Justice Rehnquist's political and judicial philosophy but an even bigger debate over change in the composition of the federal judiciary after six years of Ronald Reagan's court appointments. In chapter 9, I discuss the impact of Reagan's appointments, giving special attention to the U.S. circuit courts of appeal.

On October 22, 1986, President Reagan signed into law the Tax Reform Act of 1986, the culmination of eighteen months of intense argument and maneuvering. In chapter 6, I examine the *politics* of tax reform: It provides an excellent case study of how policy gets made in our system of divided government and checked authority. In chapter 18, I assess the *substance* of tax reform—which has changed the economic playing field for individual taxpayers and business corporations alike.

Besides including extensive material on new developments in politics and policy, I have added a wholly new chapter bringing greater depth of treatment to a subject deeply imbedded in the Constitution: *separation of powers*. In the first edition, the workings of separation of powers were parceled out in the chapters on Congress, the presidency, and the federal courts. So far-reaching are the effects of separation of powers that they deserve to be also treated as a whole, not just in the context of each branch of government. A new chapter, chapter 10, is entirely devoted to separation of powers. It will give students a more complete understanding of the interplay of president and Congress. I use the intricate process of developing the national budget for fiscal year 1986 to make separation of powers vivid and concrete.

I believe that students will especially like the addition of the new case studies that introduce most of the chapters. Chapter 17, on civil liberties and civil rights, now opens with a discussion of recent Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action programs. We see the several sides of this complex policy question—and we see how divided the Court is in responding to it. Chapter 19, on public welfare, is introduced with an analysis of U.S. programs to assist farmers—which reminds students both that welfare policies are by no means confined to helping the poor and that finding a way to address effectively the economic problems of the farm community is indeed complicated. Chapter 20 discusses U.S. foreign policy by first examining the ongoing debate over how we should respond to South Africa and apartheid. I hope that students will find the new case studies fresh, concrete,

and illustrative of the larger themes with which the respective chapters deal.

### Approaching the Study of American Government

Students reading this text have already acquired information on the study of American government and politics from discussions with family and friends, in high school classes, through television, newspapers and magazines, and more. But the subject is a big one, and the ways of examining it are enormously varied. In writing *The American Polity* I have assumed a readership aware of a familiar subject yet often unclear how the pieces fit together, how the system works. This audience needs a text that provides the store of basic common information about the polity required for further study and for informed citizenship: detailed information on American political beliefs and values, the primary institutions of government, the form and substance of political participation by individuals and groups, and the major policy commitments and choices the United States has made. But students also need greater depth and unity in a subject all too often studied piecemeal. This depth is achieved by providing as backdrops three different perspectives: societal, historical, and cross national.

*Societal perspective.* Social science has carved up the study of social experience into discrete segments, divided among disciplines like political science, economics, and sociology. This is unavoidable, but society is not so compartmentalized. Those parts of American society that we label “government” influence and in turn are influenced by all of the other parts—components involving the economy; systems of social and cultural values; education and technology; the ethnic, racial, and religious composition of the population; and many others. The first section of this text looks closely at aspects of American society that are especially important in defining the environment for the country’s government, politics, and public policy. In the remaining chapters I keep returning to the many concrete links between the polity and the larger society of which it is a part.

*Historical perspective.* With so much to discuss about the practice of American government today, the influence of the past can easily be shortchanged. Historical perspective is essential, for two somewhat different reasons. First, contemporary institutions and practices did not suddenly emerge full-grown. We understand them better—whether it is the presidency, political parties, or American welfare policy—by seeing the course they have taken. To ignore the past is to deprive ourselves of an immense amount of comparative experience.

Second, there have been powerful continuities in American politi-

cal experience. With the drafting of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 and its ratification a year later, a set of political institutions consistent with the country's political beliefs were put in place (see chapters 3, 4, and 5). The persistence of the primary political institutions—the Constitution, the presidency, Congress, the judiciary, the sharing of power by the federal and state governments—over the last two centuries is an extraordinary feature of American political experience. In this text I frequently draw examples from earlier eras in American life to make more concrete what might otherwise appear as mere assertion that important continuities are everywhere evident in our political system, even in the face of great social and economic change.

*Cross-national perspective.* Some of the responses the United States has given to enduring problems of policy and governance closely resemble those made by Great Britain, France, West Germany, and the other major industrial democracies. But the American system also reflects its own distinctive institutional arrangements and policy choices. By providing cross-national comparison throughout, I have tried to present our own system in a rounder, more complete, and accurate way.

## The Plan of the Book

The second edition contains many changes, but the basic organization of the book remains intact. The first two parts of *The American Polity* survey the setting for American political life. Part 1 examines the social setting, including the country's social origins and development, present-day economic trends, and such diverse social attributes of the populace as their ethnic backgrounds and educational attainments. Part 2 then looks at the central beliefs and values of Americans: the country's ideological tradition, derived from classical liberalism; the expression of this ideology in the basic law, the Constitution; our commitment to and practice of a particular type of democratic government.

We move in Part 3 to a detailed consideration of the principal institutions and arrangements of national government. These include, of course, Congress, the presidency and the executive branch, and the federal courts; but they also include the distinctly American form of governmental interaction, built around *separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism*.

From the organization of government in Part 3, we turn in Part 4 to public opinion, political parties, voting and elections, interest groups, and the communications media—the means by which groups participate in politics and government. People do not participate in a political vacuum, but in and through the setting their governmental institutions establish. The American system of dispersed power, accruing from separation of powers and federalism, gives interest

groups many diverse points of governmental access through which to advance their goals.

Part 5, the last section of the text, is devoted to American public policy in four major sectors: civil liberties and civil rights, political economy, public welfare, and defense and foreign policy. Like every other political system, the American polity ultimately expresses itself in the character of the policy choices it makes.

### The Ladd Report

Daily newspapers like the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, the broadcast networks, and weekly magazines of governmental affairs such as *Congressional Quarterly* and *National Journal* help us follow the ever-changing course of political events. But the perspective of a political science text, going beyond the headlines and analyzing the dynamics of American society and government, is also important. So that this perspective can be continuously applied to major new developments, even between the biennial editions, I write a report twice each year that the publisher makes available without charge to all students who are using *The American Polity*. Previous *Reports* have looked at the 1984 presidential election, the federal budget, the status of the Republican and Democratic political parties amidst the realignment of the 1980s, and campaign financing. *Report #5* assessed the 1986 elections: (1) what happened and why, (2) what the results say about the status of the Republican and Democratic parties, and (3) what impact the results are likely to have upon the last two years of Ronald Reagan's presidency.

### The Study Guide and Instructor's Manual

The *Study Guide* for *The American Polity* has been revised thoughtfully and imaginatively by David B. Magleby of Brigham Young University. Margaret Kenski of Pima Community College and Henry Kenski of the University of Arizona have expertly developed the *Instructor's Manual* and the *Test-Item File* for the second edition.

### Acknowledgments

The first edition of *The American Polity* benefited from use by teachers and students at more than 200 universities and colleges, a broad and representative proving ground for a basic American government text. Fellow teachers of introductory American government classes who have used *The American Polity* have provided me with detailed, thoughtful, constructive criticism that I have done my best to follow. The reports and comments from many of those teachers have significantly shaped the second edition. My own classes of Political Science 173 at the University of Connecticut have been a wonderful source for

what works, and what doesn't work, in introducing students to American government and politics.

There isn't space to thank each and every person who has helped me on the text. Special thanks are due to the following instructors who prepared valuable written critiques of the first edition:

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The second edition reflects too the suggestions of those who read various drafts of the first edition in manuscript. I made the following expressions of thanks in the Preface to the first edition that I want to reiterate and reaffirm here.

The team of political science reviewers that Norton assembled were extraordinarily painstaking and helpful. My thanks go to:

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*University of Connecticut.*

Colleagues in public opinion research have contributed much to this text. In particular, Burns W. Roper and Daniel Yankelovich have helped me understand better American attitudes and values. Working closely with my friends at *Public Opinion* magazine during the past seven years has also taught me much—besides being great fun. Seymour Martin Lipset and Ben J. Wattenberg have been co-editors throughout. David R. Gergen was the first managing editor, until January 1981 when he became director of communications in Ronald Reagan's White House staff. William Schambra was the magazine's first deputy managing editor, a position now held by Victoria A. Sackett. Nicola L. Furlan and Graham Hueber have been assistant editors. To the current managing editor of *Public Opinion*, Karlyn H. Keene, I owe a debt that almost rivals the one run up by the Reagan administration. Karlyn has read and commented on each chapter—sometimes in two or three succeeding drafts. Her honesty, support, and unfailing good judgment have made this a better book.

My colleagues in the Department of Political Science at the University of Connecticut, and at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, have been extraordinarily tolerant and forbearing. Ranking high in tolerance and collegial helpfulness are W. Wayne Shannon, G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Marilyn Potter, John Benson, and Lois Timms. Ranking even higher, because her position put her so directly in the line of fire, is my research assistant, Marianne Simonoff. Her care and diligence were sustained throughout the project. Sandra Berriault did a fine job entering much of the text in our trusty word processor. My special thanks and deep appreciation go to my administrative assistant, Lynn A. Zayachkiwsky. Her maturity, thoughtfulness, dependability, and all-round professional competence made it

possible for us to keep both the Roper Center and the text more or less on track and on schedule.

Sometime in 1968, I had the great good fortune of meeting Donald S. Lamm. He was then a college editor at Norton, and from our discussions came my commitment to write a history of the U.S. party system—published two years later by Norton as *American Political Parties: Social Change and Political Response*. I have worked with Don on a number of books since then, and the collaboration has been the most important of my professional life. Now as president of Norton, he has had a big hand in delivering *The American Polity*. As always, his support was valuable and his friendship invaluable. My many other Norton associations have been strong and positive. Donald Fusting has been my editor on this text, and my respect for his work has deepened over our years in harness together. Nancy Palmquist did a wonderful job copyediting the entire manuscript and managing it through production. So, too, did Caroline McKinley, who was responsible for photographs and illustrations for the first edition, and A. Deborah Malmud, for the second edition.

Authors often close their acknowledgments by recognizing the role played by their families—and for good reason. Not many people go through the experience of writing a book without realizing how much their families have borne the inconveniences and contributed to the joy. *The American Polity* is dedicated to my father and the memory of my mother, my wife, Cynthia, and our children, Benjamin, Melissa, Corina, and Carll, to Carll's wife, Elizabeth Lovejoy Ladd, and Corina's husband, Gerald Moran.

Storrs, Connecticut  
November 15, 1986

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