WE THE PEOPLE

A CONCISE INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

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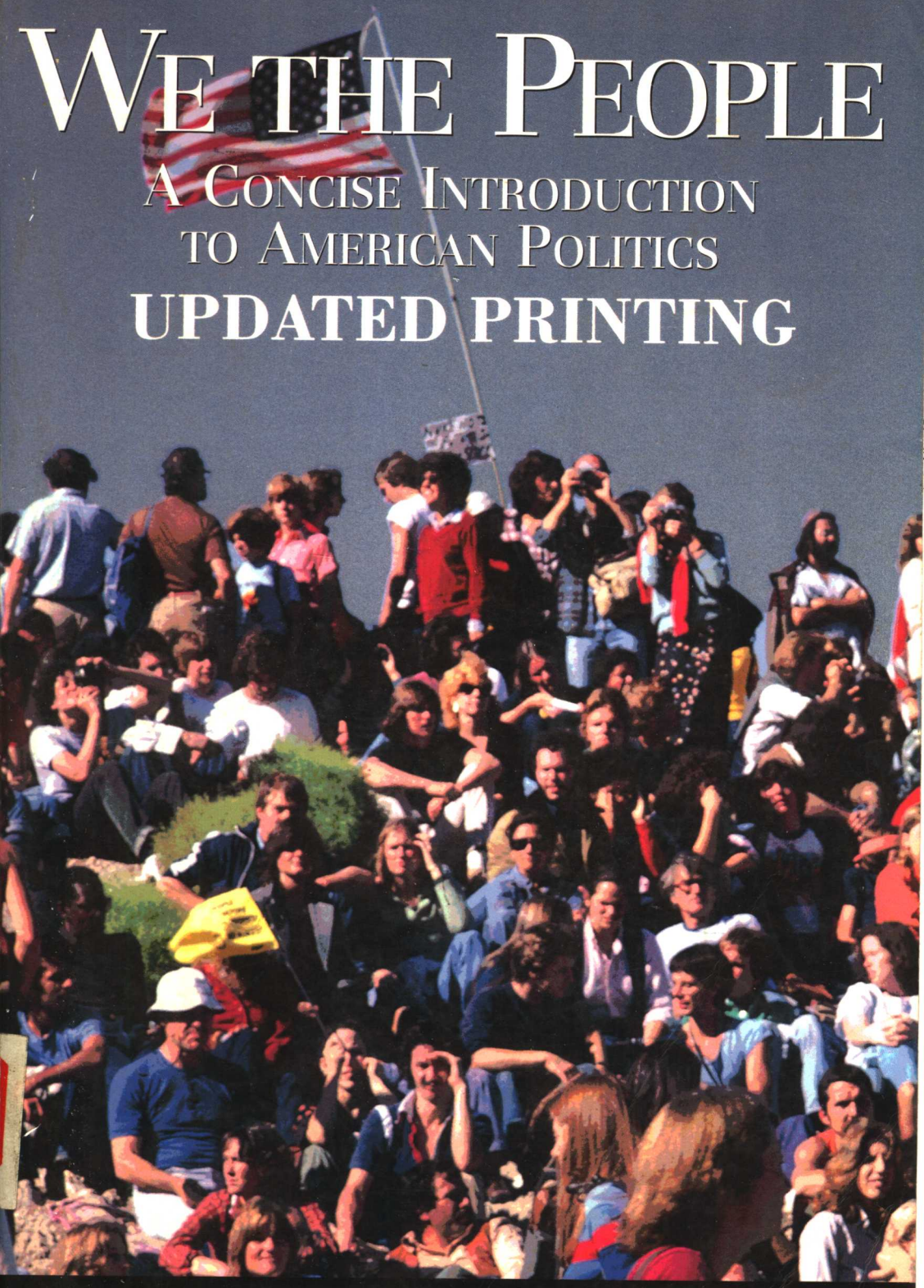

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A CONCISE INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

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Preface

he story of American politics is a compelling one. It is about the struggle of real people to find mutually beneficial ways of living together. The title of this book, *We the People*, is a recognition of this struggle and of the lofty goal—a government of and for *all* the people—that inspires many of its participants.

The writer Theodore White aptly described the United States as "a nation in search of itself." The American people have created a remarkably stable political system but have never regarded their work as finished. Each generation has had to redefine how their government will work in practice. This imperative is as powerful today as at nearly any time in the nation's history. The late twentieth century has been a period of extraordinary change in America, which has raised new challenges to the practice of government. Minorities and women, long denied access to political and economic power, are seeking a fairer share. New people in the millions from Asia and Latin America have joined the American community, bringing with them cultural traditions that have made our society richer and fuller, but also more fragmented and contentious. Traditional institutions, from political parties to families, have declined dramatically, weakening the fabric of our politics but also creating the possibility of adaptive new arrangements. America's workers and businesses have built a highly productive economy, but are now facing the opportunities of a global marketplace and its attendant fears of post-industrial dislocation. The cold war that dominated our attention in foreign policy for decades has been replaced by ethnic rivalries and localized conflicts that raise troubling new issues of world insecurity which, so far, have defied attempts to resolve them.

Scholars have endeavored to keep pace with the great changes that are taking place in today's politics. Never before has scholarship been so closely tied to the real world. If much of what political scientists study is arcane, we have tried increasingly to connect our work to the realities of everyday life in America. The result has been the gradual emergence of a clearer and more complex picture of how American government operates. I have tried in this book to convey this advancement in knowledge in a faithful and interesting way.

In writing this book, I rejected the impulse to impose a single framework on the analysis. The U.S. political system and scholarship on it are

both remarkably pluralistic, and any attempt at orthodoxy distorts their true nature. Accordingly, this text relies upon the several forms of analysis that have informed the work of political scientists—the philosophical, historical, behavioral, legal, policy-analytic, and institutional. Each perspective has its strengths and its place in a telling of the story of American government.

Nevertheless, the book has a unifying core. The American political system is characterized by a few major tendencies, which are the key to understanding how it operates, namely:

- An enduring set of cultural ideals that are its people's common bond and a source of their political goals.
- An extreme fragmentation of governing authority that is based on an elaborate system of checks and balances.
- A great many competing interests that are the result of the nation's great size, population diversity, and economic complexity.
- A strong emphasis on individual rights that is a consequence of the nation's political traditions.
- A sharp separation of the political and economic spheres that has the effect of placing many economic issues outside the reach of political majorities.

These tendencies are introduced in the first chapter and are woven into subsequent chapters at numerous points. If students soon forget many of the points made in this book, as they invariably will, they may at least retain an awareness of the deep underpinnings of the American political system.

This book has its origins in my larger text, *The American Democracy*, which McGraw-Hill first published in 1990. This shorter version is not, however, a straightforward abridgment of its predecessor. I have tried here to write a book that could well have been an original edition. The organization, for example, is substantially different. Compared with the twenty-seven chapters in the larger text, this one has seventeen chapters. This reduction was achieved, not by purging pages en masse, but by a thorough process of revision and consolidation. Throughout this effort, I labored to maintain what readers of the larger text say is one of its major strengths: the extensive use of narrative. Nothing dulls a student's attention more quickly than a text that piles fact upon fact and list upon list.

A novel feature of this edition is its set of selected readings; each chapter is followed by a reading that develops a major point of the chapter.

These readings are intended to deepen the student's understanding of American politics and to add flexibility to the instructor's use of the text. For the instructor who prefers to supplement a text with a book of readings, this text offers both. On the other hand, for the instructor who seeks to reduce the student workload, the readings can be skipped or assigned optionally. The readings, with the exception of James Madison's *Federalist* No. 10, are contemporary ones. The authors are distinguished scholars and public servants: Everett Carll Ladd, Samuel H. Beer, James Madison, Jennifer Hochschild, Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, Frances Fox Piven, Richard A. Cloward, Benjamin Ginsberg, Martin Shefter, Jack L.Walker, Jr., Morris P. Fiorina, Richard Rose, Joel D. Aberbach, Bert A. Rockman, William J. Brennan, Jr., Alice M. Rivlin, Theodore R. Marmor, Jerry L. Mashaw, Phillip L. Harvey, and C. Fred Bergsten.

The text includes two features that are also in my larger text. Each chapter has a boxed insert entitled ""How the United States Compares." The United States in many ways is the world's preeminent democracy, but it also has distinctive institutions, policies, and practices. American students invariably gain a deeper understanding of their country's politics when they recognize the ways in which it resembles and differs from politics elsewhere. Each chapter also has a boxed insert entitled "The Media and the People." The world of everyday politics is largely beyond our direct observation. We increasingly depend on the media to inform us about this world, and these boxes are intended to afford a better understanding of the inherent limitations of the media's version of reality.

This book owes a great debt to others. Editions of my larger text were strengthened immeasurably by the suggestions of more than 300 scholars at U.S. colleges and universities of all types—public and private, large and small, two-year and four-year. Their sound advice helped shape every page of that book, which in turn have affected the pages here. I am also deeply thankful to the smaller group of scholars who advised me directly on the content of this particular edition: Paul Blanchard, Eastern Kentucky University; John Bookman, University of Northern Colorado; Didrick Castberg, University of Hawaii at Hilo; Paul Chardoul, Grand Rapids Community College; Stephen Frank, St. Cloud State University; Daniel Gregory, El Camino College; Nancy Haanstad, Weber State College; Eric Herzik, University of Nevada; Richard Keiser, University of Denver; Donald Kerle, Pittsburgh State University; Thomas Marshall, University of Texas at Arlington; Richard Miller, Sacramento City College; John Nickerson, University of Maine; Martin Sutton, Bucks County Community Col-

lege; Miguel Tirado, Sonoma State University; T. Phillip Wolf, Indiana University; and Larry Wright, Florida A&M University.

I wish also to thank my graduate assistant, Lakshmi Srinivasan, who worked with me from start to end of this edition. Her extraordinary writing and editing skills added greatly to the book's cogency and readability. Peter Labella at McGraw-Hill had an equally large role in the effort; he initiated this book and provided editorial help at every stage. The end-of-chapter readings were Peter's suggestion; they add greatly to the book's substance and flexibility, and I thank him for the idea. David Damstra of McGraw-Hill carefully oversaw the laborious process of turning a rough-hewn manuscript into a well-crafted and, to my eye, beautifully designed text. I am also indebted to McGraw-Hill's Louise Karam, Wanda Siedlecka, Caroline Izzo, and Monica Freedman for their roles in the book's production.

Looking ahead, I invite from instructors and students any comments and criticisms that might inform future editions of this text. The strengths and weaknesses of a text are best discovered in its use, and I hope readers will share their thoughts with me. Suggestions can be addressed to me at the Department of Political Science, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244. I promise that your ideas will receive a well-considered response.

Thomas E. Patterson

Contents

CHAPTER ONE

The American Heritage

> One hears people say that it is inherent in the habits and nature of democracies to change feelings and thoughts at every moment. . . . But I have never seen anything like that happening in the great democracy on the other side of the ocean. What struck me most in the United States was the difficulty experienced in getting an idea, once conceived, out of the head of the majority.
>
> *Alexis de Tocqueville*[1]

T MIDDAY on January 20, 1993, Bill Clinton took the oath of office as the forty-second president of the United States. In his inaugural address, Clinton spoke of America's need for renewal: "Let us all take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and our families, but for our communities and our country." He concluded his nationally televised speech by saying, "We have heard the trumpets. We have changed the guard. And now—each in our own way and with God's help—we must answer the call."

Clinton's words, with a few changes, could have been addressed to any generation of Americans.[2] His speech was filled with references to time-honored American principles: democracy, liberty, opportunity to all, diversity, freedom, unity. The same ideals had permeated the speeches of Ronald Reagan and John Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson. The same ideals have been used to take America to war, to negotiate peace, to assert new rights, to launch major policies, and to celebrate national holidays.[3]

America's continuity has, of course, obscured deep divisions among its people.[4] The claim that America is a melting pot has always been as much fable as fact. When Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants reached this country's shores, they encountered nativist elements that scorned their ways of life and attacked their religion. The Latinos and Asians who have come here more recently also have been made to feel less than fully welcome.

The "English first" movement includes the not-very-subtle message that "true" Americans do not speak Spanish or Vietnamese or Cambodian.

Nevertheless, throughout their history Americans of all colors, nationalities, and creeds have embraced the core principles upon which the nation was founded. They have quarreled over other matters, and over the practice of these principles, but they seem never to have questioned the principles themselves. As Clinton Rossiter concluded, "There has been, in a doctrinal sense, only one America."[5]

This is a book about contemporary American politics, not U.S. history or culture. Yet American politics today cannot be understood apart from the nation's heritage. Government does not begin anew with each generation; it builds on the past. In the case of the United States, the most significant link between past and present lies in the nation's founding ideals. This chapter briefly examines the principles that have shaped American politics since the country's earliest years.

The chapter also explains basic concepts, such as power and authority, that are important in the study of government and politics, and describes the underlying rules of the American governing system, such as constitutionalism and capitalism. The main points made in this chapter are the following:

* *The American political culture centers on a set of core ideals—liberty, equality, self-government, individualism, diversity, and unity—that serve as the people's common bond.*
* *Politics is the process that determines whose values will prevail in society. The play of politics in the United States takes place in the context of democratic procedures, constitutionalism, and capitalism.*
* *Politics in the United States is characterized by a number of major patterns, including a highly fragmented governing system, a high degree of pluralism, an extraordinary emphasis on individual rights, and a pronounced separation of the political and economic spheres.*

POLITICAL CULTURE: THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

The people of every nation have a few great ideals that characterize their political life, but, as James Bryce observed, Americans are a special case.[6] Their ideals are the basis of their national identity. Other people take their