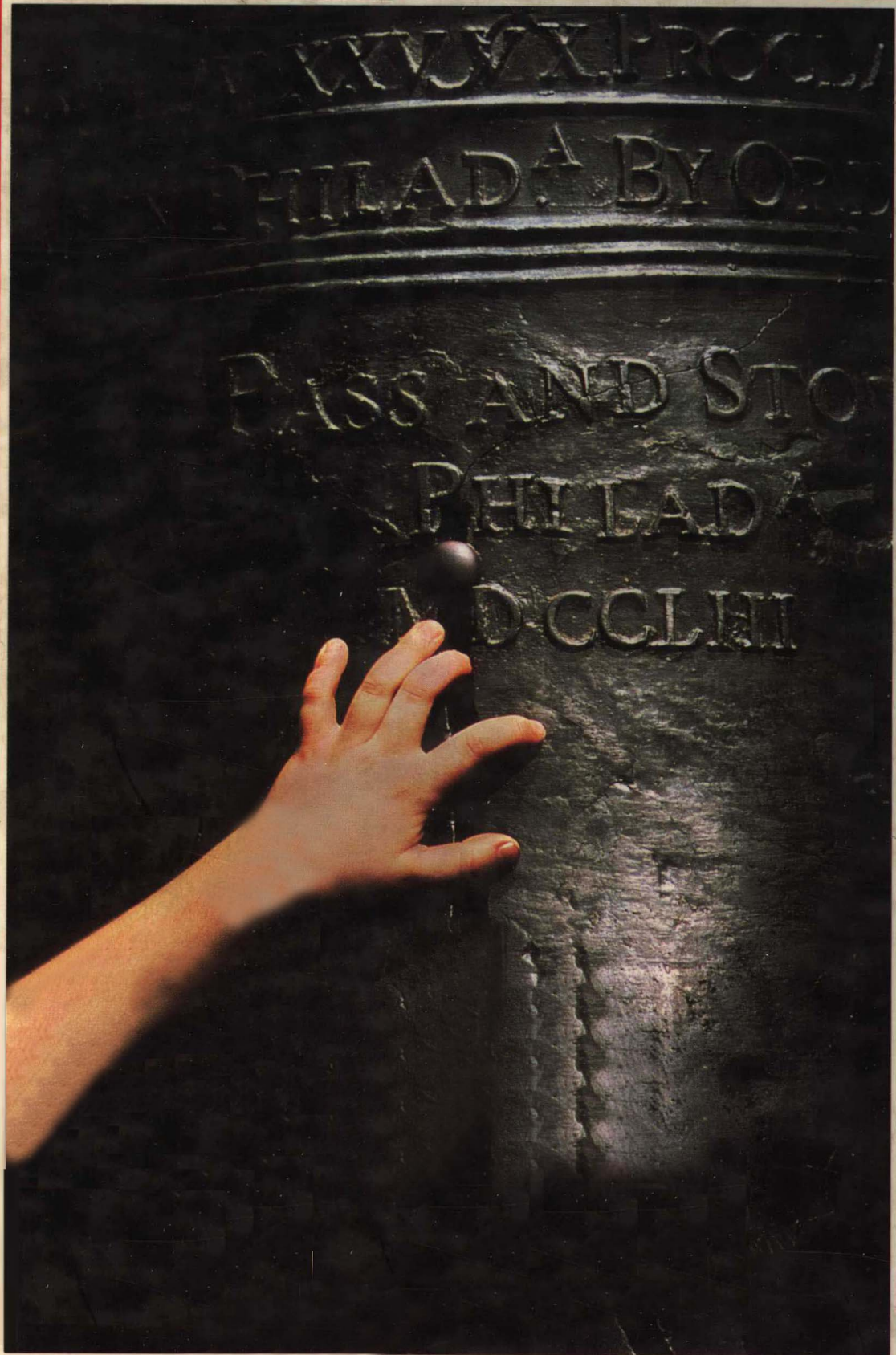


American Government



WELCH • GRUHL • STEINMAN • COMER

American Government

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Preface

American politics is exciting, important, and controversial, yet many texts convey just the opposite to students. They try to cover everything, and in the process leave students stuffed with facts but bewildered as to their meaning. The excitement of American politics is lost.

Our text, *American Government*, tries to interest students in learning about our government by motivating them to think about many important and controversial issues. We believe an introductory course succeeds if most students develop an understanding of major ideas, an interest in learning more about American government, and an ability to begin to understand and evaluate the news they hear about American political issues. Although a firm grounding in the essential “nuts and bolts” of American government is crucial, other approaches need to be used to motivate students to want to learn more.

We too offer the essential “nuts and bolts” of American government, but we also want the student to understand why (and sometimes how) these important features have evolved, their impact on government and individuals, and why they are controversial (if they are) and worth knowing about. For example, we prefer students to leave the course remembering why we have campaign finance laws and why they have the impact they do than to be able to cite specific dollar limitations on giving to different types of candidates from different types of organizations. The latter will change or will soon be forgotten, but understanding the “whys” will help the student understand the campaign finance issue long after the course is over.

We have also tried to interest students by describing and discussing the impact of various features of government. For example, students who fail to see why learning about voter registration laws is important may “see the light” when they understand the link between such laws and low

voter turnout. Thus, a particular emphasis throughout the book is on the *impact* of government: how individual features of government affect its responsiveness to different groups (in Lasswell’s terms, “Who gets what and why?”). We realize that nothing in American politics is simple; rarely does one feature of government produce, by itself, a clear outcome. Nevertheless, we think that students will be more likely to want to learn about government if they see some relationships between how government operates and the impact it has.

Features of Each Chapter

Student interest and analytic abilities grow when confronted with a clash of views about important issues. Each chapter has features especially designed to involve the student in the controversies—and excitement—of American politics.

You Are There Each chapter opens with a scenario called “You Are There.” In a page or two the student reads about a real-life political dilemma faced by a public official or a private citizen involved in a controversial issue. Students are asked to put themselves in that individual’s shoes, to weigh the pros and cons, and to decide what should be done. The instructor may want to poll the entire class and use the “You are There” as a basis for class discussion. In the “Epilogue” at the end of the chapter, we reveal the actual decision and discuss it in light of the ideas presented in the chapter.

Focus on An Issue A second feature in each chapter, “Focus on an Issue,” describes an important current issue or controversy—such as a balanced budget amendment or affirmative action—and raises a number of key questions to help

students think systematically about its pros and cons. Class discussion or written assignments can be based on this feature.

Boxes In each chapter several boxes highlighting interesting aspects of American politics draw the students into the material. Many illustrate how government and politics really work in a particular situation—how tax loopholes get written, how a corporation lobbies for government benefits, how Congress uses computers, how political polls are done—while others highlight features of government that may be of particular interest to students—the marriage gap in public opinion and the impact of federal programs on students, for example.

Several other features help students organize their study:

Outline Each chapter begins with an outline of its contents.

Key Terms Key terms are boldfaced within the text.

Further Reading A brief, annotated list of further readings contains works that might be useful to a student doing research or looking for further reading.

Glossary A glossary at the end of the book defines terms that may be unfamiliar to students.

The Organization and Contents of the Book

While the basic organization of an American government text is fairly standard, our book contains some topics not found in many others. We have a full chapter on the media. Our civil rights chapter integrates a thorough treatment of constitutional issues concerning women and minorities, a discussion of the civil rights and women's rights movements, and contemporary research on the political status of these groups.

Unlike many other texts, this one includes the special legal problems of Hispanics and Indians.

Substantive policy chapters reinforce the emphasis on the impact of government action. A chapter on economic policymaking complements the section on budgeting found in the chapter on Congress. The treatment of economic policy highlights the relationship between politics and the economy, and should help the student better understand issues such as the deficit, inflation, and unemployment. The chapter on regulation emphasizes the underlying rationale for regulation and its problems and benefits. Our social welfare policy chapter is unique in its treatment of social welfare programs for the middle income and wealthy as well as the poor. The chapter on foreign policy places current foreign policy issues in the context of the history of our foreign policy aims, especially since World War II. A chapter on military spending and nuclear arms policy highlights many current and recurrent political issues in military preparedness.

Some instructors will prefer not to use any of the policy chapters. The book stands as a whole without them, as many policy examples are integrated into the rest of the text. Different combinations of the policy chapters may also be used, as each is independent.

The organization of the book is straightforward. After material on democracy, the Constitution, and federalism, the book covers linkages, then institutions, and finally policy. Civil liberties and rights are treated after the chapter on the judiciary. But the book is flexible enough that instructors can modify the order of the chapters. Some instructors will prefer to cover institutions before process. Others may prefer to discuss civil liberties and rights when discussing the Constitution. Still others may wish to integrate some of the policy chapters into the treatment of institutions. For example, the economic policy chapter could be used in conjunction with the section in the Congress chapter on the budget. The military spending chapter illustrates several points made in the chapter on Congress and could be used with it. The foreign policy chapter fits nicely with the treatment of the presidency. The chapter on regulation could serve as a case study following the chapter on bureaucracy.

Supplementary Materials

The supplementary materials complement the book.

Instructor's Manual Written by the authors of the text, the instructor's manual provides lectures, lecture suggestions, and in-class exercises for each chapter. Suggestions for out-of-class papers and projects, and annotated film and videotape lists are also provided. A student questionnaire is included to allow instructors to collect student data that can be used in class throughout the semester as a comparison with national poll data presented in the book.

Student Study Guide An excellent Student Guide, written by Susan Rigdon of the University of Illinois, provides students with exercises emphasizing the major points of each chapter. Chapter objectives and key terms are reviewed. Practice multiple choice questions are provided. Unlike many such guides, this one also helps the students learn to write essays, thus emphasizing the improvement of analytic skills. Essay writing tips are given, then illustrated in each chapter.

Computer Simulations and Exercises Two kinds of computer exercises for student use are offered. One is a set of practice multiple choice questions that students can use in a game format or individually.

The other is a set of computer modules written by Fred Ullrich, Margery Ambrosius, Timothy Bledsoe, Susan Welch, and John Comer. In four of these, the student plays the role of a decision-maker and tries to work out strategies for solving a political problem (presidential decision-making, solving a hostage crisis, winning passage of legislation favorable to the interest group of which the student is the head, and conducting a winning congressional campaign). These exercises will stimulate students' analytic and creative skills. They can be used with a variety of chapters, including the ones on the presidency, Congress, political parties, elections, interest groups, and foreign policy. A fifth module, designed for use with the public opinion chapter, consists of a set of exercises focusing on public opinion and socialization.

Videotapes We also provide a set of videotapes that can be used with the chapters on Congress and elections.

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