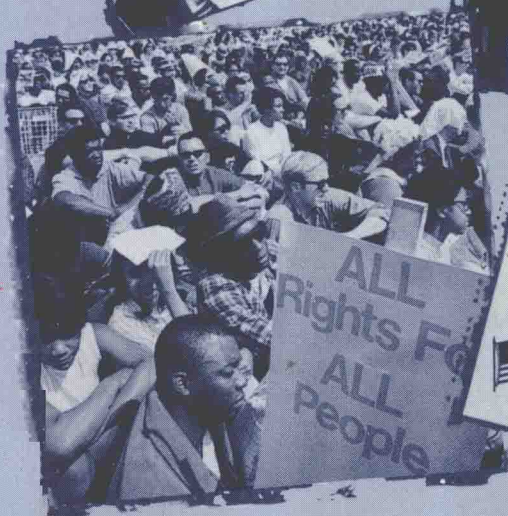
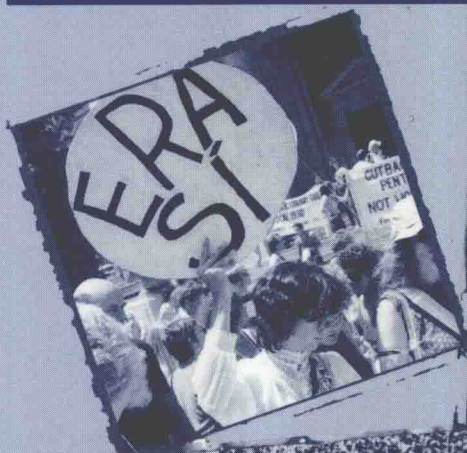


**IN OTHER WORDS:
A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO**

We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS



**JOEL REID CAROLE DARNOLD
DESIREE NORRIS MONIQUE KAY**

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We the People

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Preface

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My intention is for this study guide to be used by the instructor as a reliable teaching tool and by the students as a solid guide to learning. This study guide is a product of, as well as a tool for, good student-teacher communication. It is a true collaboration of the effort between my students and myself, a labor of love—for the subject, for the students, and for teaching itself. I would especially like to acknowledge and thank my student co-authors, who put in a lot of time and effort to help me put this study guide together: Carole Darnold, who read the text and whose input on the outlines, questions, and summaries was invaluable; Desiree Norris, who tirelessly typed the entire manuscript; and Monique Kay, who read and helped outline some of the chapters. Their creativity and our long hours of brainstorming led to the division of tasks, the results of which, when combined, became this study guide. These students and many others like them let me know I am not doing my job in vain. My hope is that this study guide, along with the text and the lively class debates that I hope will result from their use, will encourage a new generation of knowledgeable participants in our democratic process.

Joel O. Reid, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

August 1996

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American Political Culture

THE CHAPTER IN BRIEF

At the time of the Founding of the United States of America, there were sharply divided interests as to what government should be, in terms of its role in the life of the American people, its limitations, and its powers. The Federalists argued that a powerful and active government was needed to promote commerce, prevent political strife, and protect American international interests. The Antifederalists were opponents of the proposed Constitution and held the position that a government with the power to achieve the Federalist's goals would also have the power to oppress its citizens. They argued that it was better to forgo the potential benefits of a powerful government in order to avoid the threat such a powerful government would pose.

After the Constitution was ratified, the debate over the power of government continued, and gave birth to America's two-party system. The Hamiltonian Federalists (*not* the same Federalists as those discussed in the first paragraph), who are the indirect ancestors of today's Republicans, introduced an ambitious economic program designed to give America a powerful central government. The Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans, the direct forebears of today's Democrats, organized in opposition to the Hamiltonian Federalist's economic program, arguing for a weaker and decentralized national government.

Conflict over the power and role of the national government is the central issue of American politics today. Contemporary Democrats assert that the United States needs a powerful and active national government, capable of assuming a wide array of regulatory responsibilities and with the capacity to provide a broad range of social services. Contemporary Republicans, on the other hand, argue that many current governmental functions can be eliminated or turned over to the states or to the private sector.

From the Founding in 1789 until 1933, the American national government was limited in size, scope, and influence. Most of the important functions of government were provided by the states. The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, including the run on the banks in 1933, bankrupted states and individuals and prompted

the immediate expansion of the national government to meet the crisis. Congress passed legislation that brought government into the business of home mortgages, farm mortgages, credit, and the relief of personal distress. The national government today is an enormous institution. Its programs and policies reach into every facet of American life. It oversees the nation's economy, it is the nation's largest employer, it provides citizens with a host of services, it controls a vast military establishment, and it regulates a wide range of social and commercial activities.

"Government" is the term used to describe the formal institutions through which a land and its people are ruled. A government may be as simple as a tribal council or as complex as our own U.S. government. Governments can be classified according to who governs or according to how governing is carried out. Under who governs, there are three basic types. If a government is controlled by a single individual, such as a king or a dictator, it is an autocracy. If a government is controlled by a small group of landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants, it is an oligarchy. A government where more people participate and the population has influence is a democracy.

Governments can also be classified into three types according to how a country is governed. A totalitarian government has no legal limits and attempts to dominate or control every sphere of political, economic, and social life. An authoritarian government seeks to eliminate organized social groupings that might challenge or limit the ruler's (or rulers') authority. Authoritarian governments have few legal limits but are kept in check by institutions such as autonomous territories, an organized church, business groups, or organized labor unions. A constitutional, or liberal, government is limited as to what it is permitted to control (substantive limits), as well as how it goes about controlling (procedural limits).

In the United States, the people govern and the Constitution places strong limits on the government's power. Therefore, the United States is a constitutional democracy. Only twenty or so of the world's two hundred governments fall into this same category.

The evolution of our democracy began in Europe in the seventeenth century. The key force behind the imposition of limits on government power was a new social class, the "bourgeoisie," which comes from a French word meaning "freeman of the city." These people were "middle class" and were associated with being in commerce or industry. They sought to change existing conditions, especially parliaments, into instruments of real political participation. Although motivated by the need to protect their own interests, they advanced many of the principles of individual liberty that our government is based on, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, and freedom from arbitrary search and seizure. They also were advocates of electoral and representative institutions, although they favored property requirements to limit participation.

The expansion of participation took two paths. In some nations, the crown or aristocracy saw common people as potential political allies against the bourgeoisie and thus expanded popular participation hoping to build political support among the lower orders. In other nations, competing segments of the bourgeoisie sought to gain political advantage by reaching out and mobilizing the support of working- and lower-class groups who craved the opportunity to take part in politics.

In America, the Jeffersonians sought to dislodge the Federalists by organizing political clubs and mobilizing popular support. Where suffrage was restricted by property requirements or poll taxes, the Jeffersonians sought to end such limitations in order to enfranchise more of their potential supporters. The Federalists feared the Jeffersonians' strategy and enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which declared any organized opposition to or criticism of the government to be a crime. The Federalist leaders wanted the opposition eliminated by force, if necessary, but lacked the political and military means of doing so. The Alien and Sedition Acts expired after two years, but the uproar they caused led to the principle of the "loyal opposition." The Federalists began to mobilize popular support for their own candidates and the two-party system was born.

The term "politics" refers to conflicts over the character, membership, and policies of any organization to which people belong. "Politics is the struggle over 'who gets what, when, how.'" Its goal is to have a share or a say in the composition of the government's leadership, how the government is organized, or what its policies are going to be. Having a share is called "power" or "influence." In this country, every adult citizen has the right to participate, or have influence. A system of government that gives citizens the opportunity to elect the top government officials is called a representative democracy, or a republic. A regime that permits citizens to vote directly on laws and policies is called a direct democracy. At the national level, America is a representative democracy because citizens do not vote on legislation. But some states do have provisions for direct legislation through popular referendum.

Politics can also take place through informal channels called direct action. It can include either violent politics or civil disobedience, both of which attempt to shock rulers into behaving more responsibly, or it can be revolutionary politics, which rejects the system entirely and attempts to replace it with a new ruling group and a new set of rules. Direct political action—though not violence—is protected by the U.S. Constitution. The right to protest is essential to the maintenance of political freedom.

Americans share three basic values that are the core of our political culture. We generally agree on these principles but sometimes disagree over their application. The first of these values is liberty. We have documents that guarantee our liberty. The first is the Declaration of Independence, which says we have certain unalienable rights. Then there

is the Preamble of the Constitution. Most important is the Bill of Rights, which guarantees us the freedom of speech and writing, the right to assemble freely, and the right to practice religious beliefs without governmental interference. We also have the interpreted rights of free enterprise, the right to enjoy the fruits of our own labor, and the right to free competition.

The second core value is equality, which is a less well-defined ideal than liberty. Equality comes in two forms: equality of results and equality of opportunity. Unequal talents mean inequality in results. Ensuring equality of opportunity means the government has obligations to the people, rather than just limitations on its power.

The third value is democracy, the essence of which is the participation of the people in choosing their rulers and their ability to influence what those rulers do. Political power ultimately comes from the people, and voting is a key element. Ideally, democracy involves an engaged citizenry prepared to exercise its power over rulers.

The ideals of our system can easily conflict with one another in practice. What is liberty and freedom for one could possibly infringe on the freedoms of others. The issue of slavery was a key conflict in the early years of this country. Many regulations today are seen as protecting the liberties of certain segments of society, while other segments see the same rules as restricting their freedom in some way.

There have been several debates over equality. As far as equality of access to public institutions is concerned, the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decided that separate but equal accommodations constituted equality for the races. But then, in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the *Plessy* decision was overturned, and the Supreme Court decided that separate is *not* equal. The second debate was over the public role in ensuring equality of opportunity in private life. Supporters of affirmative action claim it is necessary to compensate for past discrimination, and necessary to obtain true equality of opportunity today. Opponents claim that it amounts to reverse discrimination, and that equality should not acknowledge gender or racial differences.

A third debate is over differences in wealth and the equality of income. The traditional view is that economic success is possible for anyone and is a product of individual effort. Where concern over economic inequalities emerges is usually over the issue of taxation and fairness. The growing division between rich and poor may lead to politics by class.

Until very recently, our ideal of democracy was not a reality in the United States. The United States was not a full democracy until the 1960s, when African Americans were guaranteed voting rights. Early in our history, restrictions were much greater. Property restrictions on the vote were eliminated by 1828. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1870 granted African Americans the vote, although later exclusionary practices invalidated that right. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act finally

secured the right of African Americans to vote. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the vote.

Another concern about democracy is the relationship between economic power and political power. Money often determines who runs for office, it can exert a heavy influence on who wins, and it can affect what elected politicians do once they are in office. A final consideration about democracy concerns the engagement of the citizenry. There is a low turnout for elections in American politics today and many people seem filled with apathy and cynicism. Many people do not participate because they feel that their single vote doesn't matter. This undermines the vitality of democracy and reduces the accountability of those in office to the public.

As we attempt to resolve conflicts among our core beliefs, America's political principles change and evolve. Even core values should be understood as works in progress rather than immutable facts. In principle, liberty and democracy can be reconciled, but in practice, over time democracy poses a fundamental threat to liberty. And with social policy such as affirmative action, what one person thinks is a guarantee of liberty, another thinks is an infringement of liberty. However, in the United States, it has been the institutions of democratic government that have been critical in guaranteeing both liberty and equality.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare the "equality of results" to the idealistic "equality of opportunity."
2. What is the fundamental debate in American politics today?
3. Outline the differences between an autocracy and an oligarchy.
4. Outline the differences between authoritarian and totalitarian government.
5. Who were the bourgeoisie?
6. What is the basic difference between the Hamiltonian Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans?
7. What is a government?
8. Who was John Locke?
9. Who was Adam Smith?
10. What is meant by the term "politics"?
11. What are American's core political values?
12. What seems to be the relationship between economic power and political power?

TERMS

1. Federalists
2. democracy
3. bourgeoisie
4. pluralism
5. representative democracy
6. oligarchy
7. autocracy
8. government
9. substantive limits
10. authoritarian government
11. totalitarian government
12. constitutional government
13. participation
14. liberty
15. equality