



**SECOND
EDITION**

The American Polity Reader

Edited by

**Ann G. Serow
W. Wayne Shannon
Everett C. Ladd**

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THE
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Reader

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THE
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Polity
Reader

SECOND EDITION

To our students

P R E F A C E

THIS SECOND EDITION OF *The American Polity Reader*, like the first edition, begins with collections of readings which help students explore aspects of two basic and most important questions: What is distinctive about the country they inhabit? And, what makes it that way?

Friends and critics alike in many different intellectual vocations—from literature to philosophy and politics—have puzzled over these matters for two centuries now and offered a great variety of answers. Some of them mingle the serious and the facetious. Gertrude Stein, a writer often critical of American life, who chose to spend most of her adult years in Paris, once opined that the country's sheer size and relative emptiness did much to shape it. "In the United States," she wrote, "there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes America what it is."

Edmund Wilson, the literary critic, managed to blend praise and sarcasm in noting America's historic penchant for practical technology: "I have derived a good deal more benefit of the civilizing kind as well as of the inspirational kind from the admirable American bathroom than I have from the cathedrals of Europe. . . . I have had a good many more uplifting thoughts, creative and expansive visions—while soaking in comfortable baths or drying myself after bracing showers—in well-equipped American bathrooms than I have ever had in any cathedral."

Others have waxed poetic—as did Philip James Bailey, in describing the key part played by unparalleled immigration to the United States in shaping the nation's character. He called America "half-brother of the world / With something good and bad of every land." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of many, especially in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who saw the United States distinguished by a special role and mission. He told the country: "Humanity with all its fears / With all its hopes of future years / Is hanging breathless on thy fate." And in the great prose poem that he delivered at the cemetery in Gettysburg on

November 19, 1863, Abraham Lincoln saw the essence of America in the political ideas on which it was established—"a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

The American Polity Reader is designed for introductory courses in American government. It might accompany any basic textbook on the subject (the current edition of *The American Polity*, by Everett Ladd, among them), or perhaps a briefer core text. For some instructors, the selections here might provide enough reading for the course. *The American Polity Reader* could stand alone as the basic text in such cases. However the *Reader* might be used, many of the selections address the question of what, *politically or governmentally*, distinguishes the United States. Some of the analysts whose work we sample come to praise, others to criticize. But among them there is little disagreement that America is *different* politically, significantly so, from other nations. By exploring where and why, we come to understand better the essence of our system. Many of the readings that we offer here probe from contrasting perspectives the fundamental features of America's polity—its distinctive ideas, constitution, governmental institutions, partisan divisions, and public policy choices.

We need to see this enduring structure, and to understand why it has endured. But American government is hardly static; the polity continues to grow and change. We present here 106 readings. It is a great advantage of so wide a selection that contemporary developments—in the presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court, in political campaigns and the role of the press, and in Washington's policy debates, from where America now fits in the global economy and what that requires of us, to how black Americans' needs are best met—can be amply covered, even as the things that really don't change are thoroughly reviewed.

This essential coverage of the old and the new can be combined in a reader of reasonable price and length only one way—by tightly editing some of the most important work of leading analysts with the practical needs of introductory-course students in mind. Students' time for reading is limited. In that time, they need access to an essential core of commentary on and assessment of their polity. We think the additions and deletions which distinguish this new edition from the first capture that core even better. And, because of the time and care we gave not just to selecting material but as well to abridging it, we are confident that the *Reader's* excerpts

throughout faithfully represent the argument of the books and articles from which they are derived.

We thank our students, to whom we have again dedicated this book, for they have been the willing testers of other readers and of prepublication sections of this reader. And special appreciation to Mel Bigley from Ann Serow for making the unglamorous job of proofreading somewhat fun and even a little bit glamorous in the exotic locales of Watch Hill, Newport, Bretton Woods, and West Hartford.

THE
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