

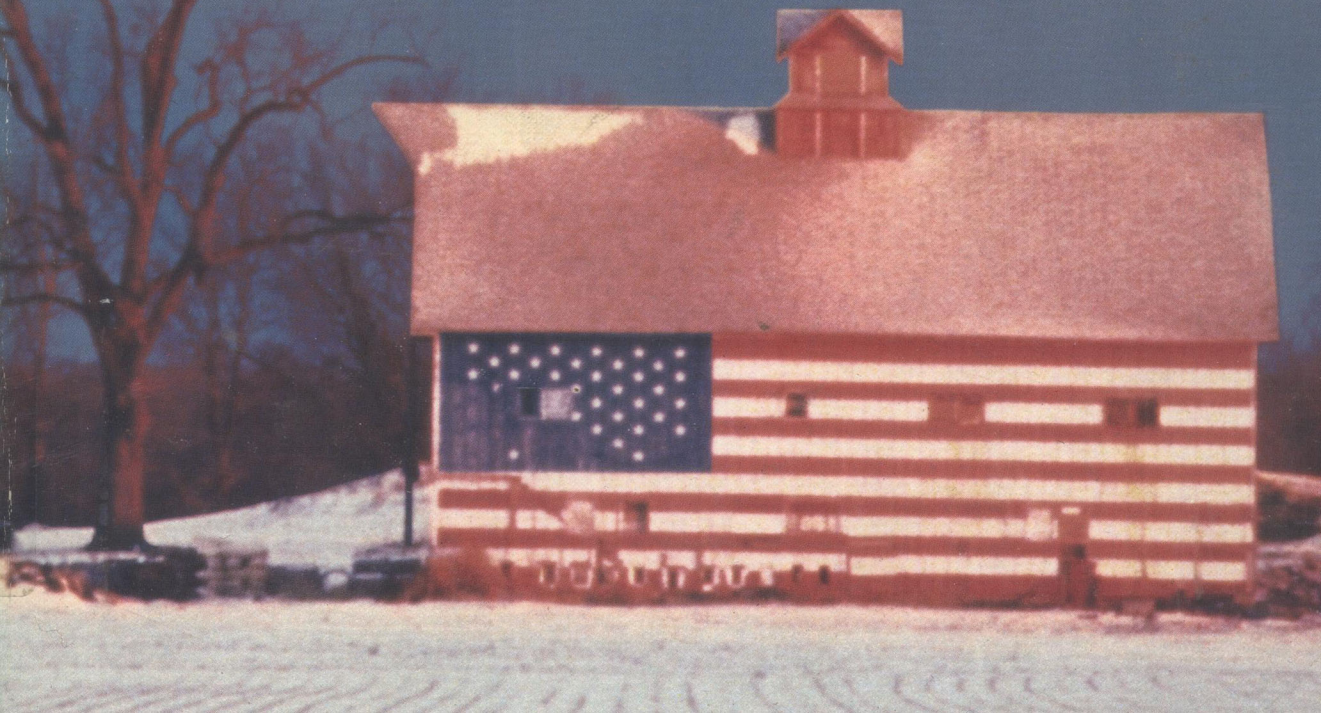
Everett Carl Ladd

*THIRD EDITION*

# THE AMERICAN POLITY

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The People and Their Government



# The American Polity

THIRD EDITION

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*The People  
and Their Government*

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Everett Carll Ladd

*University of Connecticut*

*The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research*



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# The American Polity

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## *The People and Their Government*

THIRD EDITION

## For My Family

*We begin our public affections in our families.  
No cold relation is a zealous citizen.*

—Edmund Burke

# Preface

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. The decision reached shortly after the first edition was published in 1985 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. For better and for worse, we have become more occupied with current political developments, and more insistent that our political illustrations and examples be chosen from them.

Revisions of an American government textbook must also be tailored to the schedule of our national elections—which are a recurring watershed. While our 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 years divisible by four gets the most attention, of course, because it decides who will occupy the White House as well as all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and a third of the Senate. The 1988 election was certain as well to have an additional, special result—the assumption of power by a new administration. After 8 years in office, the Reagan administration was going to end on January 20, 1989, with the inauguration of a new president.

The assumption of power by a new administration is always a momentous event in the American system. In one sense the transition to the Bush administration in 1989 has been less abrupt than others historically because, while presidents were changing, the party in power was remaining the same. When Republican Reagan passes the baton to Republican Bush, it will be the first time since the Coolidge–Hoover transition in 1929 that a retiring incumbent is succeeded by



a member of his own party. (Perhaps this parallel is not the most propitious). I am writing now and until early spring a new chapter that will examine the transition and first hundred days of George Bush's administration. (This chapter will be bound into every student copy for courses in fall 1989 and beyond; instructors will receive their advance copy of the chapter in late spring.)

Also, for the third edition, I have added two new chapters. The first, *The American System of Divided Government* (chapter 5), incorporates material that appeared in chapters 10 (Separation of Powers) and 11 (Federalism) of the second edition. Many faculty using the text have told me that they would like to see a coherent review of both separation of powers and federalism *preceding* the discussion of the institutions of national government—Congress, the presidency, the executive branch, and the judiciary—that comprises chapters 6 through 9. I thought they were right when I began this revision; now I am certain their advice was sound. I am also confident that students will find the integration of federalism and separation of powers in one chapter a more powerful introduction to what is the most striking feature of American government—the extent to which political responsibility is divided.

I have added a *wholly* new chapter (chapter 18), *State Government and Public Policy*. Students learn in chapter 5 that states have a large formal place in the structure of American government. Now they will see as well that state involvement extends throughout the processes of deciding what government will and will not do: the making of public policy. The role of the states in policy formation is a key one in our system; through the new chapter 18 it is more extensively and explicitly recognized in *The American Polity*.

Throughout, the third edition has been extensively updated: new material on the 1988 campaign and election, of course; new discussions, from the 1988 Trade Act to the INF Treaty, to make clear the changing problems and policies that dominate our attention as we enter the last decade of the twentieth century; new case studies, like President Reagan's attempt to appoint Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, to give a contemporary statement to familiar subjects; a thorough-going revision of tables and charts to make sure students are given the most up-to-date economic statistics, public opinion polling data, information on governmental performance, and the like.

Adding so much new material to a new edition could, however, cause a problem with the length of the text. Like others who teach the American government course, I sometimes yearn for a more concise text presentation. So, by combining two second-edition chapters on the Constitution and democracy into one chapter, streamlining other chapters, and eliminating sections that are not pertinent to politics of the 1990s, I have for the third edition reduced the overall length of *The American Polity*. (I might also note that for those who desire a

less expensive though identical version for their students, a low-priced paperback edition is now available.)

As I call attention to our many efforts to make *The American Polity* the freshest possible introduction to our politics, institutions, and policies, I want to affirm the position that guided the first two editions and is undiminished here: For all of the change, *continuity* remains the big story in American political life. Historical experience must be melded with contemporary material if students are to be properly introduced to a polity that almost defines Alphonse Karr's aphorism: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

## 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 vary enormously. 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 group composition of the population; and many others. The first section of the 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.* As I noted above, 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 political 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 and 4). 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 the text I frequently draw examples from earlier eras in American life to make more concrete 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

As we have seen, the third 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 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 insti-

tutions and arrangements of national government. These include the distinctly American form of governmental interaction, built around *separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism*; it also includes the Congress, the presidency and the executive branch, and the federal courts.

From the organization of government in Part 3, we turn in Part 4 to public opinion, political parties, voting and elections, interest groups, and 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 five major sectors: civil liberties and civil rights, political economy, public welfare, the role of the states in making public policy, 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.

Lastly, on the text, I call this book *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.

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

## THE LADD REPORTS AND LADD UPDATES

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 for the third edition I will continue to write more extensive *Ladd Reports*, as well as briefer commentaries, the *Ladd Updates*, as the political occasions arise. The publisher will continue to make these available without charge to all students by request of instructors who are using *The American Polity* in their classrooms.

## 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 combined *Instructor's Manual and Test-Item File* to reflect third edition changes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The third edition of *The American Polity* benefited from use by teachers and students at numerous universities, colleges, and community colleges, a broad and representative proving ground for a basic American government text. Fellow teachers of the introductory American government classes who have used *The American Polity* have provided me with constructive criticism that I have done my best to follow. My own classes of Political Science 173 at the University of Connecticut have continued to be a wonderful source for what works, and what doesn't work, in introducing students to American government and politics.

This preface gives me a chance to acknowledge the help of faculty who gave me written assessments of the previous edition:

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My colleagues at the University of Connecticut have been extraordinarily tolerant and forbearing. Ranking high in these regards, as in helpfulness, are W. Wayne Shannon, G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Marilyn Potter, John Benson, Lois Timms-Ferrara, Anne-Marie Mercure, and John Barry. 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 have been invaluable throughout the proj-

ect. I am pleased to be able to express here special thanks and deep appreciation to my administrative assistant, Lynn A. Zayachkiwsky. Yet I am afraid that these words are but a pale, too-feeble recognition of the consistently exemplary quality of her work.

Sometime in 1968, I had the great good fortune of meeting Donald S. Lamm. He was then a college editor at W. W. 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 him 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 through all three editions of this text; my respect for his work has continued to deepen. Nancy Palmquist again did a wonderful job copyediting the entire manuscript. She and Ruth Dworkin deserve enormous credit for handling professionally and expeditiously the production of the book, especially the late-arriving November '88 election-related manuscript that might otherwise have resulted in a later publication date. Ben Gamit is responsible for the book's attractive layout, Elizabeth Garrigue for cover illustration selection, Hugh O'Neill for turning that selection into an appealing cover, and Rachel Lee for tying up a number of loose ends.

First things last: *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 their newborn son Ryan Carll, and Corina's husband Gerald Moran.

Storrs, Connecticut  
December 1988

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