



# PARLIAMENT of WHORES

A Lone Humorist Attempts to  
Explain the Entire U.S. Government

# P.J. O'ROURKE

"Outrageous...it is insulting, inflammatory, profane and  
absolutely great reading." —Washington Post Book World

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*A Lone Humorist Attempts  
to Explain the Entire  
U.S. Government*

P. J. O'Rourke

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# *To Amy*

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm sure nobody wants credit for my political opinions, so let me say that the influence exercised on me by the people and institutions mentioned below was exercised unintentionally.

The foremost of these unintentional exercisers was Andy Ferguson, former Assistant Managing Editor of the *American Spectator* and presently an editorial writer of great merit for the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain. Andy's knowledge of politics is encyclopedic, his understanding of political behavior is complete and his judgment of man as a political animal is fair and even kind. I have learned a great deal from Andy—when he could get a word in edgewise.

Not long after Andy and I met, we were driving down Pennsylvania Avenue and encountered some or another noisy pinko demonstration. "How come," I asked Andy, "whenever something upsets the Left, you see immediate marches and parades and rallies with signs already printed and rhyming slogans already composed, whereas whenever something upsets the Right, you see two members of the Young Americans for Freedom waving a six-inch American flag?"

"We have jobs," said Andy.

This book owes whatever virtues it has (the vices it acquired while I

## Acknowledgments

wasn't looking) to long, pleasant sessions of cocktail drinking with Andy and his wife, Denise, who, until sidetracked by motherhood, was Production Manager of the *American Spectator*, and with Mary Eberstadt, former speech writer for George Shultz and Executive Editor of the *National Interest*, and her husband, Visiting Fellow at the Harvard Center for Population Studies and Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Nick Eberstadt. These four people and my wife, Amy, endured the dress rehearsals, in inebriated monologue form, of everything here. Thanks to their diplomatically proffered critical skills, what I've written is no worse than it is.

I've also spent hours picking the brains and bending the ears of Jim and Marilyn Denton, John Podhoretz, Chris and Lucy Buckley, John and Anna Buckley, Michael and Barbara Ledeen, Peter Collier, David Horowitz, Ed Crane, Grover Norquist, the Honorable Chris Cox, the Honorable Dana Rohrabacher, Paula Dobriansky, Josh Gilder, Jacques and Julie Mariotti, Dave York, Chris Isham, Michael Kinsley, Bob Tyrrell, Wladyslaw Pleszczynski and Ron Burr.

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Three books that I found invaluable in writing this uninvaluable one were *Losing Ground* and *In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government* by Charles Murray and *An American Vision*, edited by Ed Crane and David Boaz, President and Executive Vice President, respectively, of the Cato Institute. I commend these tomes to any critic of government seeking serious amelioration rather than comic relief.

I would like to thank Franklin Lavin for helping make the executive branch of government comprehensible, and my former (and, it is to be hoped, future) Congressman Chuck Douglas for doing the same with the judiciary. David E. Davis, Jr., Editor and Publisher of *Automobile* magazine, provided me with all the necessary information about the Department of Transportation for my chapter on the bureaucracy. It would have been impossible to write the chapter on drug policy without the aid and intellect of Dick Weart, Special Agent, U.S. Customs Service.

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Captin David Bill III kindly hosted me aboard his ship the *USS Mobile Bay* and showed me some things the Iraqis have since seen close up.

Kathleen Day's article "S&L Hell" in the March 20, 1989, *New Republic* is almost the only sensible thing I've read about the savings-and-loan crisis, and it gave me a starting point for a less sensible thing of my own. Fellow Toledoan Debbie Shannon explained banking to me as well as any mortal could and also taught me how lobbying really works (it turns out to be less distasteful than most voting).

I owe various boons and favors to the following people and organizations: the Honorable Jim Bunning, Russ Hodge, Bob Beckel, Tony Snow, the Honorable Susan Molinari, Ken Walker, Mona Charen, Walter Gottlieb, Fox TV's "Off the Record," the National Forum Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, Americans for Tax Reform, the Political Economy Research Center, the Manhattan Institute, the Cato Institute and a thousand people in Washington, some of whom I'm forgetting and some of whom would rather not be remembered here.

And I especially want to thank Lee Atwater for his political and spiritual inspiration—and for providing a great sound track.

Fully half of this book has appeared, in article form, in *Rolling Stone* magazine. Authors are forever saying, "This book could not have been written without blah, blah, blah." But this particular book really couldn't have been written if it hadn't first been *underwritten* by *Rolling Stone*. I thank *Rolling Stone* editors Robert Vare, Bob Wallace and Eric Etheridge for their necessary and welcome blue-penciling. And I thank Jann Wenner for his super-necessary and extra-welcome paychecks.

## *Acknowledgments*

A large part of the "Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry" chapter appeared in *Automobile* magazine, and "Among the Compassion Fascists" was originally published in the *American Spectator*. I'd like to thank those publications for the permission (which, it occurs to me, I've probably forgotten to request) to reprint this material.

Finally, I must thank my publisher, Morgan Entrekin. He gave this project patience, money and hard work and even stood up as best man at my wedding. What can I say, Morgan? I promise my next book will be *Madonna's Illegitimate UFO Diet to Cure AIDS and Find Elvis*.

P. J. O'ROURKE

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, 1991

### *A Note on the Arithmetic Herein*

The numbers in this book are correct to the best of the author's ability to make them so. But the statistics presented here are for illustrative, not statistical, purposes. Some figures are disputable, some will be out-of-date by the time this is published and a few were probably wrong from the get-go. Humor is, by its nature, more truthful than factual. Don't bet the ranch on my math.

*What stops a man who can laugh from speaking the truth?*

—Horace



## PREFACE

### *Why God Is a Republican and Santa Claus Is a Democrat*

THE subject of this book is government because I don't have to do anything about it.

I am a journalist and, under the modern journalist's code of Olympian objectivity (and total purity of motive), I am absolved of responsibility. We journalists don't have to step on roaches. All we have to do is turn on the kitchen light and watch the critters scurry. If I were a decent citizen instead of a journalist, I would have a patriotic duty to become involved in the American political system and try to reform or improve it. In that case I would probably do my patriotic duty about the way I did in the 1960s, before I was a journalist, when my involvement with the American political system consisted of dodging the draft. All this is by way of saying that if you are a nonjournalistic American and don't want to read this book because it's about government, just buy it and let it lie around your house like *A Brief History of Time*.

I decided to write about the United States government after I had spent some years writing about awful things that happen to foreigners overseas. It occurred to me that some pretty awful things happen to us right here. Furthermore, they happen in English, so that I could ask people why they

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were doing the awful things or getting the awful things done to them. Then, when the people told me and I didn't understand, at least I'd know that I didn't understand and wouldn't get confused by the language barrier and maybe think I did.

I also found the sheer, boring, gray dullness of government a challenge to my pride as a reporter. "I," I thought, "I alone—master that I am of the piquant adverbial phrase and the subordinate clause *juste*—can make this interesting. Why, combine my keen eye for detail with my sharp nose for the telling particular, and the reader will get . . . a faceful of minute observations. Yes, I can paint the drab corridors of power in the party hues of lively prose, dress the dull politicians in motley and cause the Mrs. O'Leary's cow of governmental insipidity to kick over the lantern of public indignation and set the town ablaze." I am not the first journalist to make this mistake.

Anyway, I thought I'd observe the 1988 presidential race and then go to Washington for the first six months of the new administration, learn everything there is to know about government and write a book. But the six months turned into two years. I'm not sure I learned anything except that giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys. And what resulted was not so much a book as a great digest of ignorance.

Grant me at least that it is an ambitious failure. In the following volume I have tried to do a number of things. I have tried to write a kind of Devil's Civics Text in which, like a voodoo doctor teaching poli-sci, I give unnatural life to a description of American government. I have also tried to present a factual—data-filled, at any rate—account of how this government works. Which is complicated by the fact that it doesn't. So I've tried to present a factual account of how the government fails, too. Finally, I've attempted to compose a dissertation on what we Americans expect from our government and how—like parents or fans of certain sports teams—we intend to maintain those expectations even if it kills us. And, several times in the past, it has.

I have tried to keep the book reasonably free of personalities. Not that this was possible in a political system (a socioeconomic system, for that

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matter) as fame-driven as ours. I had to mention the president by name, though I was tempted not to. I've always admired the way the movies of the 1930s and 1940s would only show the president character from the back. It was more respectful. Either that or movies were made by Republicans in those days.

I preferred to concentrate on systems and institutions, not because people aren't important, but because people are important, in Washington, so briefly. There was a time not long ago when day could hardly break without asking permission from Don Regan, and now, for all I know, he's hosting a talk radio show in Anaheim. I concentrated on institutions because in order to concentrate on persons I'd have had to keep revising and revising until the moment these pages went to press, and I'd still wind up with a book as dated as a Jody Powell joke.

Having said that, I was reading my manuscript (book buyers may not realize it, but we writers often do read what we write, although some of us just wait for the movie version), and I noticed that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan is singled out for criticism in three different chapters. I have nothing in particular against the senator from New York. There are plenty worse in the nation's upper house—John Kerry, Edward Kennedy, Christopher Dodd, Claiborne Pell, Alan Cranston and the appalling Howard Metzenbaum, to name just six. Senator Moynihan's triplicate appearance is mostly coincidental. He wrote something pertinent to the chapter about poverty, said something pertinent about the Social Security tax and happened to be in Pakistan at the same time I was. So—Paddy to Paddy—I apologize, Senator. On the other hand, Daniel Patrick Moynihan is the archetypal extremely smart person who went into politics anyway instead of doing something worthwhile for his country. So maybe he owes all of us an apology, too.

This book is written, of course, from a conservative point of view. Conservatism favors the restraint of government. A little government and a little luck are necessary in life, but only a fool trusts either of them. Also, conservatism is, at least in its American form, a philosophy that relies upon personal responsibility and promotes private liberty. It is an ideology of individuals. Everyone with any sense and experience in life would rather

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take his fellows one by one than in a crowd. Crowds are noisy, unreasonable and impatient. They can trample you easier than a single person can. And a crowd will never buy you lunch.

But although this is a conservative book, it is not informed by any very elaborate political theory. I have only one firm belief about the American political system, and that is this: God is a Republican and Santa Claus is a Democrat.

God is an elderly or, at any rate, middle-aged male, a stern fellow, patriarchal rather than paternal and a great believer in rules and regulations. He holds men strictly accountable for their actions. He has little apparent concern for the material well-being of the disadvantaged. He is politically connected, socially powerful and holds the mortgage on literally everything in the world. God is difficult. God is unsentimental. It is very hard to get into God's heavenly country club.

Santa Claus is another matter. He's cute. He's nonthreatening. He's always cheerful. And he loves animals. He may know who's been naughty and who's been nice, but he never does anything about it. He gives everyone everything they want without thought of a quid pro quo. He works hard for charities, and he's famously generous to the poor. Santa Claus is preferable to God in every way but one: There is no such thing as Santa Claus.

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# THE MYSTERY OF GOVERNMENT

*Good laws derive from evil habits.*

—Macrobius



