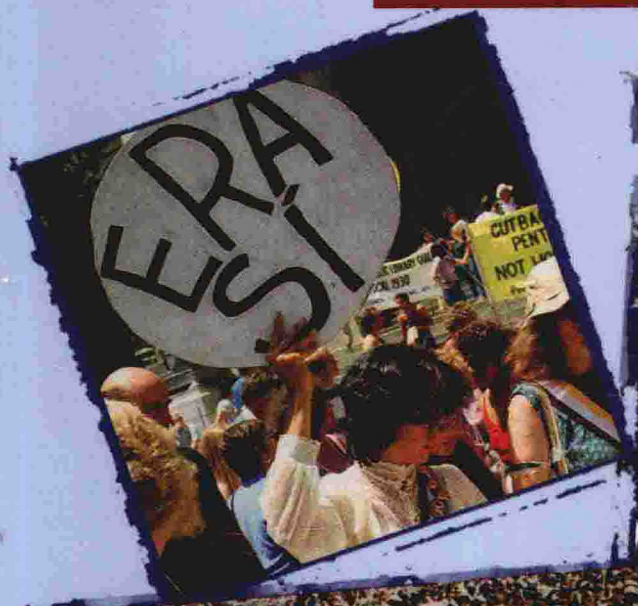
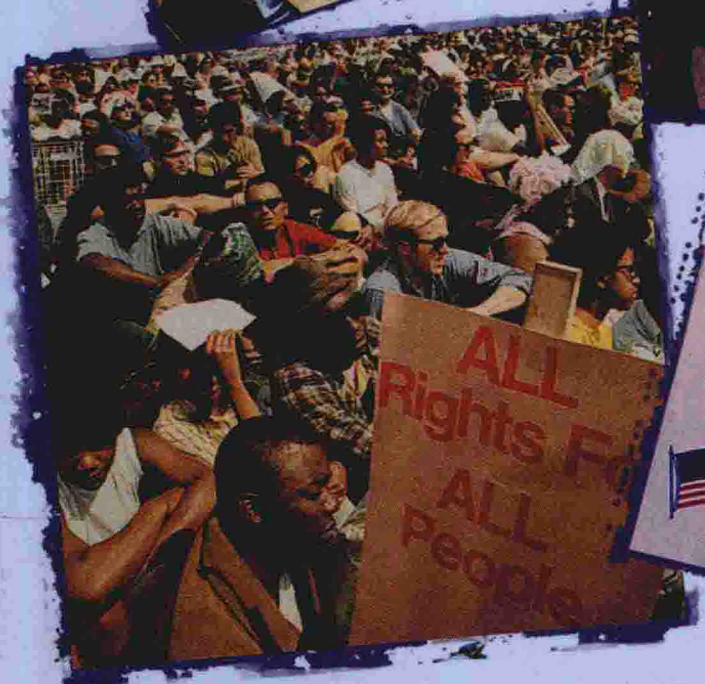
We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS
SHORTER EDITION





BENJAMIN GINSBERG THEODORE J. LOWI
MARGARET WEIR

We The People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

SHORTER EDITION

Benjamin Ginsberg
THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Theodore J. Lowi
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Margaret Weir
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

W · W · NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK · LONDON

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

First Edition

✶

The text of this book is composed in Sabon
with the display set in Garamond 3.
Composition by New England Typographic Service
Manufacturing by Quebecor/Hawkins
Book design by Jack Meserole

Cover illustrations, clockwise from upper left: Charles Steiner/SYGMA;
University Archives. The Bancroft Library. University of California, Berkeley;
Rob Crandall/The Image Works; Fred Ward/Black Star
Further acknowledgments and copyrights appear on p. A63,
which constitutes a continuation of the copyright page.

✶

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ginsberg, Benjamin.

We the people: an introduction to American politics / Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir. — Shorter ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-393-97136-8 (pbk.)

1. United States—Politics and government. I. Lowi, Theodore J. II. Weir, Margaret, 1952– . III. Title.

JK271.G65 1997

320.473—dc21 96-39657

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

http://www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company, Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

SHORTER EDITION

TO

Sandy, Cindy, and Alex Ginsberg

Angele, Anna, and Jason Lowi

Nicholas Ziegler

Preface

We the People is a milestone in a collaboration that began between Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg almost twenty years ago. The first result of that collaboration, *American Government: Freedom and Power,* was first published in 1990. With its most recent edition, we and the publishers feel warranted in expressing satisfaction that its historical/institutional method has been confirmed, not only by its reception among the teachers who have adopted it and the students who have read it, but also by the extent to which it has been imitated by so many other introductory texts.

But unlike political leaders, textbooks should not try to be all things to all people. Endurance is most often ensured by recognition of one's limitations. Lowi and Ginsberg increasingly came to feel that *American Government* needed a sibling to address a number of themes and problems that have become much more central to American politics since *American Government* was conceived in the early 1980s. For a good text should be both timeless and timely. It should present principles whose value goes beyond the immediate events of the day. At the same time, however, it should present students with the principles they need to help elevate their understanding of contemporary events.

We viewed this process as a challenge rather than as a chore. The first step Lowi and Ginsberg took to meet the challenge of developing a new text was to invite a third author to join the enterprise: Margaret Weir, a senior fellow in the Governmental Studies Program at the Brookings Institution, and an expert on social policy in the United States and Europe. Weir brings with her a strong background in urban politics as well as the benefit of several years of teaching experience at Harvard.

From the start, the three of us agreed that this younger sibling would be titled *We the People* and would focus on four sets of issues. The first of these is the question of who is and who is not part of the American political community. This question has been the source of enormous conflict throughout American history and has become salient once again as events at home and throughout the world have brightened the light of democracy, exposing for everyone to see the unreasonable restrictions on who are "we the people," how should "we the people" be defined, and what powers, rights, and obliga-

tions "we the people" should have. Although the United States has so far experienced comparatively little conflict over the basic institutions and practices of government, and although our institutions have evolved in a roughly democratic direction, the struggle over the scope and inclusiveness of the American political process has often been a bitter one, and neither the struggle nor the bitterness is over.

The original American political community consisted of a rather limited group of white male property holders. Over the ensuing two centuries, "we the people" became a larger and more inclusive body as a result of such forces as the abolitionist movement, the women's suffrage movement, and the Civil Rights movement. This expansion of the political community was marked by enormous conflicts involving questions of race, gender, social class, and religious identity. Today, these conflicts continue in the form of struggles over such issues as affirmative action, welfare reform, abortion, the gender gap, the political mobilization of religious groups, and the rise and fall of minority voting districts. These themes are raised in Chapter 2 of *We the People* and are explored further throughout the book.

But regardless of our country's spotty record, one American feature has been and remains the envy of the entire world: Expansion of our political community *has* taken place, and it has happened without having to create new institutions, rules, or procedures. Our democracy is no crustacean that has to shed its structure as it grows.

The second set of issues that we focus on concerns American political values. The American nation is defined not only by its form of government but also by a set of shared beliefs and values, the most basic of which are liberty, equality, and democracy. Although these can be located in antiquity, Americans gave them new vitality and credibility in our founding documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which transformed ancient and abstract principles into operating structures and rules for the new Republic. Although the path has deviated and wrong turns have been taken, the general direction of America has been one worthy of pride—a pride we authors share with virtually all of the American people. But our job as authors is to recognize the gap between ideals and realities and to treat the gap honestly so that our students come to understand that a good citizen is a critical citizen, one whose obedience is not unconditional. Liberty, equality, and democracy are concepts that link all the chapters of our book. They are also criteria against which to measure and to judge all aspects of governmental and political performance.

A third set of issues comes down to the key structural element of the American Constitution: the relationship between the national government and the state and local governments. For more than a century of American history under the Constitution, this relationship was resolved in favor of state and local government. About sixty years ago, this relationship was resolved in favor of national power. In recent years, however, widespread appeals for devolution of power back toward the states have reopened old questions, reviving debates that confounded the Founders. In *We the People* we examine the vitality of democratic government at the state and local levels, comparing it to the national level, in order to determine for ourselves as well as for our students not only what powers are at stake but where the balance between

the levels might best be struck. We find enormous variation among the states in governmental structure, administrative capability, and political patterns. As welfare reforms and other programs give the states more latitude to develop and implement their own policies, we can expect some surprising developments that will in themselves be great lessons in the art and science of government. We are confident that students will have a much better understanding of the nature of government after they have worked with our text, because they will have been given the experience of *many* governments, all within the American scheme of values.

Fourth and finally, *We the People* addresses a pedagogical question: Why should Americans be engaged with government and politics at all? For the entire first century and more of American history under the Constitution, Americans were relatively heavily involved in political life, as activists or as active spectators. Politics was a kind of entertainment, a defining aspect of community life. Politics in America was interesting even to those who had not yet been made full members of the political community. As the size of all governments, especially the national government, began to grow after World War I, Americans by all appearances still took their politics seriously, and the scope of their interest seemed to expand from campaigns and elections into public policy issues, keeping pace with the expansion of government and of government programs.

During the 1960s and 1970s, American students were heavily engaged with politics, many seeing it, quite realistically, as a matter of life and death. Even during the early 1980s, when *American Government: Freedom and Power* was being planned, it was our assumption that political engagement needed guidance—but that it was *there* to be guided. It hardly seemed necessary to explain to students why they should take politics seriously, as observers as well as activists.

But the involvement of the American people in political life has been declining, and students have been increasingly willing to ask why they should be interested in politics at all. We are deeply troubled by this trend and have committed this book to its reversal. Our chapters are introduced by discussions that show where students fit into the materials to be addressed by that chapter and why they should take a personal, indeed selfish, interest in the outcomes of government. For example, our discussion of the media opens with the issues of press freedom faced by college newspapers. Our chapter on civil rights begins with an evaluation of affirmative action programs in college admissions. The opening pages of our discussion of federalism deals with interstate differences that affect college students. Our hope is to make politics interesting to students by demonstrating that their interests are at stake—that their forebears were correct in viewing politics as a matter of life and death.

Acknowledgments

Our students at Cornell and Johns Hopkins and Harvard have been an essential factor in the writing of this book. They have been our most immediate intellectual community, a hospitable one indeed. Another part of our community, perhaps a large suburb, is the discipline of political science itself. Our debt to the scholarship of our colleagues is scientifically measurable,

probably to several decimal points, in the footnotes of each chapter. Despite many complaints that the field is too scientific or not scientific enough, political science is alive and well in the United States. It is an aspect of democracy itself, and it has grown and changed in response to the developments in government and politics that we have chronicled in our book. If we did a "time line" on the history of political science, it would show a close association with developments in "the American state." Sometimes the discipline has been out of phase and critical; at other times, it has been in phase and perhaps apologetic. But political science has never been at a loss for relevant literature, and without it, our job would have been impossible.

We are especially pleased to acknowledge our debt to the many colleagues who had a direct and active role in criticism and preparation of the manuscript. Our thanks go to

Sarah Binder, Brookings Institution
Kathleen Gille, Office of Representative David Bonior
Rodney Hero, University of Colorado at Boulder
Robert Katzmann, Brookings Institution
Kathleen Knight, University of Houston
Robin Kolodny, Temple University
Nancy Kral, Tomball College
Robert C. Lieberman, Columbia University
David A. Marcum, University of Wyoming
Laura R. Winsky Mattei, State University of New York at Buffalo
Marilyn S. Mertens, Midwestern State University
Barbara Suhay, Henry Ford Community College
Carolyn Wong, Stanford University, and
Julian Zelizer, State University of New York at Albany.

We owe a special debt to Robert J. Spitzer of the State University of New York at Cortland for preparing the "We the People" essays and to Michael Harvey of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee for preparing the "American Political Culture" essays. By linking concepts to historical events and contemporary debates, these essays help to make this a more lively and interesting book and thus one that students will be more likely to read and remember.

We are also grateful for the talents and hard work of several research assistants, whose contributions can never be adequately compensated. Douglas Harris, formerly of Johns Hopkins and now at Colgate University, put an enormous amount of thought and time into many of the figures and tables as well as many of the study aids that appear in the text. At Cornell, Hollie Heath, Brenda Holzinger, and Dennis Merryfield gave significant help to the book. Betty Waaler of the College of William and Mary also provided valuable research assistance.

We would like to give special thanks to Jacqueline Pastore at Cornell University, who not only prepared portions of the manuscript but also helped to hold the entire project together. We especially thank her for her hard work and dedication.

Perhaps above all, we wish to thank those at W. W. Norton who kept the production and all the loose ends of the book coherent and in focus. Steve Dunn has helped to define the overall scope of the book and offered many suggestions for specific discussions. Traci Nagle guided us in refining our arguments and our prose. Stephanie Price and Sarah Caldwell both devoted an enormous amount of their time to the book. Neil Ryder Hoos creatively located most of the photos that illustrate the text. Ruth Dworkin has been efficient and dedicated in managing the details of production. Finally, we thank Roby Harrington, the head of Norton's college department and our long-time friend and supporter.

We are more than happy, however, to absolve all these contributors from any flaws, errors, and misjudgments that will inevitably be discovered. We wish the book could be free of all production errors, grammatical errors, misspellings, misquotes, missed citations, etc. From that standpoint, a book ought to try to be perfect. But substantively we have not tried to write a flawless book; we have not tried to write a book to please everyone. We have again tried to write an effective book, a book that cannot be taken lightly. Our goal was not to make every reader a political scientist or a political activist. Our goal was to restore politics as a subject matter of vigorous and enjoyable discourse, recapturing it from the bondage of the thirty-second sound bite and the thirty-page technical briefing. Every person can be knowledgeable because everything about politics is accessible. One does not have to be a television anchorperson to profit from political events. One does not have to be a philosopher to argue about the requisites of democracy, a lawyer to dispute constitutional interpretations, an economist to debate a public policy. We would be very proud if our book contributes in a small way to the restoration of the ancient art of political controversy.

BENJAMIN GINSBERG
THEODORE J. LOWI
MARGARET WEIR

SEPTEMBER 1996

Contents

PART III

★

Politics