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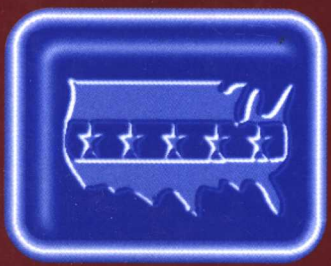

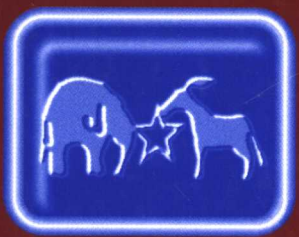

Edward Ashbee

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Preface and acknowledgements

Although the 2003 Iraq war illustrated the limitations as well as the scale of American power, the political, economic and cultural importance of the United States is beyond question. Both its critics and friends now employ the term 'hyperpower'.

Events and developments within the US since the first edition of *US politics today* was published have reaffirmed the importance of understanding the American political process and subjecting it to sustained scrutiny. The contested aftermath of the 2000 presidential election highlighted the continuing relevance of a constitution written over two centuries ago and the pivotal role of the Supreme Court. The nation's response to al Qaeda's attacks on 11 September 2001 and the launching of the 'war on terrorism' drew attention to both the powers of the president and the constraints imposed upon him.

US politics today considers and assesses US political institutions and the broader context within which they function. In particular, the book:

- offers an introduction to the structures of government, most notably the presidency, Congress, and the federal courts;
- examines the role of parties and interest groups; and
- evaluates the variables shaping the outcome of presidential and Congressional elections.

The book has been updated so as to incorporate events since 1998 and offer a more developed picture of the arguments and debates that are taking place among observers of the political process. It also includes a new chapter that examines the core political issues facing the US today and, at the same time, provides opportunities for follow-up work by readers.

I am immensely grateful to those who have helped the book come to fruition. My students – past and present – have assisted me in countless ways. Nigel Ashford and Martin Durham have always been ready with invaluable advice and thoughtful reflection. David Phelps's careful and scrupulous work improved many of the chapters. I would, however, particularly like to thank all

my new colleagues at the Copenhagen Business School – most notably Niels Bjerre-Poulsen – for providing a friendly, constructive, and purposeful environment within which the final stages of work on the book were completed.

I should, however, stress that the responsibility for errors, ambiguities and omissions remains mine alone.

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Differences and divisions

At the time of its founding two centuries ago, the US was – despite some significant regional differences – a relatively homogeneous society dominated by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants or WASPs. They were the descendants of settlers from the British Isles who had established colonies along the eastern seaboard of the American continent from the early seventeenth century onwards.

The contemporary US is very different. On 1 April 2000, the Census Bureau recorded a population of 281,421,906. The nation not only occupies a far greater land mass – stretching across the continent – but is also much more diverse. There are significant fissures based upon race, ethnicity, and region. Some observers assert that the divisions are such that they will lead to *Balkanisation* and the eventual break-up of the US. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a distinguished historian and former adviser to President Kennedy, has for example warned of 'the fragmentation of the national community into a quarrelsome spatter of enclaves, ghettos, tribes' (1992: 137–8). This chapter assesses the character of American society and considers the basis for these claims.

Race

About 12.1 per cent of the US population is black or *African-American*. Over half still live in the southern states, where their ancestors worked as slaves until the end of the Civil War in 1865. Others are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who migrated – from the First World War onwards – to the northern cities. They were drawn by the promise of industrial employment and the chance to escape the rural poverty and the 'Jim Crow' segregation laws of the south. Blacks now constitute 39 per cent and 75 per cent of those living in Chicago and Detroit respectively.

Since the ending of segregation and the extension of the franchise in the 1960s, African-Americans have made sustained economic progress. A substantial black middle class has emerged. There are also growing numbers

Box 1.1 Race: the American dilemma

Many immigrants thought in terms of religious, economic and political freedom. About one-and-a-half million Africans were, however, brought across the Atlantic in leg and neck irons. They were mostly destined for the southern states such as South Carolina, Virginia and Mississippi. Although slavery came to an end in 1865, when the south was defeated in the Civil War, southern blacks faced continuing discrimination. Until the reforms of the 1960s, public facilities were *segregated* and many blacks were unable to vote. There was a gulf between the democratic ideals that constituted the American creed and political institutions structured around racial oppression. Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish sociologist, termed this *the American dilemma.*

Amidst all this, black Americans are sometimes portrayed as passive victims. However, despite endemic racism, slaves and their descendants made an enduring mark on American life and society. For a brief period – in the aftermath of the Civil War – blacks in the southern states gained *political* rights. They were elected to state legislatures and the US Congress, although they lost these positions as whites regained their dominance in the region. There were also a number of black *economic* success stories. Madam C. J. Walker made her fortune from beauty salons. John Merrick founded the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company. Blacks also 'voted with their feet'. In the early years of the twentieth century, large numbers migrated from the south to northern cities. The growing black electorate in cities such as Detroit and Chicago created the conditions in which blacks could organise and again win political representation. In 1928, Oscar DePriest, a Republican, was elected to the House of Representatives. Others supported Marcus Garvey's radical 'Back to Africa' movement. Black *culture* also began to gain recognition as the Harlem Renaissance took shape. Novelists, poets and jazz musicians carved out a distinctive black culture in uptown New York City that influenced black and white Americans alike.

In the 1950s and 1960s the civil rights movement, led by figures such as Martin Luther King and coordinated by organisations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, began to gain substantive victories. Against a background of Cold War pressures, the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56, the 'freedom rides', sit-ins and marches compelled federal legislators to act. The

of black public officials, including Congressmen. Nonetheless, there are still entrenched inequalities. In 2001, 22.7 per cent of the black population lived below the poverty level. Just 7.8 per cent of (non-Hispanic) whites faced similar difficulties (US Census Bureau 2002a). The infant mortality rate for blacks is twice that for whites. In 2002, 27.3 per cent of African-Americans aged 15 or over had failed to graduate or complete their studies at high school successfully. The figure for (non-Hispanic) whites was 16.4 per cent (US Census Bureau 2002b). Blacks are disproportionately likely to be victims of crime. Significant numbers are also offenders. According to a 1991 study, black males born in

1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act finally brought segregation to an end and allowed African-Americans to vote freely.

Despite legal – or *de jure* – equality, there are still significant differences between the races. African-Americans lag behind in terms of both educational achievement and income levels. Indeed, the gap widened during the boom years of the late 1990s and at the beginning of the new century. This was because living standards rose for whites at a faster rate than for blacks, the boom faltered from 2000 onwards, and in 1996 a report by the Children's Defense Fund suggested that the number of black children and young people in extreme poverty rose sharply between 2000 and 2003 (*New York Times*, 30 April 2003).

Median household income, 2001 (dollars)

Households	Income
All households	42,228
White (non-Hispanic)	46,305
Black	29,470
Hispanic	33,565

Source: adapted from US Census Bureau (2003), *Income 2001*, www.census.gov/hhes/income01/inctab1.html.

What should be done? Liberals emphasise the continuing hold of *institutionalised* discrimination. The disparities between whites and blacks – in terms of poverty, educational attainment, and jailings – suggest to them that federal government action is required. They call for large-scale public investment in the inner-city neighbourhoods and the maintenance of affirmative action programmes so as to ensure that minorities are proportionately represented on educational courses and in senior management positions. For their part, conservatives – and black nationalist organisations such as the Nation of Islam – adopt a different approach. They argue that although government regulations prevent individuals building up their own business enterprises, many of the former obstacles to black progress have now been eliminated. The black communities, they argue, need to rediscover the entrepreneurial spirit, and to address the problems of illegitimacy, criminality and drug abuse within their own communities.

that year would have had a greater than one in four chance of incarceration in federal prisons, state jails, or juvenile institutions during their lifetimes. In contrast, white males would have had a 1 in 23 chance of serving time (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2003).

Race is also important because it informs social and political attitudes. The races have different priorities. Significantly more blacks than whites, for example, regard issues such as crime, violence, drugs, poverty and homelessness as the most important problems facing the US (Bositis 1999: 12). Furthermore, whereas a clear majority of African-Americans believe that the

federal government should set basic national standards in the provision of welfare and other forms of social assistance, less than a third of the population as a whole share this opinion. Similarly, whereas 78.3 per cent of whites favour the use of the death penalty, it is backed by only 49.9 per cent of African-Americans (General Social Survey 1998). Although there was a 'rally round the flag' effect in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks – as both blacks and whites pulled together behind the president and the nation – the differences between blacks and whites re-emerged as the war against Iraq drew close. According to polls conducted by the Gallup Organization, only 29 per cent of blacks backed the war effort, compared with 78 per cent of whites (Gallup Organization 2003). These attitudinal differences are reflected in voting patterns. African-Americans are the Democrats' most loyal constituency. In the 2000 election, 90 per cent of black voters supported Al Gore, the Democratic Party candidate for the presidency. Just 8 per cent of blacks backed George W. Bush, the Republican candidate.

White attitudes should also be considered. While there is evidence to suggest that racism may have either diminished or taken a less overt form over the past half century, it is still evident. A 1991 survey suggested that racial stereotypes were widely accepted. Almost half of whites agreed that 'blacks tend to be lazy'. A clear majority endorsed claims that blacks 'prefer welfare'. Almost half said that they were 'unintelligent' (Smith 1995: 39). Sentiments such as these have at times been translated into votes, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty. David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader, who still maintained many of his earlier opinions, stood as a candidate in the 1992 Republican presidential primaries. He gained 11 and 7 per cent of the votes among Republican primary voters in Mississippi and South Carolina respectively.

Ethnicity

Although hostility towards the black population bound whites together during America's formative years, the whites should not be seen as a homogeneous bloc. The white 'race' is constructed from different ethnic – or cultural – groupings. This is because the US is – in President John F. Kennedy's words – a 'nation of immigrants'.

In the 2000 Census, 10.3 per cent of the population claimed English ancestry. A further 4.6 per cent have roots in Wales, Scotland and from among the 'Scotch-Irish' of northern Ireland (US Census Bureau 2003a).

The British were the first permanent 'immigrants' on the mainland of north America. In May 1607, a settlement was established at Jamestown, Virginia. Despite many hardships, it survived by exporting tobacco. In 1620, the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth Bay in what was to become Massachusetts. In contrast with the Jamestown settlers, who were commercial adventurers, the Puritans sought to build a self-governing Christian commonwealth. Later in the

seventeenth century, Quaker communities were founded in the Delaware valley. During the eighteenth century, others came from the borderlands between England and Scotland and the northern counties of Ireland (Fischer 1989).

These beginnings evolved into stable and ordered communities stretching along much of the eastern seaboard. Although the settlers were British colonists and subject to the rule of Governors appointed by the authorities in London, a separate and distinct American identity began to emerge. While there were significant differences between the northern 'Yankees' and the southerners, this identity formed a basis for rebellion against British rule. The Declaration of Independence was published in 1776. The War of Independence followed, culminating in the defeat of the British forces at Yorktown in 1781.

Although WASPs formed the backbone of the new nation, others followed. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, millions of migrants made the journey from Europe. Before the Civil War (1861–65), they were largely drawn from northern European countries such as Ireland, Germany and Sweden. After the war, it was the turn of those from eastern and southern Europe. Between 1845 and 1854, three million crossed the Atlantic. In 1907 alone, 1.3 million people arrived in the US.

Why did they make the journey? The answer is that both 'push' and 'pull' factors were at work. 'Push' factors are the pressures that encourage migrants to abandon their country of origin. For example, in Poland, peasants were forced from the land because of competition from more advanced forms of agriculture in Western Europe and the US. Their difficulties were compounded by both a high birth-rate and the occupation and partition of the country by neighbouring powers. However, 'pull' factors also played their part. The Poles were drawn to the US by the promise of employment in industrial cities such as Chicago, Buffalo and Pittsburgh. At the same time, the transatlantic journey became less arduous and costly. The advent of the steamship cut the crossing time to weeks rather than months, and intense competition between shipping companies reduced the fares. There were broadly similar pressures in other European countries. The failure of the potato crop led to mass famine in Ireland. From 1847 until 1855, over 100,000 Irish emigrated annually. In 1851, the outflow reached a peak of 221,000. In the US, the men found employment in construction projects, such as canals and railroads along the east coast. Women worked in the textile industries.

The US offered more, however, than a regular wage. Although – as Martin Scorsese depicted in his 2002 film, *Gangs of New York* – immigrants often encountered *nativist* resentment from those who had been in the country for many generations, America represented freedom. It promised economic freedom to those who had been adversely affected by the process of economic change. In Europe, the displaced craftsman – or *artisan* – faced only unemployment or absorption into the ranks of the industrial working class. In the US, he might rebuild a business of his own. The commercial history of the US is adorned by individual success stories. German-American artisans established

Box 1.2 Latinos

There was a Hispanic or *Latino* presence in the south-west long before the region was incorporated into the US. Numbers grew significantly from the 1880s onwards, when Mexican labourers came to border states such as Texas and California in search of work. There has been renewed growth in recent years following the liberalisation of immigration laws in 1965. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Latinos rose by 57.9 per cent (US Census Bureau 2003b). Many settled in the metropolitan regions in and around cities such as Chicago and New York as well as the south-western states. In July 2002, the Census Bureau announced that Latinos had overtaken African-Americans and were now the largest minority grouping in the country. The rise in numbers can be attributed to immigration and a relatively high birth-rate.

To an extent, Latinos share the problems facing the black communities. Disproportionate numbers are unemployed and in poverty. Median income is significantly lower than for whites, although this can partly be explained by the relative youth of the Latino population. It would, however, be wrong to make too many generalisations. As the US Census Bureau emphasises, the term 'Hispanic' embraces those of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American origin. It is, furthermore, an ethnic category, and there are both white and black Hispanics. These cleavages form the basis for significant economic and cultural differences within the Latino population.

The Latino population 2002 (%)

	Total US	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	All Central and South American
Failure to graduate from high school	15.9	49.4	33.2	29.2	35.3
Below poverty level	11.7	22.8	26.1	16.5	15.2
In managerial and / or professional employment	31.4	11.9	19.5	23.0	14.7

Source: adapted from US Census Bureau (2003), The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002 – Detailed Tables (PPL-165), www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hispanic/ppl-165.html.

companies such as Steinway and Sons, the piano makers, and Levi Strauss, the clothing manufacturers. For other migrants, there were hopes of religious liberty. Sects such as the Amish and the Mennonites sought the freedom to live independently of others. They survive to this day as autonomous communities in states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. The US also offered political freedom and civic rights. In Europe, Jews faced discrimination. In the years before the First World War, there were violent anti-Semitic massacres in Poland and

There are also variations in the economic, cultural and political relationship between the Latino communities and the wider population. In California, there have been tensions that were reflected in the passage of Proposition 187. Passed in November 1994, the measure sought to deny non-emergency state benefits to illegal immigrants. It was supported by 63 per cent of 'Anglos' and opposed by 69 per cent of Hispanics. In Texas, however, polarisation is less marked. Cities such as Houston seem to have been restructured around a 'Tex–Mex' identity. Although well over two-thirds of Latinos across the US vote Democratic, there are some signs that minority politics in Texas are being 'normalised', and there is serious competition between the parties for the Latino vote.

Latinos and the overall US population compared

	Total US population	Latinos
Population (000s)	282,082	37,438
Median household income	$38,275	$25,083
Median age (years)	35.6	26.3

Source: adapted from US Census Bureau (2003), *Selected Summary Measures of Age and Income by Hispanic Origin and Race*, www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hispanic/ppl-165/sumtab01.xls.

References and further reading

US Census Bureau (2003g), *Difference in Population by Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin, for the United States: 1990 to 2000*, www.census.gov/population/cen2000/phc-t1/tab04.txt.

Russia. After the war, prejudice against the Jewish communities was sustained as the newly formed Slav nations began to establish themselves.

However, from 1921 onwards, admissions to the US were severely restricted, and skewed towards northern Europe. This policy lasted until the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act abandoned the system of quotas for particular nations and established 'family reunification' as the defining criterion for entry. As a consequence of reform, the number of immigrants has risen dramatically, and they have again become a significant element within American society. In 2002, the foreign-born constituted an estimated 11.5 per cent of the American population (US Census Bureau 2003b). Between 1991 and 2000, 9,095,417 immigrants were admitted (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2003). The majority of the new immigrants are Hispanic, or *Latino*, and are drawn from Central and South America. However, there are also growing numbers from the countries of Asia.

A significant proportion of the immigrant population are in the country illegally. Studies by the Immigration and Naturalization Service suggest that,