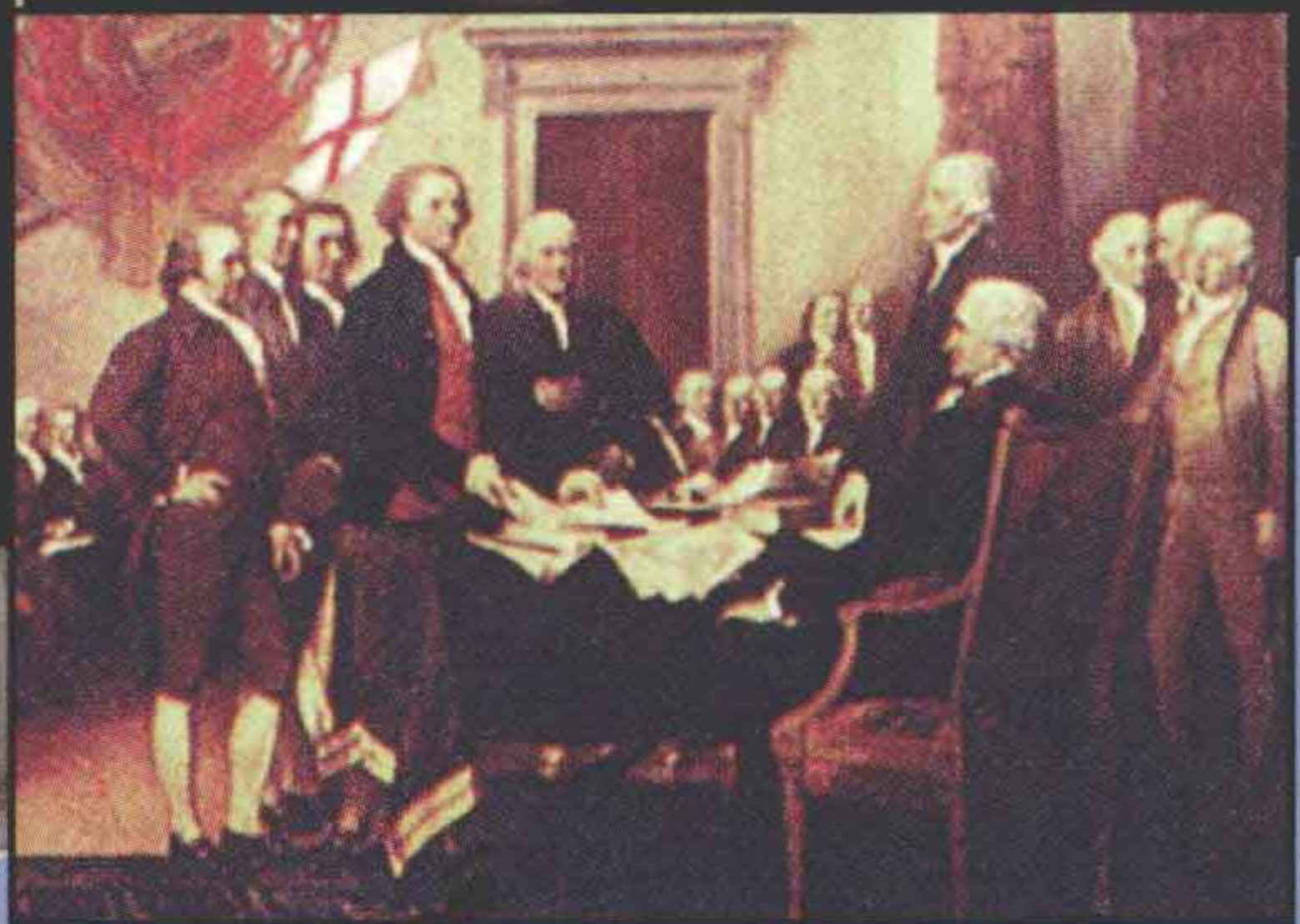
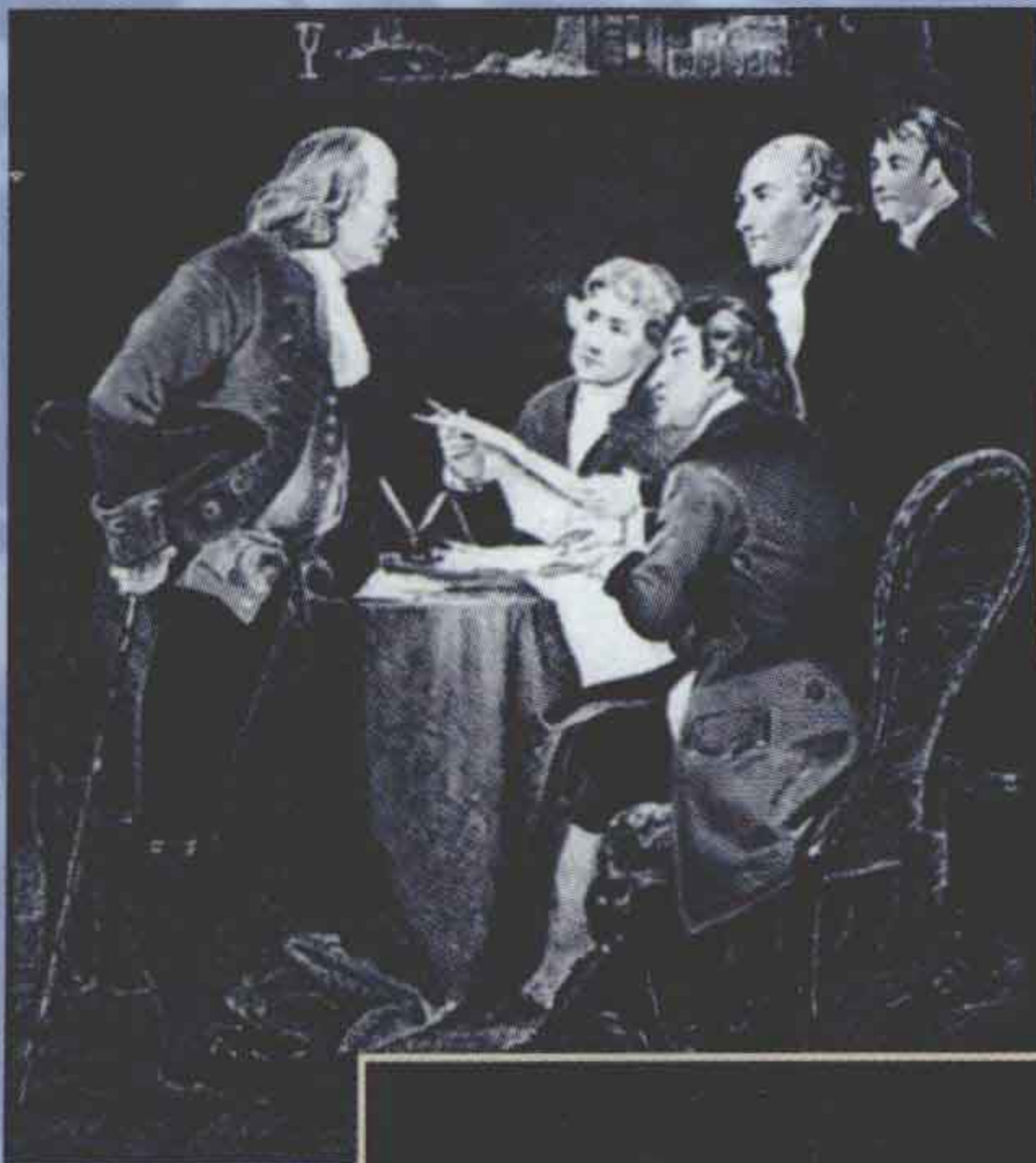


Principles and Practice of **AMERICAN POLITICS**

CLASSIC AND
CONTEMPORARY
READINGS



Samuel Kernell & Steven S. Smith, editors

Principles and Practice of
**AMERICAN
POLITICS**

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edited by

Samuel Kernell

Steven S. Smith



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PREFACE

ASSEMBLING THIS SET of readings for students of American politics has been a pleasure and a challenge. The pleasure has come in discovering so many articles that illuminate an important aspect of American politics. The challenge has come in finding far more than can be contained in a single volume. Consequently, despite its heft, *Principles and Practice* represents a small sampling of the literature.

The selection of articles has been guided by our common perspective on politics. Most of the readings concern the strategies of the major players in modern American politics—citizens, public officials, candidates for office, voters, parties, organized interests, and the media. The behavior of political actors is motivated by their own interests, though it is governed by the Constitution, the law, and institutional and organizational rules and is influenced by the strategies of others. Each chapter's readings introduce the interests, rules, and strategic context of political action in a major forum of national politics.

We have chosen the readings to serve two audiences. Many instructors will employ *Principles and Practice* as a supplement to an introductory American politics textbook. For others, this book may constitute the core reading material for the course. For the former, we looked to readings that will animate the institutional processes described in the text. For the latter, we have sought readings that do not assume more than an elementary knowledge of America's government and politics.

Some of the selections are classics that all instructors will recognize; others address contemporary political developments or proposals for reform and may be unfamiliar. Each article adds emphasis and depth to textbook coverage and illustrates an important theme; most introduce an important writer on American politics. We hope students' understanding of American politics is enriched by them all.

We have taken care to include as much of each original source as possible. In the interest of making them appropriate for use in the classroom, we have edited some of the pieces. Ellipses indicate where material has been excised, and brackets enclose editorial interpolations. Other changes are explained in the source note for the reading.

We wish to thank the editorial staff of CQ Press for its expertise, energy, and patience in helping us bring this project to completion. Brenda Carter and James Headley provided essential encouragement and guidance throughout the effort. Tom Roche provided superb editorial assistance, and Martha Hawley-Bertsch demonstrated persistence in gaining permission to reprint the selections. Several friends and colleagues have been helpful to us as well. Sarah Binder, Louis Fisher, Alan Houston, and John Zaller offered helpful suggestions that are reflected in the contents. Alan Abramowitz of Emory University, Scott Adler of the University of Colorado, Eric Lawrence of the University of California, Riverside, and several anonymous reviewers provided very helpful comments on our original outline.

Samuel Kernell
Steven S. Smith

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Designing Institutions

Politics is an ever-present social activity. It occurs whenever individuals seek to reach agreement on a course of common action despite their disagreement over the goals. Politics arises whenever people who have different, even opposing, interests accept that they must cooperate if their interest is to be served. Politics, so defined, occurs within the smallest, most intimate associations—as within families and among friends—as well as at city hall or in Washington, D.C. Successful politics almost always depends on bargaining and compromise as each side tries to get as much of what it wants from the agreement, whether friends are trying to decide on a restaurant or Congress and the president are wrangling over the budget. The essays in this book attest to the bargaining and compromise that occur in Washington, at least whenever politicians succeed in creating national policy.

By virtue of their size and complexity, national communities recurrently encounter special problems in conducting political business. This is especially true when citizens participate in politics through voting and other activities. Every aspect of a political choice presents a challenge: combining and ranking preferences, bargaining and compromising to reach agreement, and implementing agreements. Each is based on recognizing the discrepancy between what we desire as individuals and what is required of us as members of a collectivity. In this chapter we introduce American politics by taking inventory of some of the problems that we face when we try to act collectively. The commonly occurring collective action problems are known to economists and political scientists by some rather colorful names: free riding, the tragedy of the commons, externalities, and the prisoner's dilemma. Each of these problems will be explored in the following selections.

from *The Logic of Collective Action*

Mancur Olson Jr.

With the publication of The Logic of Collective Action in 1965, Mancur Olson introduced the fundamental dilemma of collective action to all who study politics. When members of a group agree to work together to achieve a collective goal, each member as an individual faces powerful disincentives, Olson showed, that can frustrate the efforts of the group as a whole. For example, when each can foresee that his or her relatively small contribution to a collective enterprise will not affect its overall success, many will fail to contribute—a phenomenon known as free riding—and leave to everyone else the burden of supplying the collective good. As a consequence, collective enterprises based on cooperation, and supported by the entire collectivity, nevertheless often fail.

IT IS OFTEN taken for granted, at least where economic objectives are involved, that groups of individuals with common interests usually attempt to further those common interests. Groups of individuals with common interests are expected to act on behalf of their common interests much as single individuals are often expected to act on behalf of their personal interests. This opinion about group behavior is frequently found not only in popular discussions but also in scholarly writings. Many economists of diverse methodological and ideological traditions have implicitly or explicitly accepted it. This view has, for example, been important in many theories of labor unions, in Marxian theories of class action, in concepts of “countervailing power,” and in various discussions of economic institutions. It has, in addition, occupied a prominent place in political science, at least in the United States, where the study of pressure groups has been dominated by a celebrated “group theory” based on the idea that groups will act when necessary to further their common or group goals. Finally, it has played a significant role in many well-known sociological studies.

Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* by Mancur Olson, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1971 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

The view that groups act to serve their interests presumably is based upon the assumption that the individuals in groups act out of self-interest. If the individuals in a group altruistically disregarded their personal welfare, it would not be very likely that collectively they would seek some selfish common or group objective. Such altruism is, however, considered exceptional, and self-interested behavior is usually thought to be the rule, at least when economic issues are at stake; no one is surprised when individual businessmen seek higher profits, when individual workers seek higher wages, or when individual consumers seek lower prices. The idea that groups tend to act in support of their group interests is supposed to follow logically from this widely accepted premise of rational, self-interested behavior. In other words, if the members of some group have a common interest or objective, and if they would all be better off if that objective were achieved, it has been thought to follow logically that the individuals in that group would, if they were rational and self-interested, act to achieve that objective.

But it is *not* in fact true that the idea that groups will act in their self-interest follows logically from the premise of rational and self-interested behavior. It does *not* follow, because all of the individuals in a group would gain if they achieved their group objective, that they would act to achieve that objective, even if they were all rational and self-interested. Indeed, unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests*. In other words, even if all of the individuals in a large group are rational and self-interested, and would gain if, as a group, they acted to achieve their common interest or objective, they will still not voluntarily act to achieve that common or group interest. The notion that groups of individuals will act to achieve their common or group interests, far from being a logical implication of the assumption that the individuals in a group will rationally further their individual interests, is in fact inconsistent with that assumption. . . .

A Theory of Groups and Organizations

The Purpose of Organization

Since most (though by no means all) of the action taken by or on behalf of groups of individuals is taken through organizations, it will be helpful to

consider organizations in a general or theoretical way.¹ The logical place to begin any systematic study of organizations is with their purpose. But there are all types and shapes and sizes of organizations, even of economic organizations, and there is then some question whether there is any single purpose that would be characteristic of organizations generally. One purpose that is nonetheless characteristic of most organizations, and surely of practically all organizations with an important economic aspect, is the furtherance of the interests of their members. That would seem obvious, at least from the economist's perspective. To be sure, some organizations may out of ignorance fail to further their members' interests, and others may be enticed into serving only the ends of the leadership.² But organizations often perish if they do nothing to further the interests of their members, and this factor must severely limit the number of organizations that fail to serve their members.

The idea that organizations or associations exist to further the interests of their members is hardly novel, nor peculiar to economics; it goes back at least to Aristotle, who wrote, "Men journey together with a view to particular advantage, and by way of providing some particular thing needed for the purposes of life, and similarly the political association seems to have come together originally, and to continue in existence, for the sake of the *general* advantages it brings."³ More recently Professor Leon Festinger, a social psychologist, pointed out that "the attraction of group membership is not so much in sheer belonging, but rather in attaining something by means of this membership."⁴ The late Harold Laski, a political scientist, took it for granted that "associations exist to fulfill purposes which a group of men have in common."⁵

The kinds of organizations that are the focus of this study are *expected* to further the interests of their members.⁶ Labor unions are expected to strive for higher wages and better working conditions for their members; farm organizations are expected to strive for favorable legislation for their members; cartels are expected to strive for higher prices for participating firms; the corporation is expected to further the interests of its stockholders;⁷ and the state is expected to further the common interests of its citizens (though in this nationalistic age the state often has interests and ambitions apart from those of its citizens).

Notice that the interests that all of these diverse types of organizations are expected to further are for the most part *common* interests: the union members' common interest in higher wages, the farmers' common interest