

American Government and Politics A NEOCONSERVATIVE APPROACH



Richard T. Saeger

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Literary

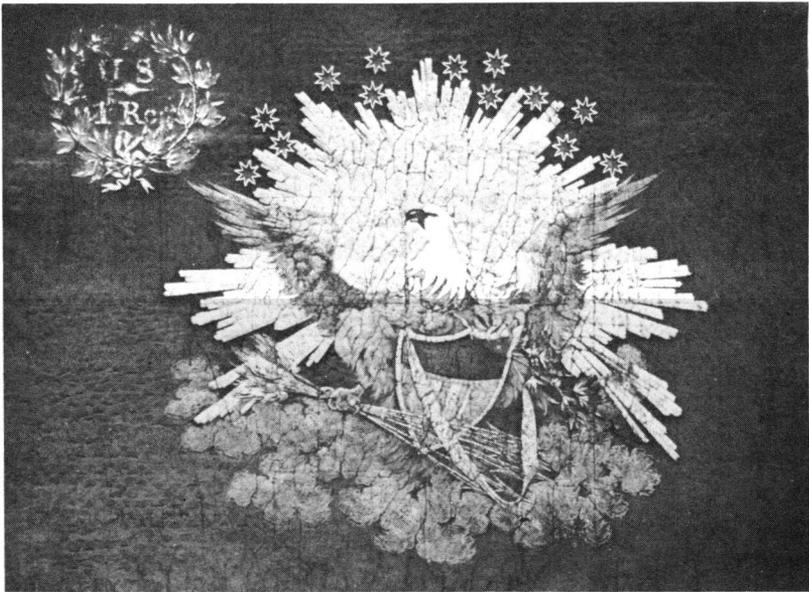
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Figures and Tables

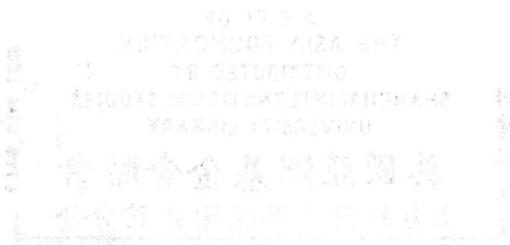
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Cover

American Government and Politics
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U.S. First Infantry Regimental flag



Preface

When the political history of this decade is written, neoconservatism will warrant more than a footnote. Certainly, it will comprise at least a chapter; it may even be a theme. Thus, the perspective of this text is neoconservative, although I am certain that my version of neoconservatism is not precisely the same as that of others who would call themselves neoconservatives. But just as liberals, conservatives, radicals, and those of any other ideological stripe differ from others who are similarly self-identified, so do neoconservatives.

Like many neoconservatives, I was once a self-described liberal. I still believe that government has a positive role to play in our society and that it can be a force for good. But, like most neoconservatives, I also believe that modern liberalism has become perverted. In fact, it is no longer liberalism but statism—a willingness to make the state, not the individual, the central measure of value and to entrust to the state the power to do all things.

Some commentators feel that liberalism died on the day Senator Hubert Humphrey was buried in Minneapolis. That evening, television news commentators around the nation proclaimed (and some lamented) the passing of an era. Liberalism, they said, the liberalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, and his vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, finally had been interred with the last of these great men.

Approximately two years later on election day, the returns revealed a surprising shift of political power. Former Governor Ronald Reagan, a conservative Republican, captured the White House in a landslide victory. Other Republicans (mostly conservative) took control of the U.S. Senate and made substantial gains in the House. Although these victories were, in themselves, significant, even more significant was the defeat of liberal Democrats. George McGovern of South Dakota, Birch Bayh of Indiana, Frank Church of Idaho, Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, and John Culver of Iowa—all well-known liberals—yielded their seats to unknown conservatives in what was heralded as a near sweep by the “New Right.” Surely, something was happening to America’s politics.

According to self-proclaimed New Deal liberal Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and self-proclaimed neoconservative Irving Kristol, what has happened in America’s politics is that “(New Deal) liberalism has become a victim of its success.”¹ While the liberal programs of Roosevelt’s New Deal, Truman’s Fair Deal, Kennedy’s New Frontier, and Johnson’s Great Society were mostly well-intentioned—and may have even been necessary at the time they were created—many political observers now maintain that we can no longer afford that much government. Clearly, the time has come for the leadership to pass to those with new ideas and with promise, and the one ideology most compatible with our political, economic, and philosophical traditions is neoconservatism.

American Government and Politics: A Neoconservative Approach contains many features that make it quite different from other conventional American government texts. But are these differences from other texts sufficient to justify the publishing of yet another American government text? Obviously, I think they are. In this text, the format is conventional, the approach is not. Most textbooks approach American government by either purposely ignoring ideology, by dismissing it as irrelevant, or by assuming the ideology of New Deal liberalism as an indisputable given. *American Government and Politics: A Neoconservative Approach* takes a more

far-sighted view that emphasizes the importance of ideology in grounding, guiding, and explaining the direction of public policy in the United States.

Most textbooks on American government include the Constitution in an appendix, discuss the making of it and its major features in separate chapters, and then refer to it only in passing. Again, *American Government and Politics: A Neoconservative Approach* broadens this view by not only discussing the Constitution's making and major features, but also by having it serve as a foundation for the chapters on the presidency, the legislature, and the judiciary. The superiority of this approach is self-evident when one considers that many of the most controversial issues facing our nation today have their origins in the Constitution. And some of these issues will be discussed in detail, pointing out the arguments for and against, for example, capital punishment, affirmative action, balancing the budget, etc. Thus, this constitutional-institutional approach provides a far-ranging involved view of our political processes and a close look at our political actors.

And that *is* important. If we are to understand how the American political process works, we have to know how the participants in that process—voters, interest-group members, elected and appointed officials—behave, and why they behave as they do. Any text that ignores that, ignores much of political reality. But, more important, actors act within a constitutional-institutional setting, and any text that ignores that also ignores political reality. In writing this text, I have tried to incorporate all the elements that I believe are important in any American government textbook. We shall consider the behavior of political actors, the processes of American politics, and the constitutional and institutional settings in which all this takes place.

Another feature of *American Government and Politics: A Neoconservative Approach* that makes it stand apart from other textbooks is its consideration of the economic implications of political decisions and nondecisions. At the end of each chapter, a postscript entitled "Notes on Political Economy" discusses the chapter's theme in terms of some economic implications that derive from it. It is the author's contention that to understand either the polity or the economy of the United States, it is essential that we understand something of both. These postscripts are a small attempt to assist the reader in seeing the interrelationships between politics and economics.

I have divided this text into four parts. Part 1 explores the meaning of some central concepts: politics, government, influence, power and the influence of ideology—liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism. Included in this first part is also a chapter on neoconservatism that attempts to define neoconservatism and its difference from other ideologies.

Part 2 examines the historical bases of our constitutional system, the central features of the Constitution, and the civil liberties and civil rights granted by the amendments to the Constitution.

In Part 3, the focus is on the political processes—the formation and manifestation of political attitudes, voting, and the activities and nature of political interest groups and political parties.

Finally, Part 4 considers the institutions of American government—the presidency, the bureaucracy, the legislature, and the judiciary. *American Government and Politics: A Neoconservative Approach* concludes with an epilogue on public policy, which is added as a summary and postscript to the

text. To promote further reading, a bibliography of important and relevant works is provided at the end of each chapter.

Neoconservatism is an important ideological development in American politics. Some have called it the most important intellectual development in America in at least fifty years. And scores of books and magazines articles have appeared to underscore its importance. But a perusal of the most recently published textbooks on American government reveals scarcely a mention of this development. Either political scientists do not agree with their journalistic colleagues that neoconservatism is important, or they continue to wear ideological blinders. Whichever the case, this writer is convinced of the significance of neoconservatism as *the* political ideology of the 1980s.

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I am indebted to a great many people for assisting me in the preparation of this book. Particularly, I'm grateful for the support of my wife Marie and of our future political scientists, Katherine, Mary Elizabeth, and Richard, Jr. However, contrary to the findings of the literature on political socialization, none of them shares my political views or opinions.

Also disagreeing with me most of the time, but offering invaluable suggestions, nevertheless, were the reviewers of this manuscript—John Bibby, John Goldbach, Jean Hardisty, and John Saloma. Their comments and criticisms caused me to reflect on and reevaluate nearly every position I had taken. Whatever merit this book might have is attributable in no small part to them.

It is also attributable to the professionals at Scott, Foresman. I am especially indebted to Bruce Borland, whose unswerving commitment saw me through the writing; to Linda Muterspaugh, who, as developmental editor, caught most of my errors; and, to Tana Vega-Romero, who, as manuscript editor, added polish and organization to what was, in places, a somewhat ragged manuscript.

While the ideas and opinions expressed in this book are my own, I received precious assistance from my colleagues at Valdosta State College in the departments of political science, economics, and philosophy. I especially want to thank Jim Betka, Jane Elza, Bill Morrow, and Henrik van Dalen in political science; A. L. Addington, Marvin Ray, and Albert Zlabinger (now at Jacksonville University) in economics; and Jim Hill in philosophy for their contributions. Special thanks go to Arts and Sciences Dean Jim Daniels (now president of Coker College) for his support and encouragement.

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Finally, I have to thank Ronald Reagan and all the conservative Republicans and Democrats for verifying what I thought was a developing trend toward conservatism, and especially toward neoconservatism, long before the 1980 elections.

1. "Is America Turning Right? Ought It?" *Public Opinion*, September–October 1978, p. 60.

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Part **1**

POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

- 1 The Meaning of Politics**
- 2 American Ideology**
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The Meaning of Politics

The man who is isolated—who is unable to share the benefits of political association, or who has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient—is no part of the polis [the city-state], and must therefore be either a beast or a god.¹

Aristotle

The discharge of political duties appears to them [Americans] to be a troublesome impediment, which diverts them from their occupation and business. These people think they are following the principle of self-interest, but the idea they entertain of that principle is a very crude one. . . .²

Alexis de Tocqueville

I don't think politics or election results will do or affect my own life very much. Regardless of who is in power, I'll keep my job and my home.³

A citizen of Ithaca, New York

Politics seems to be a dirty word in the United States. Indeed, most mothers and fathers would prefer almost any career for their sons and daughters to a career in politics. On all levels, politicians often go out of their way to deny that they're politicians and often attempt to discredit their opponents and detractors by accusing them of "playing politics." These days, it appears that a professional politician is considered to be worthy only of disdain. Such adjectives as sleazy, shady, corrupt, dishonest, and backroom are commonly used to describe today's politics and politicians. However, before we dismiss politics and politicians with these negative thoughts and adjectives, we should remember that they influence nearly every facet of our lives.

For instance, college students frequently wonder about the relevance of politics to them and to their future career plans. What do doctors and nurses, business people and accountants, teachers and engineers have to do with politics? The answer is that one's freedom to choose one of these professions, the regulation of these professions, the educational requirements for these professions, and the environment in which these professions operate—not to mention the economic rewards to be derived from them—depend very much on politics. The degree to which we are free, healthy, educated, housed, employed, and fulfilled depends in no small part on how we are governed. And how we are governed depends on politics.

WHAT IS POLITICS?

There are probably as many or more definitions of politics as there are definers. Most definitions, however, do have elements and components in common. One of the most popular, and one memorized by probably every political science graduate student since the early 1950s, is the definition offered by political scientist David Easton: politics is "the authoritative allocation of values for a society."⁴ Now, what does such jargon mean? To give you a better idea, let's look at the key terms of this definition.