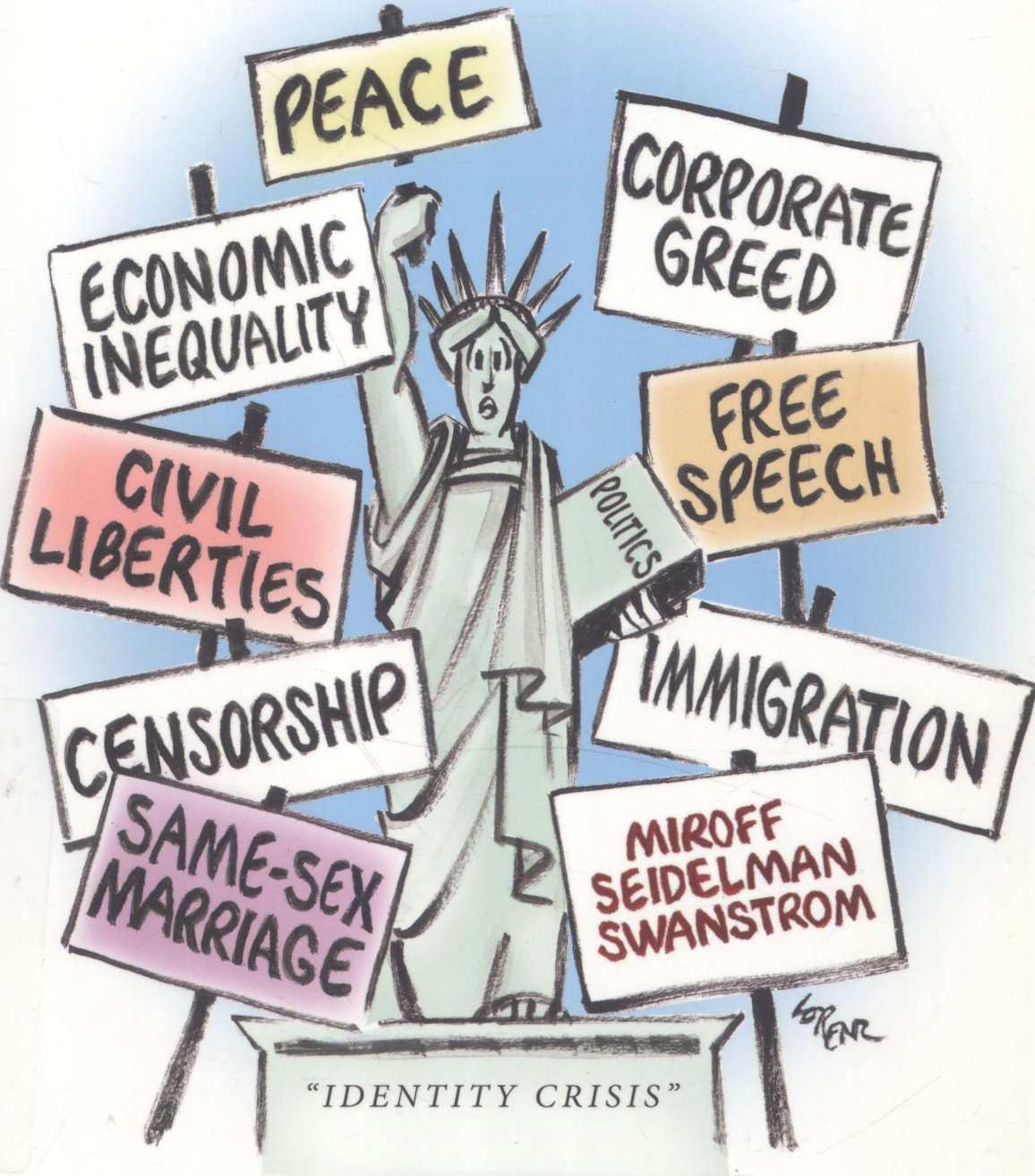


SEVENTH EDITION

# DEBATING DEMOCRACY

A READER IN AMERICAN POLITICS





# Debating Democracy

A Reader in American Politics

SEVENTH EDITION

**BRUCE MIROFF**

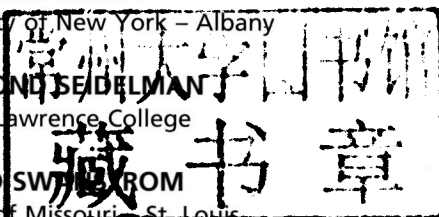
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in American Politics,  
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# Debating Democracy

A Reader in American Politics



## In Memory

*On October 30, 2007, Ray Seidelman, our coeditor and friend, died after a four-year battle with colon cancer. An incisive political thinker and inspiring teacher, Ray was also a model of the democratic intellectual who refuses to retreat into theory or succumb to cynicism.*

*A graduate of the University of California–Santa Cruz, Ray earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Cornell University. For twenty-five years he taught at Sarah Lawrence College, where he held the Sarah Yates Exley Chair in Teaching Excellence. Devoted to his students, in 2002 Ray won the college’s Lipkin Prize for Inspirational Teaching. His 1985 book, *Disenchanted Realists*, critically examines the efforts of professional political scientists to marry the scientific study of politics to political reform.*

*In the summer of 1988 we joined Ray on a camping trip in the Catskills that ended up in a rundown motel room. Accompanied by the steady patter of rain on the roof, that night we came up with the idea for an introductory textbook in American politics that would draw its inspiration from the homegrown traditions of participatory democracy. The *Democratic Debate* is now in its fifth edition. Conceived as a companion to our textbook, *Debating Democracy* has taken on a life of its own, and this is its seventh edition.*

*Ray loved political debate. Over the years the three of us argued long and loudly about what to include in the textbook and the reader. Ray always pushed us to go deeper in our analysis and to challenge students to think more critically. His sharp wit could penetrate the thickest skin and make you squirm. But he never came across as morally superior. You always had the feeling that Ray’s views were tentative, open to constant interrogation and change. Maybe that is why he was such a great teacher.*

*Listening to Ray criticize the distortions and elite manipulations of American democracy, you might have concluded that he was a cynic. You would have been wrong. Cynics don’t argue about global warming with strangers at a gas station. Cynics don’t accompany carloads of students to demonstrations against the war in Iraq. His views were not those of a cynic but of a lover of American democracy. Ray is greatly missed—not only by his family, friends, and students—but by supporters of democracy everywhere.*

Bruce Miroff

Todd Swanstrom

However unwillingly a person who has strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that, however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not as a living truth.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)



# Preface

**W**e have been very pleased by readers' and reviewers' enthusiastic reactions to the previous editions of *Debating Democracy*. They warmly endorsed our belief in the need for a reader for courses in American politics that makes democracy its unifying theme. Of course, Americans agree in the abstract about democracy, but in practice we often disagree about democracy's meaning and implications. To explore these crucial disagreements, the seventh edition is constructed around a series of debates about democracy in America.

## **Special Features of *Debating Democracy***

*Debating Democracy* is different from other readers in American politics. The selections in our reader are organized around a common theme—the meaning and improvement of American democracy. Thus, reading through the selections has a cumulative effect, helping students to think more clearly and deeply about democracy.

Our experience as the teachers of introductory courses in American politics suggests that debate-type readers can leave students confused, wondering how to respond to a bewildering array of different arguments. Many students conclude that political debates are just a matter of opinion, that there is no cumulative knowledge generated by debating the issues. To prevent such confusion, we provide an introduction, praised by reviewers, that gives students a framework for evaluating democratic debates. This framework is designed to help students develop their own political philosophies and critical abilities for analyzing political issues. In the end, we believe, engaging students in these democratic debates will help them to understand that democracy is a complex and contested idea and that although there is no One Truth, the search for democratic truths is well worth the effort.

In order to engage students in the search for democratic truths, we have included lively and clearly written selections from political leaders, journalists, and scholars. In each case we have chosen two contrasting views on a controversial topic. To help students in evaluating the selections, we introduce each debate with a short essay that places the issue in a meaningful context and alerts the reader to be on the lookout for contrasting values and hidden assumptions.

*Debating Democracy* seeks to generate further debate. After each set of selections we include questions that can be used by readers to analyze the issues or by teachers to spark class discussions. We end with suggested readings and websites that students can use to pursue the topic further.

Each chapter in the book can be used as the basis for a structured in-class debate. Our own introductory lecture courses have included discussion sections of ten to twenty students led by teaching assistants. The TA divides the class in two and assigns each group one side in the debate. The students are asked to meet outside of class and prepare their arguments based on the readings. A session of the discussion section is then devoted to a formal debate. We do several of these structured debates in the course of a semester. Students enjoy these debates and often report that this is the high point of the course for them.

Following the formal debates, each student is required to write a short paper setting out the arguments of her or his side and rebutting the arguments of the other side. We are convinced that this exercise helps students to achieve what is often an important goal in introductory American politics courses: improving writing skills. Requiring students to take a stand on a political issue and develop a coherent argument for their position in a thematic essay is an effective way, we believe, to teach writing.

### **Structure of *Debating Democracy***

*Debating Democracy* has been structured to fit with almost all introductory texts in American politics. We cover topics usually covered in an introductory text, but we have also included debates on political economy, immigration, and religion because we believe these are important subjects for understanding contemporary American democracy.

The editors of this book make no claim to being impartial observers of democratic debates. We support the extension of democratic decision making into broader spheres of the economy and society with greater emphasis on equality and community. Our participatory democratic inclinations are evident in our textbook, *The Democratic Debate: American Politics in an Age of Change*, Fifth Edition (Cengage Learning 2010).

Although we make no claim to impartiality, we have made every effort in the chapters that follow to select the strongest arguments on both sides of the issues. The reader can be used with any textbook in American government, no matter what the political inclinations of the professor. The reader can also stand by itself as an introduction to the critical issues facing American democracy at the beginning of the twenty-first century.



## New to the Seventh Edition

The seventh edition contains twelve new selections, comprising nearly 35 percent of the book. Several of the new chapters address profound issues currently facing American democracy, including the debates over corporate spending in elections, same-sex marriage, and negative campaigning.

There are four new chapters:

- Chapter 6 Civil Liberties and Elections: Is Corporate Spending on Elections the Equivalent of Free Speech?
- Chapter 7 Civil Rights: Debating Same-Sex Marriage
- Chapter 11 Campaigns and Elections: Do Negative Ads Damage Democracy?
- Chapter 12 The Federal Budget: Is the Deficit a Threat to the Nation?

In addition, we have one or two new selections in three chapters continued from the previous edition:

- Chapter 9 Digital Media: Do They Expand or Shrink Democracy?
- Chapter 13 Congress: Can Our Representatives Serve the Public Good?
- Chapter 17 Foreign Policy: Has the United States Become an Imperial Power?

Many of the essays in the book have been written by leading figures in political science, law, journalism, and politics. We are grateful to two leading scholars of the presidency, Fred Greenstein and Stephen Skowronek, for updating their essays in Chapter 14 specially for this edition in order to incorporate the presidency of Barack Obama.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all of those who helped us to carry forward our original hopes for *Debating Democracy*. At SUNY, Albany, skillful research assistance was supplied by Molly Flynn, Paul Goggi, Timothy Gordinier, Christopher Latimer, Liu Runyu, Jordan Wishy, Christopher Witko, and Fred Wood. At Saint Louis University, Allan Lamberg, Ann Robertson, and Scott Krummenacher provided invaluable help. Jennifer Edwards and Bruce Hanebrink at the University of Missouri, St. Louis skillfully helped with the seventh edition. We would like to thank the outside reviewers who have reviewed *Debating Democracy* in all its forms over the years. Their incisive suggestions led us to change some selections, add new subjects, and improve our pedagogical framework.

Scott Adler, University of Colorado at Boulder

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Finally, we continue to depend on the love, the support, and especially the patience of our families: Melinda, Nick, and Anna; Fay, Eva, and Rosa; Katie, Jessica, Madeleine, and Eleanore.

B. M.

R. S.

T. S.



# Contents

PREFACE   xiii

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO READ THIS BOOK   1

|                  |  |           |
|------------------|--|-----------|
| <b>Chapter 1</b> | <b>The Founding: Debating the Constitution</b>   | <b>14</b> |
|                  | <i>Federalist No. 10</i>   | 16        |
|                  | James Madison  |           |
|                  | <i>Anti-Federalist Paper, 18 October 1787</i>  | 22        |
|                  | Brutus   |           |
| <b>Chapter 2</b> | <b>Democracy: Overrated or Undervalued?</b>  | <b>29</b> |
|                  | <i>Democracy's Romantic Myths</i>  | 31        |
|                  | John Mueller   |           |
|                  | <i>The Active Citizen</i>  | 39        |
|                  | Paul Rogat Loeb  |           |
| <b>Chapter 3</b> | <b>The New Federalism: Does It Create<br/>Laboratories of Democracy or a Race<br/>to the Bottom?</b> | <b>48</b> |
|                  | <i>Beyond the Beltway</i>  | 51        |
|                  | William D. Eggers and John O'Leary   |           |
|                  | <i>The Devil in Devolution</i>   | 56        |
|                  | John D. Donahue  |           |

|                  |   |            |
|------------------|---|------------|
| <b>Chapter 4</b> | <b>Immigration: Does It Strengthen or Threaten American Democracy?</b>  | <b>63</b>  |
|                  | <i>Immigration Strengthens American Democracy</i>   | 65         |
|                  | Ben Wattenberg  |            |
|                  | <i>Patriotic Immigration</i>  | 71         |
|                  | Newt Gingrich   |            |
| <b>Chapter 5</b> | <b>Political Economy: How Democratic Is the Free Market Economy?</b>  | <b>80</b>  |
|                  | <i>Capitalism and Freedom</i>   | 82         |
|                  | Milton Friedman   |            |
|                  | <i>Corporate Capitalism Hurts American Democracy</i>  | 92         |
|                  | Samuel Bowles, Frank Roosevelt,<br>and Richard Edwards  |            |
| <b>Chapter 6</b> | <b>Civil Liberties: Is Corporate Spending on Elections the Equivalent of Free Speech?</b>                                 | <b>106</b> |
|                  | <i>Corporate Spending on Elections Is Free Speech and Should Not Be Regulated</i><br>(Excerpts from the Majority Opinion) | 108        |
|                  | Justice Anthony Kennedy   |            |
|                  | <i>Corporate Spending on Elections Is Not Free Speech and Can Be Regulated</i><br>(Excerpts from Minority Opinion)        | 113        |
|                  | Justice John Paul Stevens   |            |
| <b>Chapter 7</b> | <b>Civil Rights: Debating Same-Sex Marriage</b>   | <b>120</b> |
|                  | <i>Same-Sex Marriage as a Constitutional Right</i>  | 122        |
|                  | Evan Gerstmann  |            |
|                  | <i>Gay Marriage—and Marriage</i>  | 129        |
|                  | Sam Schulman  |            |
| <b>Chapter 8</b> | <b>Church–State Relations: Was the United States Founded as a Christian Nation?</b>                                       | <b>140</b> |
|                  | <i>The Centrality of Our Creator in Defining America</i>  | 142        |
|                  | Newt Gingrich   |            |
|                  | <i>Our Godless Constitution</i>   | 147        |
|                  | Brooke Allen  |            |

|                   |   |            |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| <b>Chapter 9</b>  | <b>Digital Media: Do They Expand or Shrink Democracy?</b>                   | <b>155</b> |
|                   | <i>The Daily We</i>   | 157        |
|                   | Cass R. Sunstein  |            |
|                   | <i>Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age</i>                              | 168        |
|                   | W. Lance Bennett  |            |
| <b>Chapter 10</b> | <b>Political Polarization: How Divided Are We?</b>                          | <b>181</b> |
|                   | <i>Bipolar Disorder</i>   | 183        |
|                   | Jonathan Rauch  |            |
|                   | <i>How Divided Are We?</i>  | 192        |
|                   | James Q. Wilson   |            |
| <b>Chapter 11</b> | <b>Campaigns and Elections: Do Negative Ads Damage Democracy?</b>           | <b>203</b> |
|                   | <i>Negative Ads Shrink and Polarize the Electorate</i>                      | 205        |
|                   | Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar                                     |            |
|                   | <i>The Need for Negativity</i>  | 212        |
|                   | John G. Geer  |            |
| <b>Chapter 12</b> | <b>The Federal Budget: Is the Deficit a Threat to the Nation?</b>           | <b>222</b> |
|                   | <i>The Federal Budget Deficit Is Not Necessarily a Threat to the Nation</i> | 225        |
|                   | Joseph Stiglitz   |            |
|                   | <i>The Federal Deficit Is a Threat to the Nation</i>                        | 230        |
|                   | Arthur B. Laffer and Stephen Moore  |            |
| <b>Chapter 13</b> | <b>Congress: Can Our Representatives Serve the Public Good?</b>             | <b>239</b> |
|                   | <i>Congress Is the Broken Branch</i>  | 241        |
|                   | Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein                                       |            |
|                   | <i>Is Congress "The Broken Branch"?</i>                                     | 249        |
|                   | David R. Mayhew   |            |
| <b>Chapter 14</b> | <b>The Presidency: How Much Difference Does the Individual Make?</b>        | <b>258</b> |
|                   | <i>Lessons from the Modern Presidency</i>                                   | 260        |
|                   | Fred I. Greenstein  |            |

|                   |  |            |
|-------------------|--|------------|
|                   | <i>The Changing Political Structures of Presidential Leadership</i>    | 268        |
|                   | Stephen Skowronek  |            |
| <b>Chapter 15</b> | <b>The Judiciary: How Should It Interpret Our Constitution?</b>        | <b>286</b> |
|                   | <i>Textualism and the Constitution</i>                                 | 288        |
|                   | Antonin Scalia   |            |
|                   | <i>Active Liberty and the Constitution</i>                             | 295        |
|                   | Stephen Breyer   |            |
| <b>Chapter 16</b> | <b>Economic Inequality: A Threat to Democracy?</b>                     | <b>304</b> |
|                   | <i>Myths of Rich and Poor</i>  | 307        |
|                   | W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm   |            |
|                   | <i>For Richer</i>  | 312        |
|                   | Paul Krugman   |            |
| <b>Chapter 17</b> | <b>Foreign Policy: Has the United States Become an Imperial Power?</b> | <b>323</b> |
|                   | <i>The Limits of American Power</i>                                    | 325        |
|                   | Andrew J. Bacevich   |            |
|                   | <i>The Case for Goliath</i>  | 334        |
|                   | Michael Mandelbaum   |            |
|                   | <b>CREDITS</b>   | <b>343</b> |

# Introduction

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## How to Read This Book

**W**hen we think of democratic debates, we often think of the presidential debates that take place every four years. Beginning with the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debate, these nationally televised events have been a crucial part of presidential campaigns. Presidential debates, however, are very different from the debates about the key issues facing American democracy that we have gathered together in this volume. A good way to understand this difference is to examine one of the most widely publicized exchanges between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in their closely contested battle for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008.

The debate in question took place in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, five days before the crucial South Carolina primary. Nasty exchanges between the candidates at this debate caused it to be quickly dubbed the “brawl on the beach.” Early in the debate the moderator, CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, asked Obama about one of Clinton’s criticisms of his programs. “What she said wasn’t true,” Obama said, going on to knock down other Clinton statements he thought were untrue. On whether he had said that Republicans had better economic policies in the 1980s, Obama said, “This simply is not true.”

“This is not the case,” Clinton retorted. “When it comes to a lot of the issues that are important in this race, it is sometimes difficult to understand what Senator Obama has said, because as soon as he is confronted on it, he says that’s not what he meant.”

When he got the microphone back, Obama counterattacked: “Hillary, we just had the tape. You just said that I complimented Republican ideas.... What I said was that Ronald Reagan was a transformative political figure because he was able to get Democrats to vote against their economic interests to form a majority to push through their agenda, an agenda that I objected to. Because while I was on those streets watching those folks see their jobs shift overseas, you were a corporate lawyer sitting on the board at Wal-Mart.”

A little later Clinton came back to the issue, saying that it certainly sounded as though Obama was praising Republican ideas. “Bad for America,” Clinton declared. “And I was fighting against those ideas when you were practicing law



and representing your contributor, Rezko, in his slum landlord business in inner-city Chicago.”

All Obama could say was, “No, no, no.”

In presidential debates the candidates often ignore the issues and attack their opponents. The average voter is primarily interested not in who is the better debater but in who has the best character, temperament, and leadership qualities to be president. In an issues debate, like the ones in this book, attacking one’s opponent is considered a logical fallacy (called the *ad hominem* fallacy, literally, addressing the man instead of the issue). Because the issue in presidential debates is choosing a president, attacking your opponent’s judgment or character is relevant. Clinton was trying to convince the voters that Obama was corrupt and not to be trusted, while Obama was trying to persuade them that Clinton was out of touch with ordinary Americans.

Instead of trying to persuade voters to change their positions on the issues, presidential candidates generally try to convince the voters that they are closest to the positions most voters already hold. Thoroughly briefed by pollsters about what the voters want to hear, each candidate, without appearing unprincipled, tries to mold his or her views to please the undecided voters.

Above all, skilled politicians try to use language to frame the issues in ways that favor their side. If you succeed in having your framing of the issue accepted, your opponent is at a distinct disadvantage. If Clinton can succeed in having the debate revolve around whether Obama praised Republican ideas, then no matter how hard Obama protests, Democratic primary voters will be reminded of this unflattering connection. No wonder Obama tried to shift the debate by charging that Clinton was cozy with Wal-Mart. Professor George Lakoff begins his class in linguistics by telling his students, “Don’t think of an elephant!” He has never found a student able to do this—illustrating his point that when we criticize a frame, we end up reinforcing it.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that politicians often end up speaking past each other, ignoring what their opponents have said and repeating again and again their own framing of the issue.

The preceding analysis of presidential debates could easily lead one to the cynical conclusion that political debates are nothing but rhetoric and manipulation. In the real world, however, debates range from manipulative to principled and everything in between. In the real world no debate is perfectly free and fair, if only because one side has more resources to make itself heard. The debates we have gathered together in *Debating Democracy* approximate the conditions of a free and fair debate. Each chapter addresses a central issue in American democracy. The debaters are experts and focus exclusively on the issue; the personality or background of the debaters is irrelevant. Each gets equal time. For the most part, they avoid begging (ignoring) the question, mudslinging, or manipulating stereotypes. They still try to frame the issue their way, but these frames are usually easier to see and analyze than is the case with the vague rhetoric of a political campaign. The contest is decided not by who has the most money or who projects the best image; you, the readers, decide who has the best argument using logical reasoning and facts.