

SHORTER SEVENTH EDITION

We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS





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We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Benjamin Ginsberg

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Theodore J. Lowi

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Margaret Weir

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY



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TO
SANDY, CINDY, AND ALEX GINSBERG
ANGELE, ANNA, AND JASON LOWI
NICHOLAS ZIEGLER



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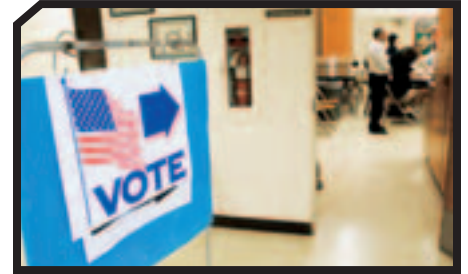
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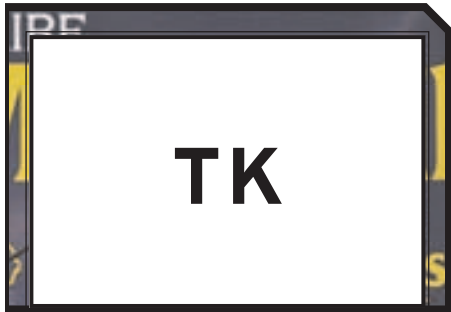
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PREFACE

This book has been and continues to be dedicated to developing a satisfactory response to the question more and more Americans are asking: Why should we be engaged with government and politics? Through the first six editions, we sought to answer this question by making the text directly relevant to the lives of the students who would be reading it. As a result, we tried to make politics interesting by demonstrating that students' interests are at stake and that they therefore need to take a personal, even selfish, interest in the outcomes of government. At the same time, we realized that students needed guidance in how to become politically engaged. Beyond providing students with a core of political knowledge, we needed to show them how they could apply that knowledge as participants in the political process. The "Get Involved" sections in each chapter help achieve that goal.

As events from the last several years have reminded us, "what government does" can be a matter of life and death. Recent events have reinforced the centrality of government in citizens' lives. The U.S. government has fought a war abroad, while claiming sweeping new powers at home that could compromise the liberties of its citizens. America's role in the world is discussed daily both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, students and younger Americans have become more aware of and involved in politics, as the 2008 elections illustrated. Reflecting all of these trends, this new Seventh Edition shows more than any other book on the market (1) how students are connected to government; (2) how American government is connected to the world; and (3) why students should think critically about government and politics. These themes are incorporated in the following ways:

- › **New "Get Involved" units show students how they can make a difference in politics.** The 2008 elections produced a surge in political participation among young Americans, as well as changes in the ways that they participated. These full-page boxes use contemporary examples to explain how young people (even those with busy lives!) can get involved in politics. Specific, step-by-step instructions guide students through a range of possible political activities related to each chapter's topic. These new boxes replace the "Get Involved" sections that appeared as part of the chapter text in the Sixth Edition and have been rewritten to take account of the Internet's growing prominence as an avenue for political participation.
- › **"Politics and Popular Culture" boxes connect politics to topics students are interested in.** In each chapter "Politics and Popular Culture" boxes ask students to look critically at how politics intersects with television, film, music, cartoons, and the Internet. Drawing on a range of social science research, these boxes engage students in questions such as "Do non-news TV shows that include political content, like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, have an effect on political knowledge?" "Is there a culture war?" and "Why do candidates sometimes prefer to be interviewed on talk shows rather than traditional news programs?"

› **Chapter introductions focus on “What Government Does and Why It Matters.”** In recent decades, cynicism about “big government” has dominated the political zeitgeist. But critics of government often forget that governments do a great deal for citizens. Every year, Americans are the beneficiaries of billions of dollars of goods and services from government programs. Government “does” a lot, and what it does matters a great deal to everyone, including college students. At the start of each chapter, this theme is introduced and applied to the chapter’s topic. The goal is to show students that government and politics mean something to their daily lives.

› **“America in the World” boxes show students how American government is connected to the world.** These one-page boxes in every chapter illustrate the important political role the United States plays abroad. Topics include “Should America Export Democracy?” “The American Constitution: A Model for the World?” “Participation and Democracy in Iraq,” and “What Is Congress’s Role in Foreign Policy?” These boxes exemplify the critical-analytical approach that characterizes the text and include “For Critical Analysis” questions.

› **“For Critical Analysis” questions are incorporated throughout the text.** “For Critical Analysis” questions in the margins of every chapter prompt students’ own critical thinking about the material in the chapter, encouraging them to engage with the topic. The two “For Critical Analysis” questions that conclude each “America in the World” box get students to think more deeply about America’s role in the world. The questions at the end of each “Politics and Popular Culture” box ask students to think critically about the intersection of politics and mass media. And the questions that follow the discussions of contending perspectives in each “Policy Debate” box invite students to reconsider their own perspective on the issue.

› **NEW “Politics Today” questions highlight discussions of current issues and recent events.** We believe that students value what they learn in the course more if they see how the course material relates to the issues and events in today’s headlines. This Seventh Edition has been extensively updated with new sections on major events like the 2008 elections and the government’s response to the recent housing and financial crisis, as well as contemporary examples throughout. New “Politics Today” questions in the margins of each chapter draw students’ attention to discussions of recent events and ask questions to get them thinking critically about contemporary issues and events.

We continue to hope that our book will itself be accepted as a form of enlightened political action. This Seventh Edition is another chance. It is an advancement toward our goal. We promise to keep trying.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our students at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Berkeley have been an essential factor in the writing and revising 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 endnotes 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:

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Chis Soper, Pepperdine University
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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

November 2008

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