

# The Academy of Political Science

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external terms, is hard to establish, and the authors do not seek to provide systematic measures for how well a given rhetorical effort worked or failed. If the point of a given address is to “reconstitute” the public (p. 43), for instance, it is not clear how we know if said public actually feels reconstituted.

This volume, then, will not satisfy those seeking empirical verification of rhetorical impact. But that is not its aim. Taken on its own terms, it remains an enlightening and newly strengthened contribution to our understanding of the role of substantive eloquence in governance.

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**Attack Politics: Negativity in Presidential Campaigns Since 1960** by Emmett H. Buell, Jr. and Lee Sigelman. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2008. 354 pp. \$34.95.

The subject of campaign negativity has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Political observers have bemoaned the rise of attack ads and the hostile tone of civil discourse. Many claim that our country’s campaigns are getting dirtier, and that this undermines the quality of American democracy. Yet few of these criticisms have been based on systematic evidence. Opinions and anecdotes often outweigh clear data or compelling reasoning.

In this book, Emmett Buell and Lee Sigelman present a forceful counterbalance to conventional wisdom on this subject. Using original analysis, they argue that campaign negativity has not increased, and in looking at races from 1960 through 2004, the most-negative campaigns occurred in 1960, 1972, and 1992.

According to their analysis, the single most-negative campaigners were not the oft-criticized Lyndon Johnson of 1964, George Herbert Walker Bush in 1988, or George W. Bush in 2004, but rather Walter Mondale in 1984, George McGovern in 1972, Ross Perot in 1996, and John Kennedy in 1960. The least-negative candidates, in contrast, were Richard Nixon in 1972, Bill Clinton in 1996, and Al Gore in 2000 (p. 248).

To reach these conclusions, the authors assess over 17,000 campaign statements taken from 11,000 *New York Times* news stories. They classify statements based on tone, object of discussion, subject area, attacker, and time of the attack. Using this material, they find that campaign negativity depends in large part on the competitiveness of the race and the political circumstances surrounding particular campaigns.

The authors deserve credit for being clear and systematic in their approach to negativity. More so than most researchers, they are very explicit in describing their database, coding rules, and approach to the assessment. Where their methods and conclusions differ from those of other researchers, they say so. There is no doubt that they have compiled one of the most comprehensive databases of campaign statements in modern elections.

Yet, as the authors themselves point out, several of their key findings differ from those of other studies in perplexing ways. One source of difference is that most other researchers looking at negativity focus on television ads. Political advertisements constitute the largest single expenditure in most presidential campaigns, so researchers have emphasized them because of their centrality to political communications. It may be that some candidates (plus their surrogates) were negative in campaign statements but not so negative in their advertisements, or vice versa. Or it may be that news stories highlighted statements that were more negative than what campaigners themselves intended and therefore created the impression of undue negativity by certain individuals.

Where they are in agreement with findings of other researchers is the idea that negativity has gotten a bad rap. Rather than being non-substantive and antithetical to democracy, they agree that attacks are often policy oriented, help voters distinguish between candidates, and contribute to overall accountability.

Most worrisome from the standpoint of democratic thinking, though, is not how negative campaign statements are, but how fair and accurate they are. In recent elections, there has been growing concern over political statements being taken out of context, exaggerated, or employed in grossly inaccurate or unfair ways. For voters to hold candidates accountable, they need statements that bear some reasonable resemblance to the truth.

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**Citizens and Paupers: Relief, Rights, and Race, from the Freedmen's Bureau to Workfare** by Chad Alan Goldberg. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2008. 336 pp. Cloth, \$55.00; paper, \$22.00.

Building on T.H. Marshall's insights on citizenship and Pierre Bourdieu's thinking about the symbolic classification of peoples, Chad Goldberg has crafted an ambitious and thought-provoking account of six important episodes in the development of the American welfare state, spanning from the Freedmen's Bureau to the Earned Income Tax Credit. Attempting to bridge the gap between cultural explanations and institutional accounts, Goldberg acknowledges both. However, more than simply striving for a middle way between these two well-trafficked approaches, this richly theoretical narrative assigns central importance to contested notions of citizenship. Goldberg concludes that while most of his cases witnessed protracted disagreements over the status of aid recipients—being either full or only partial citizens—successful programs have been those that have invoked images of rights-bearing workers as beneficiaries, standing in contrast to relief programs for paupers.

*Citizens and Paupers*, essentially drawing a dichotomy between the so-called deserving and undeserving, treads some familiar historical ground but