The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274

(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · http://www.psqonline.org

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 118 · Number 4 · Winter 2003-2004

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly

Copyright © 2003 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the United States as an identity group. It seems more plausible to view this as an interest group that appeals to people with a particular racial identity (Black or African American). While the NAACP draws its members principally from a particular identity group, it seems closer to a classic interest group, in the sense that its principal purpose is to advance the interests of that segment of the population. Moreover, it may have to contest for support from other interest groups which are comprised of the same identity group but which might have a different strategy for advancing African American interests. The identity of Blacks or African Americans is relatively stable, but the interest groups which claim to support people sharing that identity are subject to the vagaries of political fortune. I would also argue that Gutmann's description of political parties as "identity groups" (pp. 4–5) is also problematic. Further, the category of identity group in some parts of her book seemed over-inclusive. Certainly, the distinction between interests and identities is much clearer when she is dealing with partially ascriptive identities or religious identities.

There is much to admire in this book. It is clearly written, deploys interesting and topical examples, and is accessible without losing important nuance and careful insight. In the end, Gutmann is tough on identity groups while recognizing their importance, and their inevitability, in democratic politics.

MARGARET MOORE
Queen's University

You Call This an Election? America's Peculiar Democracy *by Steven E. Schier. Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 2003, 176 pp. $24.95.*

In an especially compelling metaphor, Steven Schier compares an electoral system to a calendar: as the calendar structures our lives, the electoral system structures our political process. His evaluation of electoral systems is based on four cogent goals: stability—political, governmental, and regime; accountability; high voter turnout; and deliberation of public policy. He offers an analysis that is at once rich and lucid, arising from a distillation of the research results and the conclusions of an amazing number of experts in the field. He discusses the characteristics and consequences of electoral systems beginning with the theories of John Locke and James Madison and extending to the practices of the world's other constitutional democracies.

It soon becomes clear that the goals of electoral systems, including his own four, are not necessarily compatible in practice. As a result, readers are forced to rank order their own goals and to confront their own personal tradeoffs. Which is more important: stability or accountability? What kind of accountability—party or individual official—is most desirable? Is a swift and decisive election more or less important than achieving the most humanly accurate

vote count? Is direct democracy superior to representative democracy? Is a plurality system less legitimate than a majority one? Is a locally-based constituency more functional than an ideologically-based one? Is the more representative multi-party system preferable to a stable two-party system?

Like the rest of us, Schier makes choices. Of the evaluative four criteria, only voter turnout merits its own chapter. At times it appears to be his paramount concern, shaping more of his recommended reforms than the other three and explaining his endorsement of the instant runoff system in a single member district with a majority requirement. Under this system, used in Australia, voters must rank their preferences, and if no candidate receives a majority in the first round, the second choice ballots of the lowest candidates are counted. Such counting continues until one candidate achieves a majority. Although this system appears to increase turnout, it is a curious choice because it might very well create a multi-party system which would undermine both stability and accountability. At the very least, it would give influence and appointive offices to extremist candidates. The average citizen's response to this voting mechanism usually is that it gives some voters two votes. Further, it is very complex, though endorsed by a theorist who wants "to make America's electoral system simple and user friendly" (p. 143).

Schier's analysis of the Populist-Progressive reforms and their consequences for the political process is quite devastating. He points out that these reforms undermined party-based elections and made ballots too complicated for most voters. Favoring legislative democracy over direct democracy, he finds the referendum, the recall, and most particularly, the initiative promising, but they do not provide accountability. Instead, they are disruptive of the deliberative Madisonian system because they ask too much of voters and empower the special interests. As for campaign finance, he concludes it is an antiparty reform that helps interest groups and incumbents and harms parties and challengers. Other topics examined are the electoral college, redistricting, and racial gerrymandering.

This book is a keeper, not only as a stimulus to sorting and ranking personal political values, but also as a useful reference work—it is chock full of information. The bibliography is extensive, the text provides easy source and page references, the organization is excellent, and the argument flows smoothly. His students must love his classes.

JUDITH A. BEST
State University of New York
College at Cortland

Democracy by Decree: What Happens When Courts Run Government
by Ross Sandler and David Schoenbrod. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003. 256 pp. $30.00.

Rights to such benefits as health care, schooling, humane prison conditions, and environmental quality are easy to assert and difficult to provide. They re-