Review Editor's Introduction

By Jeffrey C. Isaac

This is an interesting time to be a political scientist. The sixth anniversary of 9/11 is fast approaching. The United States continues to deal with the mammoth challenges of "nation building" in post-Taliban Afghanistan, and remains mired in what by virtually all accounts is a quagmire-like civil war in Iraq. As every issue of this journal attests, we in this rich and diverse discipline possess an array of intellectual resources for understanding current events. And if there is anything that unites us as social scientists, it is the bedrock belief that it is possible to offer deeper and more complex understandings of events than those furnished by sound bites and slogans.

One notion that has served a crucial function in American politics in the past six years—with enormous effects on the rest of the world—is "democracy promotion," which has become a hallmark of the so-called Bush Doctrine. One of the common themes joining together many of the books reviewed here is the idea that however laudable "democratization" may be as an ethical or political goal, it is of limited use in understanding the complex conflicts and challenges presented by the current political world.

Three books reviewed in our International Relations section underscore the great obstacles confronting democracy promotion as a tool of foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on parts of the world of growing geopolitical importance. *Fostering Fundamentalism: Terrorism, Democracy and American Engagement in Central Asia*, by Matthew Crosston, *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy*, edited by Brenda Shaffer, and *Predators and Parasites: Persistent Agents of Transnational Harm and Great Power Authority*, by Oded Löwenheim, make clear, each in a different way, that much of the world is resistant to simple formulae of democratization, and that the dynamics of resentment, power, and conflict render many areas profoundly recalcitrant to moralistic foreign policies.

A similar theme runs throughout the Comparative section—that so-called nation building is a complex, contingent, and often violent process eluding simple characterizations. In *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*, Thomas Carothers underscores both the importance of party development and the fragility of efforts to aid such development in the name of democracy promotion. A number of books—*After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, edited by Lowell W. Barrington, *The Pedagogical State: Education and the Politics of National Culture in Post-1980 Turkey*, by Sam Kaplan, and *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*, by Gyanendra Pandey—make clear how tortuous is the process of "nation building," and how rooted is this process in endogenous conditions. Reviews of Diane Haughney's *Neoliberal Economics, Democratic Transition, and Mapuche Demands for Rights in Chile* and Kelly M. McMann's *Economic Autonomy and Democracy: Hybrid Regimes in Russia and Kyrgyzstan* make equally clear the economic constraints facing projects of nation building and democratization.

Lest the challenges confronting democratization be seen only as problems of "political modernization," a number of books reviewed in both the Comparative and the American sections underscore that in the "advanced democratic world" itself, the status and forms of democracy remain topics of serious political contention. Pippa Norris's *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* and Terri E. Givens's *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe* make clear that liberal democratic values are challenged in the very heart of European democracy. Naomi Murakawa's extended review of books by Marie Gottshcalk, Bruce Western, and Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen highlights the "dark side" of American democracy, associated with a "politics of mass incarceration" with strong racial and class dimensions. David E. Campbell's review of the historian Sarah E. Igo's *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* highlights the hollowing out of democracy in recent American history. And the reviews of a number of other important books in "American Political Development"—Suzanne Mettler's *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, Edwin Amenta's *When Movements Matter: The Townsend Plan and the Rise of Social Security*, and Frances Fox Piven's *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America*—underscore the extent to which democratization is an "unfinished project" energized by social movements pursuing conceptions of social justice by deploying repertoires of contentious politics (a theme also developed in the Political Theory section review of

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Kevin Olson's *Reflexive Democracy: Political Equality and the Welfare State*).

The theorization of "contentious politics" has long been associated with the individual and collaborative works of Sidney Tarrow, and so it is fitting that this issue's featured review essay is his "Inside Insurgencies: Politics and Violence in an Age of Civil War." The topic of this essay—the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the civil wars that currently pervade the political landscape and put the lie to Panglossian visions of "modernization"—ties nicely with the themes just noted. Tarrow reviews an extraordinary group of new books—by Stathis Kalyvas, Jeremy Weinstein, Elizabeth Jean Wood, and Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis—that take the study of civil war to a new level of mixed-methodological sophistication and historical insight. And he argues that the analysis of civil war, which has become an understandably flourishing genre of social science, is best understood as part of the broader theorization of contentious politics in a range of settings, from civil wars to the kinds of social movements analyzed by Piven, Mettler, and Amenta (and Norris and Givens as well: for the Right too has its "new social movements"). In developing this theme, Tarrow contributes precisely to one of the principal goals of *Perspectives on Politics*—to feature synthetic essays that extend research by drawing important connections between literatures and approaches, and by reframing issues in broad and dialogic ways.

Three books reviewed in the Political Theory section—Joshua Foa Dienstag's *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit*, Ruth Grant's edited *Naming Evil, Judging Evil*, and Roxanne Euben's *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge*—also accomplish this goal, not by offering "empirical analyses" of political events and processes but by developing what one of my assistants has called, with the intention to praise, "metaphysical musings" about some concepts not simply central to normative theorizing but strikingly posed by the kinds of political phenomena—xenophobia, persecution, ethnic warfare, and so on—discussed in the many works of empirical social science referenced here. While these books do not speak directly to "empirical" literatures, they all draw productively on historical and empirical examples and speak to questions that are arguably of relevance to all of political science: How has our knowledge of the "non-Western world" been a political construct animated by fears and fantasies of salvation? How has Western thinking about "modernization" betrayed an optimism that has been continually dashed by unforeseen developments? To what extent is "evil," the most metaphysical of categories, an important concept of political analysis as well as political judgment?

A brief note: Careful readers will observe that Frances Fox Piven's *Challenging Authority* is reviewed in separate double-reviews in the American Politics and Comparative Politics sections. While it is our policy to never review a single book twice, in this case the same book entered so well into two different dialogues that we relaxed our "rule," which seemed especially appropriate since the overlap so nicely underscores the limits of conventional subfield boundaries.

Finally, I note with apologies that we inadvertently ran an abbreviated version of Roxanne Euben's fine essay on suicide terror in our March 2007 issue's symposium, and I note with pleasure that the more complete version can be accessed at http://www.indiana.edu/~iupolsci/docs/Eubenfinalessay.doc.

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