Introduction and Comments

Jennifer L. Hochschild

What unites most articles in this issue of *Perspectives* is the search for power. The authors seek power for different reasons—to enable political leaders to be more effective, to eliminate its insidious effects on citizens and the polity, to end group-based strife, or to produce better social science theories. That the search for power would unify otherwise disparate articles is hardly surprising; if our discipline has any center toward which its many peripheries gravitate, it is the study of power in all of its many manifestations.

Terry Moe, in "Power and Political Institutions," focuses directly on this theme. Rational choice theories have generated very important insights about political actors, the nature of political institutions, and the impact of action within a political system. Nevertheless, these theories have a crucial flaw: because they derive from economic models, their central dynamic is the search for equilibrium (or multiple equilibria). Thus rational choice theorizing is ill suited to study power—which is manifested not in equilibria but rather in hierarchy, central control, or the legitimated use of force by a state. While providing insights along the way about the difference between politics and markets and the value of the new institutionalism, Moe focuses on showing how we might begin to transform formal analysis in order to place power at its center. His argument stands a good chance of redirecting a wide swath of research within political science in order to make it truly *political.*

In "Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability," Kanchan Chandra also takes us on a search for power, but in this case the arena is the drawing of state boundaries within a nation, and the question is whether democratic polities can be structured to evade ethnic conflict. Chandra answers yes—if subnational boundaries are properly drawn, political parties will be motivated to seek power by appealing to voters across ethnic lines rather than by appealing to only one group and thus reinforcing in-group identities and out-group hatreds. Chandra is not the first to extol the organization of politics around cross-cutting cleavages. Robert Dahl did so some decades ago; and before him, James Madison. But Chandra uses this core insight to show just how and why a smart constitutional design and strategic map drawing can shape for the better the channels within which electoral power flows. She then applies her argument to the recent history of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, and shows how it can help other nations struggling with domestic ethnic conflict.

Sanford Schram seeks power in a different way—by digging beneath the surface to reveal how it is exercised, even in a purportedly neutral public policy, in a way that creates or maintains racial hierarchies. In "Contextualizing Racial Disparities in American Welfare Reform," Schram examines the purposes, practices, and effects of the United States' 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Statistical evidence about what kinds of people have left the welfare rolls, who attained jobs, and how many were able to escape poverty or have fallen back into it lends itself to many interpretations. To some, the evidence demonstrates that racism no longer infects the American political or class systems; to others, the same data demonstrate the persistence and intractability of racial hierarchy. Schram shows how contextual understandings are essential for interpreting statistical results, and how racially invidious power infuses policy outcomes even when the designers of the policy seek to abjure it.

In "Citizenship, Same-Sex Marriage, and Feminist Critiques of Marriage," Jyl Josephson shows how difficult it is for even passionate political reformers to avoid substituting a new form of oppressive power for the old forms that they are abolishing. Many supporters of gay rights in the United States argue that gay and lesbian couples should have the same right to marry, and thereby to acquire the symbolic and substantive benefits of marriage, as heterosexual couples. That claim is itself highly controversial—many see opposition to gay marriage as a contributing factor in the reelection of President George W. Bush in 2004. But some gay and feminist activists see commitment to gay marriage as itself oppressive, in the sense that it reinforces traditional values of lifelong monogamy in an institution controlled and valorized by the state. In their view, even gay marriage is just another form of exclusion, since it leaves the unmarried outside the category of first-class, legitimate citizenship. Josephson calls for a broader discussion of the meaning of citizenship in order to ensure that one form of oppressive power—the celebration of marriage—does not merely substitute for another form of oppressive power, the celebration of heterosexuality.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592705050164 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kevin Smith parses the claim that public schools (a.k.a. government schools) take too much power from parents by denying people the right and resources to choose how their own children will be educated. He has two purposes in "Data Don't Matter? Academic Research and School Choice." The first is to review the claims made by proponents and opponents of school vouchers. He concludes that school choice does not typically enhance academic achievement, that it does frequently increase parents' support for their child's school, and that the effects on class and racial segregation depend on the details of a given choice proposal and its implementation. Smith's second purpose is to establish criteria for when and how scholars' evidence on the effects of school choice should be used to influence politicians' decision making about it. Using these criteria, he concludes that more choice-based experiments are warranted, but only if we attend to concerns that substituting parental power for state power may not improve children's schooling and may undermine democratic citizenship.

In this issue's "Perspectives" essay, J. Phillip Thompson shows the harmful effects of *insufficient* power in a complex political system. The understanding of power in "Seeking Effective Power: Why Mayors Need Community Organizations" is somewhat different from that of the other articles. For Thompson, power can be understood not as the invidious control by some people or policies over others, but rather as the shared capacity to take action in order to overcome deep structural problems. Mayor David Dinkins of New York City was unable to achieve his vision of creating a "gorgeous mosaic" out of the racial and ethnic divisions in his city, or even to communicate that vision to the city's residents, because there were no institutions capable of putting it into practice. New York, and by extension other cities, desperately needs community organizations that cut across racial and other divides, that develop mutual trust and forms of joint engagement, and that have the organizational capacity to dampen crises and promote equality and justice. Dinkins's problem was too little power of the right kind in the political system; had vibrant community organizations existed, he might have been able to make New York a more truly democratic polity.

The next section of this issue of *Perspectives* is a set of reflections by the former presidents, and current and future presidents, of the APSA. I invited the participants to write brief essays on one or two important things that political scientists know, or do not know, that the rest of the world might want to hear. Their answers are in "APSA Presidents Reflect on Political Science: Who Knows What, When, and How?" The essays are as wide-ranging and incisive as the authors themselves. There is a more detailed introduction at the beginning of the symposium; here let me simply urge you to read and reflect on the contributions, and to let the editors of *Perspectives* as well as the authors of the essays hear your reactions.

Next comes a syllabi review essay, "The Growth of American Political Development," by Rogan Kersh. As in other essays of this genre, Kersh uses a large sample of the extant syllabi on his topic to analyze not only how it is and should be taught, but also how scholars conceptualize and conduct research on the topic. The syllabi are, in that sense, raw materials for a broader set of ruminations. Kersh gives us a brief history of the upstart field of APD, distinguishes it from history and other forms of scholarship about American politics, and points to ways in which it can mature out of its current adolescence. He praises the field's bumptiousness, diversity, and energy, but argues that, like any adolescent, it would benefit from being a little more systematic, a little more disciplined, and a little more broad-minded. This essay is already being used by graduate students studying for general exams, and we anticipate an equally avid use by a wider audience.

As always, almost 100 pages of book reviews grace the issue. After many of these introductions, I am running out of ways to praise the reviews and the hard-working editor and scholars who produce them—not to speak of the authors who write the books being reviewed. So I will simply urge readers to give them the care and attention that they deserve.

The next issue of *Perspectives* will include a reconsideration of James Madison by one of our greatest luminaries, a study of the effects of war on politics and another of the political dynamics leading to one particular war, an analysis of the ways in which European governments affect economic inequality in their respective states, and more. We editors are, as always, excited by what is to come almost as much as by what is currently here. We hope that you are too.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592705050164 Published online by Cambridge University Press