Review Editor's Introduction

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In an Introduction written this summer, I noted that the 2008 U.S. Presidential election process symbolized some fundamental questions about the relationship between race, gender, and class in American politics. The recent election of Barack Obama clearly represents a watershed. Commentators have noted that the incoming Obama administration offers the possibility of a new and more cooperative way of negotiating and regulating differences in our domestic politics and in world politics. Whether this comes to pass is of course an open question. As political scientists our job is to keep such questions open, to proffer our own hypothetical and revisable answers to them, to foster an academic and perhaps even a public culture where these questions can be seriously, freely, and constructively debated, and to place such contemporary questions in a broader historical and theoretical context. The books under review in this issue of *Perspectives* contribute substantially to these tasks.

A number of them deal with what has come to be called multiculturalism and the politics of difference. Our political theory section features a fascinating review of Burke A. Hendrix's new book on indigenous rights claims, and three excellent double reviews—by Penny A. Weiss, Georgia Warnke, and Leigh Jenco—dealing, respectively, with the construction of gender and sexuality; the relationship between gender and other identity claims in liberal democratic societies; and the distinctive ways these issues are understood and politicized in an Asian context. Our international relations section features a number of books dealing with a different "politics of difference"—the power politics of nation states on the world stage. Three in particular address balance of power issues with clear relevance to the future of global order in the twenty-first century: Jakub J. Grygiel's *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change,* Benjamin Miller's *States, Nations, and the Great Powers: The Source of Regional War and Peace,* and Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth's *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy.* Our comparative politics section features two double reviews of important new books on terrorism, a phenomenon that poses fundamental questions regarding domestic politics, transnational identity formation and political networking, and international relations. It is worth noting the obvious—that it is really not clear that the conventional subfield markers "comparative politics" and "international relations" are adequate for such a phenomenon. The limits of these markers are also made clear by Robert Frith's excellent review of three books on the European Union: Willem Maas's *Creating European Citizens,* Vivien A. Schmidt's *Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Politics,* and Jan Zielonka's *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union.* If "terrorism" symbolizes the ways that new forms of violence challenge the boundaries separating "domestic" and "foreign," the EU—as a European polity experimenting with questions of identity, scope and institutional form—symbolizes the way new forms of "international organization" challenge these boundaries.

This returns us to the broad theme of conflict and cooperation. The current issue of *Perspectives* features three "Critical Exchanges." This format is designed to bring into dialogue authors of different kinds of books who deal with similar kinds of topics. It is intended to create new kinds of disciplinary conversation, by encouraging authors—functioning as both reviewers and respondents—to stretch beyond their comfort zones. This is a challenging process, and it rarely produces perfect results, if perfection is taken to mean either a fully transparent understanding of the sources of intellectual disagreement or, even more ambitiously, a new agreement. But, of course, such a standard of perfection is absurd in science, which proceeds, as Karl Popper taught us, through endless conjecture and refutation. There is surely a "discourse ethic" embedded in this process of argument and counter-argument. But it is not one that envisions the termination of disagreement. In science, as in life more generally, there are no such final solutions. Each of our Critical Exchanges usefully models this process of scientific discourse. Each also deals, theoretically, with the complicated processes whereby political differences are translated into imperfect, fragile, and provisional commonalities. The exchange between Kerry Whiteside and Scott Barrett deals with how this plays out in terms of global public "bads" and the ways in which commensurate public goods can be provided. The exchange

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between Marc Howard Ross and John T. Sidel centers on alternative understandings of the dynamics of ethnic conflict and the possibility than new understandings or incentive structures might mitigate such conflict. And the exchange between Ioannis D. Evregenis and Ivan Ermakoff offers competing approaches to understanding the role of mistrust and enmity in politics, and the ways in which these phenomena render political order highly precarious (a theme also addressed in Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley's *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder*). There are striking similarities between these exchanges, in terms of the affinities of the topics under discussion, and in terms of the way each offers an interesting debate about the respective merits of "interpretive" as opposed to "rational choice" approaches to political inquiry.

This is a methodological question. But it is linked to substantive questions about the ways of understanding social order (as "community" or as "collective goods provision") and about the possibilities of collective self-governance—of *democracy.* This is a theme of many of the books under review. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson's *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy,* only published in 2006, is already regarded as a classic account of the logic by which democracy emerges as a solution to problems of "credible commitment," and Miriam Golden, in her extensive critical review, nicely explains the reasons why this book has received the attention it has gotten (note: Armando Razo's *Social Foundations of Limited Dictatorship: Networks and Private Protection During Mexico's Early Industrialization,* offers a useful complement to Acemoglu and Robinson, discussing the ways in which dictators can conceivably create alternative, non-democratic forms of credible commitment). José Antonio Cheibub's *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy* deals with the challenges of democratic "consolidation" under different post-authoritarian institutional conditions. These general problems of democratic "transition" and consolidation are also addressed by a number of books dealing with specific areas, including Latin America and Southern Europe (Elizabeth Shakman Hurd's *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* deserves special mention, because of the unique way that Turkey presents these problems as matters of domestic but also regional and international politics).

But the challenges to the flourishing of democracy are not simply questions of comparative politics or international relations or political theory. They are—and are increasingly seen as—central to *American* politics as well. Perhaps because of the "exceptionalism" of the U.S. constitutional system, or of U.S. political development more generally, a good deal of recent scholarship in American politics has been highly specialized, and has focused on the quantitative or formal analysis of particular institutions—Congressional committees, bureaucratic agencies, judges, etc.—often considered in isolation (a point made powerfully by Paul Pierson in his "The Costs of Marginalization: Qualitative Methods in the Study of American Politics," published in a February 2007 special issue of *Comparative Political Studies*). But this appears to be changing. One instance of such change was the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy appointed by then-President Theda Skocpol, which produced the important and much-discussed 2004 report on "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality." Larry Bartels was a member of that task force, and his own just-published book, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age,* has already received a great deal of scholarly and public attention (according to MSNBC and other major media outlets, the book has caught the eye of President-elect Barack Obama himself). In this book Bartels deploys a range of methods to develop a careful empirical analysis of American political trends that asks large and serious historical and normative questions. *Unequal Democracy* is a rich and important book, and some of its theses are controversial. So it was my pleasure to invite three distinguished political scientists—Jennifer Hochschild, Benjamin I. Page, and James A. Stimson—to offer their own distinctive commentaries on the book (it is my special pleasure to welcome Jennifer—*Perspectives*'s inaugural editor—back to its pages). Future issues of *Perspectives* will continue to invite this kind of engaged and critical discussion of important and timely books, in the hopes that such discussion can enrich both our scholarly discourses and broader public discussion.

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