
BACKGROUND BOOKS

PARTY POLITICS IN AMERICA

"The American Revolution was made by a party, the Patriots [Whigs]," D. W. Brogan reminds us in his acerbic **POLITICS IN AMERICA** (Harper, 1954, cloth; 1969, cloth & paper). "It had its origin in party meetings, caucuses* . . . in 'committees of correspondence' linking the party members from state to state, and it had its governing body in the various Congresses of which the most famous, in 1776, published the Declaration of Independence. The Founding Fathers . . . knew a great deal about parties and party organization."

Yet Thomas Jefferson, co-founder with James Madison of America's first modern political party (the Republicans), paradoxically had no use for parties, as Richard Hofstadter points out in **THE IDEA OF A PARTY SYSTEM: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840** (Univ. of Calif., 1969, cloth; 3rd ed., 1972, paper). Both Madison and Alexander Hamilton, founder of the rival Federalists, discussing parties in *The Federalist* (especially Papers 9 and 10) did so "only to arraign their bad effects."

Were these Founders indulging themselves hypocritically in the antiparty cant popular in 18th-century America? Or were they from the start feeling their way toward the creation of a mechanism "by which men," in Hofstadter's words, "could put together what God, in the shape of the Constitution, had sundered"? His view is that without parties functioning as a part of the machinery of government, it is doubtful if the Constitution,

devised in part as a *barrier* to party rule, could have been made to work.

William N. Chambers, in **POLITICAL PARTIES IN A NEW NATION: The American Experience, 1776-1809** (Oxford, 1963, cloth & paper), discusses the role of the emerging two-party system in the election of 1801, when Jefferson succeeded his old Revolutionary friend, Federalist John Adams. This "first . . . grand, democratic, peaceful transfer of power in modern politics" was, Chambers writes, "an example of a procedure which many . . . nations have yet to experience, which many defeated factions or parties have found it difficult or intolerable to accept, but one which 1801 did much to 'fix' on the American scene."

These complementary basic books on the shaping of the American two-party system vary widely in style and detail. Hofstadter soars imaginatively, while Chambers is more definitive. Both are good reminders of how the despised "factions" (a word used interchangeably with "parties" in the 18th century) began to grow into the durable, often disparaged, but widely respected U.S. political "system."

V. O. Key, Jr.'s classic **SOUTHERN POLITICS IN STATE AND NATION** (Knopf, 1949, cloth; Vintage, 1962, paper) is an examination of the causes and consequences of one-party politics in the once "Solid South," based on the situation extant in the 1940s, but digging up old roots that go back to Civil War and Reconstruction days.

His monumental general textbook, **POLITICS, PARTIES, AND PRESSURE GROUPS** (Crowell, 1942; 5th ed., 1964, cloth & paper), has been rated by leading political scientists as the most stimulating of all texts on the operation of the

*The word, according to Brogan, is one of Boston's contributions to the vocabulary of politics. Supposedly, the Colonial city's convivial Caucus Club took its name from the Greek *kaukos* (drinking vessel).

American two-party system.

Key regards the emergence of "episodic" third parties in American politics as essential to the system. They have a short life span because their issues are quickly adopted by at least one of the major parties; they get a large portion of the total vote; and they frequently are tied to important party realignments. Doctrinal third parties, such as the Socialists, generally have a long life but attract comparatively few voters—those purists more interested in issues than in power (i.e., winning elections).

Another analysis of third-party activity as it affects major parties comes from James L. Sundquist in **DYNAMICS OF THE PARTY SYSTEM: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States** (Brookings, 1973, cloth & paper). Sundquist describes the turning-point elections of the 1850s, in which the two major parties, temporarily split by the Know-Nothings and others, re-established themselves; the 1890s, when the populist uprising in the frontier states polarized the Democratic Party and set the East against the West; and the 1930s, when the Great Depression caused Republicans and Democrats to move to opposite poles on economic and social policy.

Ray Allen Billington's **THE PROTESTANT CRUSADE: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism** (Macmillan, 1938; Quadrangle, 1964, paper) remains the standard work on the early manifestation of the radical right in American politics. Billington holds that hatred of Catholics and "foreigners" was endemic for more than two centuries before it erupted in the Native American outburst of the 1840s and the Know-Nothingism of the 1850s. In **STRANGERS IN THE LAND: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925** (Rutgers, 1955; Atheneum, 1963, cloth & paper), John Higham argues that whenever there is strong sectional or class cleavage or when war confronts an

unprepared nation, men desperate for national unity rally against "the symbols of foreignness . . . appropriate to their predicament."

The contributors to **THE RADICAL RIGHT: The New American Right Expanded and Updated**, edited by Daniel Bell (Doubleday, 1963, cloth & paper), originally published in 1955 shortly after the crest of the McCarthy era, are concerned with more recent responses to severe strains in American society. The later edition has essays added in the early '60s on the John Birch Society.

On the other side, **THE CONCEPT OF JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY: New York as a Test Case** by Lee Benson (Princeton, 1961, cloth & paper) assesses the impact of the egalitarian movements—the Anti-Mason Party, Liberty Party, Barnburners, and Locofocos—associated with what Benson considers to be the misnamed Age of Jackson. To him, it was not the Jacksonian Democrats who moved the country away from political elitism but these splinter groups challenging the already dug-in local parties. Joseph G. Rayback in **FREE SOIL: The Election of 1848** (Univ. of Ky., 1970) analyzes the rise and impact of the small, leftist Free Soil party, which brought the slavery issue into both the Whig and Democratic 1848 presidential campaigns.

In **THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF AMERICA: A History** (Macmillan, 1955; Quadrangle, 1967, paper), David Shannon argues that the Socialist Party's failure was "due less to its errors than to basic traditions and conditions in American society which the Socialists could do little or nothing to change." But he cites the SP's faults, especially its failure to decide "whether it was a political party, a political pressure group, a revolutionary sect, or a political forum. It tried to play all these roles at the same time."

THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM by Theodore Draper (Viking, 1957, cloth; 1963, paper) is the first vol-

ume of a history of the Communist Party USA, with later volumes by other authors. Draper's account goes through the 1920s. His thesis is that when the infant party failed to build a real base in the United States "it was transformed from a new expression of American radicalism into the American appendage of a Russian revolutionary power."

DISCONTENT AT THE POLLS: A Study of Farmer and Labor Parties 1827-1948 (Columbia, 1950; Russell & Russell, 1967) by Murray S. Stedman, Jr. and Susan W. Stedman is a data-filled, long-range treatment of third-party growth. The Stedmans trace the political effect of one social movement—the agrarian revolt that began in the Western states in the 1870s and '80s and simmered right through New Deal days.

On the populist/progressive movements, Richard Hofstadter, again, has provided one of the most cogent studies. In **THE AGE OF REFORM: From Bryan to F.D.R.** (Knopf, 1965, cloth; Vintage, 1961, paper) he analyzes the People's Party (1891) and the Bull Moose Party of 1912, in particular. He points out that populism was a rural movement, progressivism largely urban and middle class. He sees both movements as tending toward extremism and expressing a romantic yearning for the past, and arising less for economic reasons than out of sentiments of class and status.

For an overall summary of third-party effects and a strong statement of the value of new parties in American democracy, Daniel A. Mazmanian's study **THIRD PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS** (Brookings, 1974, cloth & paper) is recommended.

Mazmanian's conclusion: "To restrict the free development of third parties . . . is to rely exclusively on the Democratic and Republican parties to represent the wants and needs of all Americans. The interests of the American people are too diverse for two parties to do this adequately all the time."

It is hard to find a contemporary American scholar or political journalist who is not critical of the state of the two major parties. Interestingly enough, however, when D. W. Brogan, the English author of *Politics in America* (above) wrote a new preface to the 1968 edition of his 1954 book, his admiration of the two-party system remained unchanged.

The two major parties, he wrote, are "the least integrated, the least national, of the numerous organizations that the Americans have invented for holding the country together." Yet they alone make it possible for "the formal political institutions" to work, preserving "in the days of supersonic flight . . . the methods and the spirit of the politics of the rural America of the age of Lincoln, if not quite of Jefferson or Jackson."

EDITOR'S NOTE. Many of the above titles were suggested by Austin Ranney, former president of the American Political Science Association, currently resident scholar for public policy at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and member of the Democratic National Committee Commission on the Role and Future of Presidential Primaries. His books include **CURING THE MISCHIEFS OF FACTION: Party Reform in America** (Univ. of Calif., 1975). Additional recommendations were made by John Ellwood, special assistant to the director, the Congressional Budget Office. Ellwood is working on a book about the George Wallace movement.