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THE DEMOCRATIC DREAM

> Democracy is the name we give the people whenever we need them.
>
> —Robert, Marquis de Flers and Armand de Caillavet, *L'Habit Vert* (1913)

The American Body Politic . . .

The predominant American political belief—attained, pretended, or otherwise—from before the establishment of the Republic and throughout the nation's history has been the democratic dream, nominally based on some version of popular representation and governance. Virtually every political structure and reform—from the founding Federalist Papers through the Civil War, the Progressive Era, and the War on Poverty—have been predicated on some mode of the democratic, egalitarian ethos, even as they oscillated between its Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian poles. At least as far back as the Boston Tea Party to the Emancipation Proclamation to Manifest Destiny and as recently as the Clinton invasion of Haiti (with a multitude of political points in between), the United States has initiated countless policies and programs based on the democratic dream, deserved or otherwise.

Indeed, to imagine a widespread domestic political movement (and probably foreign policy initiative) that does not in some very

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visible manner drape itself in the sacred vestment of democracy is inconceivable. The Confederacy's secession was at least partially motivated by the Southerners' perception that they were being denied their constitutional, democratic rights by the dominant industrialized Yankees; the Pacific migration across the Midwest Plains and western mountains was motivated by men (and women) seeking their own democratic destinies, an option finally exhausted by Frederick Jackson Turner's declaration in the late nineteenth century of the closing of the West; and the Progressive Era, women's right to vote, and the later labor movements were heavily wrapped in democratic swaddling clothes. The First World War was declaredly fought to "make the world safe for democracy," while the Second World War was obviously a battle against brutal totalitarian governments. The 1960s brought forth the civil rights and feminist politics, both long-deferred democratic movements representative of all the nation's citizens. Even today, the dream and its enabling symbolism hardly pause: witness, for instance, how Ross Perot's United We Stand America (later renamed the Reform) party—arguably the most unabashedly centralized American political party this century—repeatedly insists on its egalitarian heritage and platform in the face of one man's Croteus-like wallet.

It is in this ambience that American political philosophies, politics themselves, and even certain professions (e.g., public administration) were created and nurtured. Although democratic proponents unquestionably argued over differing points of view (e.g., states' rights versus federal rights versus individual rights), the Constitution and its amendments have generally served as the one unifying symbol overarching the American polity and its diverse citizenry. That is, while many have debated over the duties, roles, and shape of government, few mainstream politicians have argued outside the acknowledged ken of the federal Constitution. It is, for all intents and purposes, the sacrosanct bedrock of the American democratic political system.

But the Constitution itself cannot serve as a singular political poultice for whatever ails the body politic. Part of the genius of the Constitution is that it sanctions political and social controversy without itself being tarnished. Hyperpluralism appeases the many without satisfying the nation as a whole, thus leaving a sorry residual of a government that "works" without a whit of empathy from its citizens. Within the country at large, there is a tangible sense that as often as appeals are made to the nation's democratic bench marks, these are more calls to a fading faith than references to reality.

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Americans are apparently disenchanted with their politics, both in terms of substance and process.

In light of these ills, it is not surprising that Christopher Lasch, just before his death in 1994, asked the hardest question of all, that is, "whether democracy has a future." Lasch contended that "It isn't simply a question of whether democracy can survive . . . [it] is whether democracy deserves to survive."[1] This certainly is not the place to enter into that particular discussion. Just permit me to say that the overriding assumption—postulate—of this book is overwhelmingly positive in that regard for any number of normative and political reasons that one trusts most readers can appreciate on any number of levels.

Academics, as is their traditional wont, have long voiced a despair over forms and models of democracy. Benjamin Barber distinguishes, for instance, between "weak" and "strong" democracies in terms of their active voter participation rates, while others offer remedies that have little realistic chance for implementation.[2] Inevitably, popular journalists are not far behind. E. J. Dionne, as brusquely as anybody, explains *Why Americans Hate Politics:*

> At a time when the people of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia are experiencing the excitement of self-government, Americans view politics with boredom and detachment. For most of us, politics is increasingly abstract, a spectator sport barely worth watching. . . . Our system has become one long-running advertisement against self-government.[3]

Michael J. Sandel strikes much the same chord, when he writes, "Our public life is rife with discontent. Americans do not believe they have much say in how they are governed and do not trust government to do the right thing."[4]

It goes without saying that the more visible voter behavior signals this unrest. Eligible voters voting in presidential elections have fallen steadily since 1960, with only a 1992 reversal due to Perot's 19 percent of those voting violating the trend. George Bush was elected with less than half the eligible voters in his favor. Bill Clinton was even further removed from a majority in the 1992 presidential election, and the Clinton-Dole election in 1996 was conspicuously marked by one of the lowest voter turnouts of the twentieth century. Off-year elections rates have declined since 1966, with a momentary respite in 1982 (when Ronald Reagan secured a Republican Senate); of course, the absolute number of voters is much lower than in the presidential election years. Even the Republican majority

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elected in the 1994 elections to control Congress fell quickly out of public favor, when subsequent surveys reflected a dissatisfaction with its Contract for America as campaign promises were transformed into personal deprivations and displacements. Voter turnout statistics are even more discouraging as one moves from federal elections to those on the state and local jurisdictions. Even news viewer- and readership (probably the most painless of all democratic activities) are markedly down over the last five years (e.g., television news viewership declined from 60 percent in 1993 to a present 48 percent).[a] Most disheartening, Republicans (78%) and Democratic as well as nonvoters (both 57%) polled indicate that "government is almost always wasteful and inefficient."[5]

One can hardly compare the present protestations of citizen ennui with a nation whose establishment was based on a popular rebellion, whose most moving political event—the Civil War—was waged by large numbers of men, mostly volunteers, or one whose civil emancipation recruited millions of civil right leaders and followers into the streets and voter booths, or a nation whose labor movements were to improve significantly the quality of life for its working population. Still, we should not underestimate the disenchantment with democracy and its attendant processes and products. Robert D. Putnam has brilliantly characterized this growing sense of frustration and alienation with the revealing observation that the nation is surrendering its social cohesions (or what the sociologist James S. Coleman refers to as "social capital"), or in his words, that we are in matter of empirical fact "bowling alone."[6] Although Putnam's carefully drawn speculation does not directly indict the political system, it is scarcely idle speculation to suggest that the political system in seeming turmoil has done nothing to relieve this condition. Even worse, little better is being offered by any political party as an acceptable palliative.

Various authors have offered their "best guess" as to the source of the American malaise, ranging from race relations to a shrinkage of the middle class to the cynicism of the media to the economy to Lasch's disdain for elite behaviors to Putnam's pervasiveness of television. Whatever, this decline in American's faith in their political culture is the hallmark of the final decade of America's twentieth

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[a] Interestingly enough, those who heard their news via radio listenership actually rose, from 42 percent (1995) to this year's 44 percent, following a five-year pattern of increased listenership.

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century. Most will agree with William Greider when he writes that the resulting political insolvency is both patent and pervasive:

> The decaying condition of the American democracy is difficult to grasp, not because the facts are secret, but because the facts are visible everywhere. . . . The things that Americans were taught and still wish to believe about self-government—the articles of civic faith we loosely call democracy—no longer seem to fit the present reality. . . .
>
> The blunt message of this book is that American democracy is in much deeper trouble that most people wish to acknowledge. . . . What exists behind the formal shell is a systemic breakdown of the shared civic values we call democracy.[7]

President Clinton took up this issue in his July 1995 address to Georgetown University:

> . . . it is difficult to draw the conclusion that our political system is producing the sort of discussion that will give us the kind of results we need. But our citizens, even though their confidence in the future has been clouded, and their doubts about their leaders and their institutions are profound, want something better.

It would appear, in summary, that the uncertainties and ambiguities fostered by democracy and the democratic processes (no one has ever suggested that "democracy makes the trains run on time") are beginning to weigh heavily on the American people. For instance, the 1995 federal budget donnybrook and its poisonous reserve of rhetoric and ill-feeling between the Republican Congress and President Clinton hardly infuses any American with a glow of patriotic serenity. If it were a singular phenomenon, one might safely blame a party or individuals (and vote it or them out of office), but coming close upon a decade of Republican-bred corruption[8] and Clinton's predilection for indecision (which some wags have described as "waffling"), it is hard to accept with civic equanimity. If there is still a democratic booster, it seemingly resides, in John Kenneth Galbraith's ironic phrase, as "a democracy for the fortunate,"[9] and even that is problematic as wealthy American taxpayers leave for low-tax havens. For whatever reasons, the American citizen and occasional voter shows every indication of not being "a happy camper." What is much less clear is what is next, a general disgruntlement with a shrugging of one's electoral shoulders, or a more serious, debilitating political movement (e.g., the Freemen phenomenon).

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. . . And the Study of the Public Sector

Not surprisingly, public service and public administration in the United States have shared a similar democratic coloration. From the early days of the professional public administrator—when Woodrow Wilson temporarily partitioned "politics" and "administration" into separate entities—we find a solid stream of democratic theory underpinning and underlining contemporary public administration. The obvious exception in the history of American public administration was promulgated by the so-called scientific management movement of the early twentieth century. However, its ontogeny has undergone so many populist reforms and empowerment alterations, such (most recently) as the so-called new public management of decentralization and power sharing, that its founder Frederick Taylor would scarcely recognize his administrative offspring. The "science" claimed by Taylorites has grown noticeably softer with age.

One can argue, as Frank Fischer has with great conviction, that most of the public management strategies are much less democratic than they portray themselves, perhaps even cruel charades meant to maintain ultimate managerial prerogatives and control while, paradoxically, offering little of compensating value.[10] However, the important observation is that these changing management philosophies have always cloaked themselves in the raiment of the democratic legend to substantiate an integral part of their ideology, appeal, and, ultimately, final worth. Thus, one finds bipartisan leaders of the current "reinventing government" phenomenon clothing their theories and proposals in the garments of local, that is, more democratic, control, as opposed to an equally legitimate (and often historically valid) theme of small-minded parochialism, "bossism," and local intolerance.[b] There are, it would seem, certain canons that must be honored in order to justify movements and practices in the American body politic, of which democracy is the most unwavering. The demo-

[b] "Reinventing" also brings with it worrisome baggage to a democratic system. Vice President Al Gore's *National Performance Review* draws a clear distinction between "citizens" and "customers," favoring the latter as a key instrument toward the revitalization of the American bureaucracy. Unfortunately, that perspective, especially as it is being implemented, destroys the role or place of citizenship in lieu of the demanding customer who can (should?) easily transfer allegiance to an alternative vendor as part of legitimate market behavior. I am indebted to Professor Laurence Lynn (University of Chicago) for pointing out this distinction to me.

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cratic rhetoric is viewed as fulfilling an insistent symbolism that must be popularly acknowledged before the managerial innovation or political idea can be legitimated and put into place.

Much more explicitly, the newer discipline of the policy sciences falls into much the same characterization. While the policy sciences are characterized by some as having a long history (if they are defined in terms of advice to rulers[11]) and a short past (if they are defined as emanating from the carnage of the Second World War as a systematic, institutionalized approach to improved governance), they have inevitably been alluded to as "the policy sciences of democracy." In terms of the latter definition, they were first articulated by Harold D. Lasswell in 1949; two years later, Lasswell and Daniel Lerner further set forth the concept of the policy sciences in their seminal volume, *The Policy Sciences*. In Lasswell's very words, "the policy sciences of democracy" were "directed towards knowledge to improve the practice of democracy."[12]

Since then, the policy sciences and their more applied "kin," public policy analysis in its various guises, have become prevalent, indeed, virtually ingrained in the woof and warp of government. As Alice M. Rivlin noted over a decade ago in the midst of a Republican administration widely thought to be antianalysis,[13] policy research has "dramatically changed the nature of public policy debate. . . . No debate on any serious issue . . . takes place without somebody citing a public policy study."[14] Certainly during the current administration headed by a president often said to be a "policy wonk,"[15] Rivlin's (formerly the first director of the Congressional Budget Office, then Clinton's director of the Office of Management and Budget, and presently a governor of the Federal Reserve Board) depiction is even more accurate than ever. Witness, for instance, the uncountable number of "analyst-years" (to say nothing of the opportunity costs) expended by President and Mrs. Clinton on the thorny questions surrounding an American national health care insurance policy, as over five hundred analysts worked in virtual seclusion for months to produce a universal health care proposal. But, likewise, witness the widely held charge that the failure of the Clinton health proposal was embedded in its closed council, nondemocratic genesis, giving unwitting sustenance to the perception that too often important policy work is the privileged domain of distant and detached policy elite, rather than, in Lasswell's words, one "directed towards knowledge to improve the practice of democracy."

The present author has given voice to this sentiment when he observed that "In the analysts' current positions (geographic and

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bureaucratic), they are effectively sequestered from the demands, needs, and (most critically) values of the people they are reputed to be helping."[16] And so one is forced to wonder as to the legitimacy and validity of the so-called policy sciences of democracy or, more precisely, what they have come to be. Lasswell himself was possibly prophetic when he warned that the policy sciences of democracy could readily become, with no malice—indeed, some claim a liberal benevolence—of thought, the "policy sciences of tyranny." This caution was reiterated forty years later when John S. Dryzek wrote that "most policy analysis efforts to date are in fact consistent with an albeit subtle policy sciences of tyranny."[17] Although Dryzek was referring specifically to a potential rule by bureaucracy, there is little doubt that a ready extension of his charge could be advanced to the overall policy-making system.

Democracy and the Policy Sciences

The critical assumption for this study is that these two apparently disjoint phenomena of the decline of democracy and the rise of the policy sciences are not independent, rather, in both theory and practice, they feed upon and reinforce one another. We will attempt to propose and document that synergy, drawing upon such outstanding political scientists and policy scientists as Robert A. Dahl, Putnam, and Lasswell, to underscore that peril—although we might not know its effect or even direction—is at the door of democracy; whether today or tomorrow is less the point than its presence. Moreover, that for this malady, the remedy is critical because the game is easily worth the candle, for the "game" here is more of a threat, one that endangers the very basis of the American democratic dream and system, at least in practice. Furthermore, we choose to go beyond documenting the current peril and propose ways in which this condition may be relieved, maybe not entirely, but at least the trajectory could be lessened.

The central perspective is premised on Lasswell's original conception of the policy sciences, although this is not meant to present a Lasswellian exegesis. If not in practiced fact, then in promise, it contains the seeds for this democratic reincarnation. Concurrently, we will argue that the democratic dream itself has been misconstrued in critical ways, and transformed into priorities that only deepen rather than ameliorate the problem.

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It is important to stress that this is not a chronology of American democracy, or alternatively, what James A. Morone calls *The Democratic Wish*.[18] Undoubtedly the surest way to render this book soporific would be to engage in a logorrheic debate over precisely what constitutes democracy and, concomitantly, a democratic system of government. Instead of engaging in this prototypical academic argument, we will briefly define and discuss democracy as it was originally formulated and then came to be practiced in the United States during the twentieth century, since that is the period in which we find the policy sciences being developed and disseminated, supposedly as an instrument of improved democratic governance. We need therefore to consider more precisely not only what constitutes the dream as well as how that dream came to be seen and how today it is politically interpreted and implemented.

It follows that not only will new approaches to the traditionally empirical policy sciences need to be proposed, but that adjustments to how we envision American democracy will also be necessarily relevant if we are to succeed. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers summarize the predicament, namely that we confront "above all an argument about democracy, the idea that free and equal persons should together control the conditions of their own association."[19] In brief, the task of this book is to reconcile the policy sciences within an expanded version of the American democratic dream so that the two work cooperatively toward mutual goals instead of being at odds with one another. Failing this purpose, it is not clear at all if either will work in their original incarnations and certainly not in harmony.

Organization

The book is divided into roughly four main sections, in addition to this introduction. The first section (i.e, the second chapter) outlines what appears to be the problems extant with the American democracy and its processes. By posing these questions, we mean to move well beyond Winston Churchill's much quoted but less-than-curative claim:

> Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time. (*Hansard,* 11 November 1947, col. 206)

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The reasoning is straightforward: if the admittedly ambiguous chicken entrails (or radio talk show hosts: Who can say which are better soothsayers?) are anything close to correct, democracy might still be better than "all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," but it is increasingly being removed from a workable system today. Or, alternatively, to the degree that it is workable, one might easily fear with William Greider and E. J. Dionne that it is only democratic on the margins, a mile wide and an inch deep. Michael J. Sandel, for one, presents the case that American democracy is beset with self-inflicted, internal contradictions that provide little hope for reconciliation.[20] Most of the problems addressed in this section will be of a contemporary nature. That they will be of more derivative and elaborative than original research is true enough, for most of the conditions and processes are well-known. More central to the book's theme, however, will be an exploration of the roots of American democracy and political order, traced back to the Founding Fathers (especially James Madison and *The Federalist Papers*) and the ever-observant Frenchman, Alexis De Tocqueville, with additional discussions of participatory democracy theories and movements. (One might parenthetically wonder if the framers of the Constitution themselves are icons of legitimacy, just as potent as the Constitution itself to the patrioticly inclined; consider, for one, how President Reagan favorably compared the Nicaraguan Sandinista rebels with Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and other American patriots.)

Similar explanations need to be proposed in the third chapter, that is, what ails the policy sciences of democracy and what might be a useful prescription? In brief, the issue is not so much that the policy sciences and policy analysis are quite wrong; rather, it is that in their present form and format, they are not nearly sufficient. Too many policies have been proven too far off their intended mark, so that shortcomings rather than promises are the dominant chord. In other words, important changes should be offered that would make them render them less prone to having (by now, the hackneyed charge of) "precisely the right answer for the wrong question." For one, they must face up to a situation in which the resolutions are more humanistic and less "scientific" without surrendering the requisite standards. This is less to indicate a reduction in rigor and more toward a variety of ways in which policy tools may be brought to bear for a multitude of conditions. As noted earlier, the emphasis will be toward a growing postpositivist movement, some of the obstacles it must face, and, in particular, a critical reading that will

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underlie the later support of participatory policy analysis as one tool in the policy sciences' methodologies.

The fourth chapter examines the means by which the policy sciences have worked to rescue their democratic charter from their insistent doppelgänger, the economics-oriented policy analysis. It reviews a number of recent advances or recommendations in policy research but, more important, it dwells to some length on some of the so-called postpositivist schools to understand what they might offer. As in earlier sections, this chapter is not meant to be the definitive statement on (say) "deconstructionism" or "critical theory" (as if either approach even admitted to such definitiveness). Rather, the chapter is intended to propose a number of theoretical insights and then to synthesize them in a manner that could lead to a more democratic model of the policy sciences than is currently the case. Admittedly (as readers of the fourth section will see), many of the postpositivist approaches have defied easy or convenient operationalization. However, this does not imply that they are irrelevant or overly "academic."

The fifth and final chapter attempts to weave these three previous sections together, that is, to advance the policy sciences in ways that they will contribute positively to the revised vision of democracy. Already some policy scientists are moving tentatively in these directions, claiming that policy should promote democratic behaviors in areas such as nonprofit organizations and local empowerment programs.[21] Still, it is apparent that these movements should be more definite in purpose and means. Furthermore, one needs to be advised how best and where to use them; if there is one lesson the policy sciences have learned, it is that there are no universal answers or omniscient hammers. Indeed, as Aaron Wildavksy warned policy analysts some years ago:

> Instead of thinking about permanent solutions, we should think of permanent problems in the sense that one problem always succeeds and replaces another . . . the capacity of policies to generate more interesting successors and our ability better to learn from them what we ought to prefer may be their most important quality.[22]

The pivotal questions thus move beyond aspirations and more into operations, for the policy sciences, if nothing else, are little without application, evaluation, and revision. Likewise, again harkening back to the original Lasswellian vision, they are empty without a democratic vision. This book attempts to correct both of these contemporary deficiencies, at least for once and hopefully for all.

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