

# Editor's Introduction

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I am writing this introduction from an internet café in Bucharest. Yesterday, courtesy of CNN, I watched Hillary Clinton officially suspend her Presidential campaign and throw her support behind Barack Obama. In Bucharest they are preparing for a second round of municipal elections, to be followed soon thereafter by parliamentary elections. Here in Bucharest—and also in Budapest, the first leg of my trip—my political science friends watch the U.S. election campaign with fascination and admiration. It seems, to most of them—hardly a representative sample of the population at large—that the U.S. elections are more open, competitive, and less oligopolistic than post-Communism, which some call a “partyocracy.”

Being abroad casts the U.S. election in a sharp comparative relief, and it also underscores how important this election is, in symbolic but also material terms, for so many people across the world. And so it seems especially appropriate for me to use this introduction to the Book Review to highlight the ways that so many of the books currently under review speak to and shed light on the current campaign and the broader election.

One theme central to the campaign, and central to so much recent writing in political science—especially at the border of political theory and international relations—is the character of the current world order and the question of whether the “hegemony” at least asserted by the Bush Administration is either feasible or desirable given the current state of the world. This issue is addressed in the International Relations section by Ian Clark's review of Andrew Hurrell's *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* and in the Political Theory section by Maeve Cook's review of John P. McCormack's *Weber, Habermas, and Transformations of the European State: Constitutional, Social, and Supranational Democracy* and Philip Green's review of Fred Dallmayr's *In Search of the Good Life* and Iris Marion Young's *Global Challenges* (Young, who passed away shortly after completing this book, devoted much of her later career to questions of global justice). The related question of the serious foreign policy challenges facing the U.S. is addressed by a number of books reviewed in the International Relations section, including Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala on *Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and Its Legacy*, Steve Chan's

*China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A Critique*, and Edward J. Lincoln's *Winners Without Losers: Why Americans Should Care More about Global Economic Policy*.

Another set of books under review, in the American Politics section, address questions of party politics and public policy of clear relevance to the 2008 election. Mark A. Smith's *The Right Talk: How Conservatives Transformed the Great Society into the Economic Society* and Andrew J. Taylor's *The Elephant's Edge: The Republicans as a Ruling Party* are two of many recent books (a number reviewed in our next issue) dealing with broad questions of party alignment, electoral competition, and the post-1960's Republican ascendancy and its limits. Kristen A. Foot and Steven M. Schneider's *Web Campaigning* touches on a number of themes central to the success of the Obama campaign (something nicely discussed in Ramona S. McNeal's review). Two books on American political development—Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman's edited *American Democracy in the Making* and David Brian Robertson's *The Constitution and America's Destiny*—offer a broader historical backdrop on current political controversies (David Seimers's double-review nicely ties these books together). And Patricia Strach's *All in the Family: the Private Roots of American Public Policy* treats broad questions of public policy in historical perspective (this book can be placed in an illuminating dialogue with Gregory J. Kasza's *One World of Welfare: Japan in Comparative Perspective* and Leonard J. Schoppa's *Race for the Exits: The Unraveling of Japan's Systems of Social Protection*, nicely reviewed together by Joseph Wong in the Comparative section).

There is, finally, our featured symposium on Katherine Cramer Walsh's *Talking about Race: Community Dialogues and the Politics of Difference*. We organized this symposium because Walsh discusses big questions—about race, deliberative democracy and its limits, and the politics of difference—central to much fine work in recent political science that seeks to straddle conventional subfield boundaries. We also organized it because the topic was of such obvious relevance to the historic 2008 Democratic primary battle, which for the first time in U.S. history pitted a (Caucasian) woman against an African-American (man) in a race for a major party Presidential nomination.

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This campaign raised so many powerful and contentious questions about “the politics of difference,” questions in some sense indicated by my very own difficulty above in describing the two candidates, who are both human beings and American citizens, and yet whose identity markers—“white” and “Black,” “woman” and “man”—loom so large in public discourse. The excellent commentaries by J. Philip Thompson, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, and Dara Z. Strolovitch—all young scholars working on race and the politics of difference—illuminate something that has been

underscored by the contest between Clinton and Obama that seems recently to have been concluded: that it is difficult for Americans to avoid talking about race, but equally difficult for them to talk about it in a way that produces constructive democratic understandings—whatever that means. In the months leading up to and following the November 2008 election there will no doubt be much talk about race, and much talk about the talk. I believe that our symposium demonstrates how political science at its best can enrich such talk.