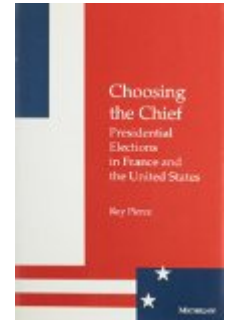**Roy Pierce**. *Choosing the Chief: Presidential Elections in France and the United States.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995. xiv + 301 pp. $47.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-472-10559-5.

Reviewed by Peggy Anne Phillips

Thomas Jefferson most certainly would be pleased that scholars are still intrigued by the political bonds between France and the United States, as demonstrated in Roy Pierce's *Choosing the Chief*. Pierce's highly quantitative study of presidential politics in the two countries from 1964 through 1992 confirms important insights from earlier studies and directly examines the 1988 election. The book offers a detailed statistical survey of the relationship between public opinion and voting behavior in both countries.

The discussion of partisanship begins with the categories offered by V. O. Key's major work in the 1950s, then moves swiftly to the important revisions by Philip Converse and Pierce since the 1960s. Identification with a particular political party, with a broad movement, or with an individual presidential candidate is carefully set in the context of each country's system of presidential politics. The vast differences in partisanship and political identification between the two systems are delineated carefully. Pierce concludes that May 1968 forced a realignment of French politics that was comparable with the Great Depression in United States politics. In each case, the common mechanism appears to have been young voters who were not yet firmly entrenched in a political outlook and who were propelled by events in a way that differed from their parents and even their older siblings. The result was increasing momentum behind a different and sometimes new set of political parties that over time transformed the distribution of voters within the electorate.

The book presents detailed, even exhaustive, results from voter surveys in France and the United States. Voters in the surveys are tested on their ability to assign candidates to a position on a spectrum from left-liberal to right-conservative, and on a large array of issues. Pierce finds that broad ideological categories are most meaningful to a relatively small number of elite voters and not to the bulk of the electorate in either nation. A candidate's position on issues such as clericalism or immigration in France and on race in the United States seems to be far more salient in attracting votes than do broad appeals to class or party. When voters fail to find suitable candidates, frustration rises and participation falters. Thwarted

voters and non-voters come under scrutiny in both systems. In the French case, Pierce identifies the structure of the electoral process as the key factor in the incidence of abstentions, whereas he argues that voter disenchantment plays a greater role in the United States.

With elaborate and carefully specified models, this study portrays the French and American political systems as heavily determined by demographic forces which are shaped and reshaped by major realigning events like May 1968, then modified (or stymied) by the passage of time and by election laws and conventions. I doubt that the magic and majesty of citizenship looked like that to a good eighteenth-century humanist like Jefferson. Yet in his own way Pierce has produced a classic political science interpretation to fit his own times, and that is valuable, too.

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Citation: Peggy Anne Phillips. Review of Pierce, Roy. *Choosing the Chief: Presidential Elections in France and the United States.* H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.

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