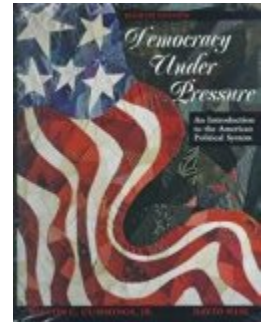


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Milton C. Cummings, David Wise. *Democracy Under Pressure: An Introduction to the American Political System*. Fort Worth, T.X.: Harcourt Brace, 1996. xxiii + 819 pp. \$57.52 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-15-503195-1.

Reviewed by John F. Kozlowicz (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater)  
Published on H-Teachpol (September, 1997)



Like aging wine that we hope becomes a fine wine rather than vinegar through the passing years, so too we wonder whether aging American Government textbooks will become better classroom tools rather than antiquated texts unsuitable for contemporary classroom use. *Democracy Under Pressure* by Milton Cummings and David Wise is now in its eighth edition and older than most students and a few of the instructors using it today, yet it remains a high quality American Government text suitable for instructors applying a wide range of classroom approaches to teaching American Government and Politics. While I have selected another text for my own classroom use, Cummings and Wise remains a very strong choice for use in the introductory college level American Government and Politics course. This text could easily be used by me in an effective manner without having to modify how I teach my American Government course. In my decision to move away from a text that I had used for the last five years, this was one of the strong contenders to be my new American Government text. Much of the strengths that have made this a popular text over the years remain. At the same time, many new touches (additional chapters and new material within existing chapters) make this a highly useable and desirable text.

The book is logically organized and flows well. After the first three chapters ("Government and People," "The Constitutional Framework," and "The Federal System"), the remaining individual chapters are sufficiently modular that instructors can have their students read the material in virtually any order that fits the sequence of his/her lectures to cover the major topics of American Government. The only exception might be Part Four which looks at the government in operation. These policy-rich chap-

ters might make more sense to students only after they acquired an understanding of the organization of the machinery of American Government and workings of the political process. While many American Government texts have such chapters, it seems that there is rarely time in a one semester course to cover policy issues beyond those of civil rights and civil liberties.

Reflecting the changing publishing approach of today's American Government texts, the Cummings and Wise text provides a comprehensive teaching package (instructor's manual, text bank, video package, interactive CD ROM, readings package, transparencies, and special subscription offer for new users). This review does not evaluate these ancillary materials which are common selling tools hawked by campus book representatives as reasons to adopt a text. This reviewer's approach has always been to largely ignore such bonuses in the text decision-making process and focus on the primary student learning tool—the main text. Where such ancillary materials are helpful, they can be incorporated into the course. Where such materials are not helpful, they too often join all those other materials catching and hold dust on the ever-present bookshelves that decorate most professorial offices. With advent of university student access to e-mail and the World Wide Web, it is increasingly easy for instructors to distribute readings electronically via a course specific electronic discussion list or posting of materials on a course specific Web page, making some of these text enhancements completely unnecessary. In many ways this is preferable, since instructors can select specific and contemporary materials that better fit their specific course and/or approach to the teaching of American Government and Politics. Like most other American Government texts providing these total teaching pack-

ages, there is virtually no attempt to integrate such materials into the main text. For example, Cummings and Wise offer a free subscription to *The New Republic*, yet they do not incorporate previous material from *The New Republic* in the text to suggest to students the importance of articles from this journal.

As a mature text (Eighth Edition), it is not surprising that *Democracy Under Pressure* remains well written and flows smoothly. Clearly, a major plus for the introductory student are the clear explanations of basic materials such as constitution building, parties, groups, and the law making process, the American Judiciary, the American Presidency among other basic topics of American Politics. Instructors adopting this text should have little worry that their students will be properly exposed to the nuts and bolts of the American political process. The authors are thorough and complete. Additionally, in most instances Cummings and Wise go well beyond that factual base which today's student need in most introductory college level courses in American politics. A large number of today's college students have little or no exposure to the American political process in high school. Even worse, too many students who supposedly had such exposure have either ignored or forgotten it. A good example of this moving beyond the basics by the authors is found in the Presidency chapter. Near the end of the chapter are two sections titled "The American Presidency: Triumph and Tragedy" and "The Splendid Misery: Personality and Style in the White House" where the authors discuss individuals who have occupied the White House as well as the theories of Barber and Koenig classifying Presidential behavior. It is easy to see how, at least for the more thoughtful students, these sections would serve as a splendid backdrop for an analytical essay and/or class discussion on the Presidency. Similar discussions are found in other chapters of this text.

Another advantage of this text is that it develops a theme of policy and policy analysis in the first chapter. This theme is carried forward in subsequent chapters of the book. The final section of the book concludes with a series of policy chapter that instructors can use to wrap up an American Government course providing time remains in the semester.

One trend of American Government texts today is the increasing emphasis on visual enhancements to the basic text often justified as making the book relevant and appealing to today's student. Each chapter is sprinkled with an abundance of color photos, clever black and white cartoons, color graphs and charts and a wide assortment of

boxed information. It is the boxed materials, however, that deserve further discussion. In fact, I had to look long and hard to find a set of pages in which there was not some picture, graph, or boxed text. Thus, there is no question that Cummings and Wise are as competitive in this area as any other of today's newer texts. My only fear is that this liberal use of visual materials can serve as a distraction to the flow of material in the chapter. To the authors' credit, the materials that they have included are relevant to the surrounding text and do enhance student understanding of the text if they are willing to take the time to make the logical connections that do exist.

In the Preface, the authors promise a new set of boxed materials examining "The American Past" as well as continuing their long standing practice of including "contemporary boxed material...to enliven and augment the text." Examining the boxed text of this text does indicate that the authors have carefully selected material that would enhance student understanding of the major thrust of the chapters. In many instances the boxed materials provide information that instructors may well want to use as a starting point for class discussion or points to illustrate points in their lectures or discussions

While *Democracy Under Pressure* by Cummings and Wise is as competitive as any of the newer texts as an effective teaching tool, it is not without some shortcomings. The authors take little note of the impact of the Internet and World Wide Web as an important source of political information and as a valuable tool to examine American Government and Politics. They do deal with the issue of Internet decency in the introduction to the discussion of civil liberties and citizenship. They do not, however, deal effectively with the role of the Internet in politics and government today other than to make one reference to candidate and party web pages in discussing campaigns (p. 328) and to include one sentence noting that some newspapers publish on the Web (p. 278). Certainly there are a wide variety of Internet related issues that deserve discussion. These include the increased availability of information to citizens through the Internet, the vast array of government documents available on the Internet, the Internet as a quick lobbying instrument though e-mail to legislators, the cost of technology to local government as schools meet President Clinton's goal of having all schools hooked up to the Internet, and the impact of a generation of technologically equipped students becoming the new voters of the Twenty-First Century.

Each chapter ends with a concise and nicely anno-

tated bibliography. Certainly, these are works that students in upper level courses or graduate school may examine and/or read. These are often the works that Ph.D. students should be familiar with as they approach their preliminary exams. It is not clear that these works are the ones that the introductory student would want for more information than presented in the chapter. For example, following the chapter which includes a discussion of the federal court system, there are references to the works of Henry Abraham, Alexander Bickle, and Robert McCloskey. It cannot be argued that these are not critical works, but I wonder if the college freshman might next prefer to move to something less intense such as Chief Justice Rehnquist's *The Supreme Court: How It Was How It Is*, Anthony Lewis' *Gideon's Trumpet*, or even Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong's *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*. The listing of annotated URL's in addition

to text would be a useful resource for students who might desire to explore issues of government and politics on the World Wide Web.

Despite some minor criticisms, *Democracy Under Pressure* by Milton Cummings and David Wise remains one of the better American Government texts suitable to a wide range of teaching approaches. Its emphasis on policy and policy-making, especially the introductory section on policy analysis which is carried out throughout the text, provides a framework to analyze the American political system that will serve both the instructor and students well.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-teachpol>

**Citation:** John F. Kozlowicz. Review of Cummings, Milton C.; Wise, David, *Democracy Under Pressure: An Introduction to the American Political System*. H-Teachpol, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1262>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).