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Stephen E. Frantzich. *Citizen Democracy.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. vii + 235 pp. $102.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-9150-0; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-9151-7.

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Common People Can Achieve Uncommon Results through Political Participation

Americans are cynical about our government. Over two-thirds of the public do not believe the government is responsive to their desires, with young Americans being even more alienated (p. 2). Professor Stephen E. Frantzich uses this text to demonstrate that government can indeed be made to respond to the people. In his work he presents nineteen vignettes of activists and their causes. Most are unlikely heroes, who reacted out of grief, compassion, political ideology, or a sense of justice.

Clearly, our democracy is threatened to the extent that people feel disconnected from each other and from the civic community. Robert Putnam made big waves by sounding this theme in a popularization of his academic work on civic community in Italy and in several articles, such as, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital."[1] Frantzich's book was designed to help reduce the level of cynicism in his students at the U.S. Naval Academy (and elsewhere) by presenting stories of people who made a difference, and examining how they did so.

People are more likely to try to make a difference if their self interest is involved, i.e., they are more likely to get involved for selective rather than collective benefits. Many then discover that their gains carry collective benefits (p. 4). There are some, though for whom altruism is a motivating factor. Regardless, there are some requisites for achieving one's goals through political activism. Frantzich explains that, "Successful activists worked *smart* as well as hard, recognizing the nuances of the various decision-making arenas. They began with a healthy skepticism, recognizing that success is elusive, but were empowered by knowing enough to target the right decision makers. They framed the issues in human terms and pursued their goals with creativity and persistence" (p. 4) [italics in original].

Frantzich uses a game metaphor and examines the players, their strategies, the system's rules, and the winners and losers. He interviewed his protagonists, and the book aptly portrays the passion of individuals fighting for their causes. The work is improved by having not only heroes but also anti-heroes. Heroes include Lois Gibbs, a simple housewife who rescued her neighborhood and provided the impetus for the Superfund, and Rosa Parks, a black department store seamstress, who started the Montgomery bus boycott and the beginning of the end of legal segregation (with the help of a young preacher, the Reverend Mike King, who later became Martin Luther King). Anti-heroes include Gregory Lee (Joey) Johnson, a young man with great hatred toward the United States, who burned the flag. His actions helped to show that even unpopular participation is tolerated and that there is strong institutional support for free speech. The book also talks about Dr. Jack Kavorkian or "Dr. Death" who is presented as a very unlikeable person but one who was also a leader in the "death with dignity" movement. Though he currently is in jail for pushing the envelope too far, his role in placing and keeping the idea of euthanasia on the public agenda has resulted in Oregon legalizing assisted suicide.

Each of the vignettes draws lessons for readers. For example, Frantzich portrays the battles of Candy Lightner, founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). Ms. Lightner learned that the drunk driver that had killed her daughter had four prior arrests, one only two days before the tragic accident that took her daughter's life. She learned further that the drunk driver in question was unlikely to do jail time even though his illegal behavior had resulted in a death. As was the case for the Kankas, whose daughter was raped and killed by a neighbor (a convicted sex offender), whose action in response to this crime led to Megan's Laws in several states requiring notification, and the Clearys, whose daughter was killed on a college campus plagued with lax security by a fellow student with a criminal record (which led them to champion the Student Right to Know and Campus Security

Act), tragedy became a motivator and a means of coping with grief. Candy Lightner was a women who was "neither registered to vote nor able to distinguish between Democrat from Republican" (p. 71). With little knowledge but wonderful intuitive skills, Ms. Lightner started to write to parents who had also lost their children to drunk drivers. She established a significant mailing list, then hounded California Governor Jerry Brown until he appointed a task force, whose recommendations resulted in increased punishment for drunk drivers. When President Reagan signed a bill reducing highway funding to states with drinking ages less than twenty-one, Candy Lightner was invited to the signing ceremoney.

Frantzich not only portrays the political struggles but also the humanness of his protagonists. Ms. Lightner's crusade caused her other children to be unhappy. She was asked to leave as leader of MADD when the organization's board of directors became unhappy with her salary demands and the fact that there was too much money spent on fund raising rather than programming. In a final irony, Candy Lightner became a lobbyist for the American Beverage Institute to argue against lowering the legal blood alcohol content too greatly, which she would describe as stopping social drinking without cracking down on the real problem of drunk drivers. Frantzich notes in this case, and in others, how hard it is to determine if the movement or other factors led to positive results, but does note that the number of people killed by drunk drivers has declined. He draws three lessons. The first is that misery seeks company but needs a little help. By uniting the relatives of victims of drunk drivers Lightner had a large constituency that evoked sympathy. Second, she chose the right target. She did not threaten the liquor industry, which has a large financial stake in public policy, but instead targeted irresponsible individuals. Finally, Frantzich notes that activists are human, and as such, are subject to foibles and inconsistencies, that, nevertheless, can be overcome.

A trove of fascinating cases can be found in this work. Persons of virtually all political persuasions are presented and their tactics charted. Frantzich concludes with a final list of lessons or conclusions drawn from all the various cases. From the perspective of the players, he notes that, "citizen activists are made, not born," and "political participation may or may not become habit forming" since some actors continue with their cause while others return to their normal lives (p. 198). Under strategies, he notes, among others, that "organization trumps random acts" and "clearly presented data usually trump data that are difficult to understand and interpret" (pp. 198-99). In discussing winners and losers, Frantzich offers many conclusions, including that you "can't win if you don't play," "media attention is more important than media approval," and "successful policy activists often pay a personal price and may not reap the benefits of the change they initiate" (pp. 200-01).

The book is well and cleverly written. One example refers to Rosa Parks who "stood (or perhaps more accurately sat) her ground" (p. 34). From an academic perspective the book could be improved by discussing the criteria for inclusion or exclusion for the citizen activists. The people chosen highlight a number of issues and a number of different strategies. In addition, each case is listed under various topics, e.g., public opinion, or direct democracy. A paragraph or two tying the case to the phenomenon to which it was related along with some context would be useful to students. Finally, the work could have been academically enhanced by providing a discussion, at the beginning or end, of the works of political scientists whose theories these citizens were inadvertently confirming. For example, Kingdon, in his book on agenda setting, points to the importance of indicators to make one's case;[2] while Cobb and Elder note the importance of symbols and emotion in expanding the issue.[3] And E. E. Schattschneider, mentioned once, sets the theoretical framework for defining and redefining issues.[4]

These are merely minor quibbles with what might have been. The work as it stands is interesting and enlightening. It stares down apathy and cynicism and proves that anyone has the potential to have a major impact on public policy. It does not glamorize the process; it indicates that victory is not always at hand and that sometimes victories may be short-lived. Nonetheless, many ordinary people have made a difference. This book would be very useful in courses on political participation or public policy making.

Notes

[1]. Robert D. Putnam, et al., *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), and Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, January 1995, pp.64-78.

[2]. John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies,* 2d ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

[3]. Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, *Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda Building* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

[4]. E. E. Schattshneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hindale, IL:

Dryden Press, 1960).

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