

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Jeffrey M. Berry. *The Interest Group Society*. New York and London: Longman, 1997. xiii + 267 pp. \$24.87 (paper), ISBN 978-0-673-52511-6.

Reviewed by Garry Young (University of Missouri, Columbia)

Published on H-Pol (February, 1997)

Jeffrey Berry has produced a new—the third—edition of his well-received text, *The Interest Group Society*. Concisely written, yet comprehensive, the book lends itself well to courses in political science, modern political history, and political journalism. Indeed, the Berry book is an excellent choice, if not the best choice, as the core text in an undergraduate course on interest groups.

It is potentially useful for other undergraduate courses as well—for example, introductory U.S. politics courses that emphasize group politics. Because of its wide-ranging focus, it is probably not as useful for courses on federal institutions such as Congress and the Presidency. Because of its national focus, it is not a potential text for courses on sub-national politics. Because of its derivative nature it is hard to see the text being used for graduate courses, but it would provide an excellent starting point for those graduate students lacking a solid native or undergraduate grounding in U.S. politics. Finally, this is a fine choice for the interested non-academic who simply wants to learn more about a topic that typically is treated with large measures of hysteria. Indeed, as a primer on the ins and outs of interest group politics in the United States, this is a far better choice than other more colorful polemics—for example, *Demosclerosis* (Rauch, 1994) and *Showdown at Gucci Gulch* (Birnbaum and Murray, 1987).

Aside from an introductory chapter that presents the Madisonian notion of factions coupled with a nice discussion of pluralism, the book includes chapters on the modern proliferation of interest groups; the impact of interests on political parties; mobilization and organization; lobbyists; influencing public opinion and grassroots lobbying; PACs; lobbying federal institutions; issue networks; and the problem of moneyed interest bias and representation.

Those familiar with the previous editions will find much that is familiar. Berry retains his enviable ability to pack an extensive topic into a compact volume in a manner that is interesting, clear, and concise, yet com-

plete. Aside from up-dating trends and replacing aging anecdotes, this edition makes two key structural changes. Most notably, the chapter on interest groups and political parties is a new and welcome addition. Here, Berry documents the inter-relationship between parties and interest groups; the tension between vote-maximizing party regulars and the more ideological, policy-oriented, interests like the Christian Coalition; and the increasing aggressiveness with which the parties have pursued “soft money” contributions. The other major change relates to the final chapter, “Bias and Representation.” Here Berry combines the final two chapters from the 2d edition (“The Rise of Business” and “Reform”) into a single chapter that objectively evaluates the corporate bias characteristic of the interest group system.

If there needs to be a modification of future editions, I believe it is in the area of interest groups and sub-national politics. As is increasingly clear, the national government is no longer the only game around. Interest groups increasingly are focusing on state and local policymaking, and there is every reason to believe that this trend will become more pronounced as states are left to deal with different types of regulatory and social welfare responsibilities.

The book avoids extensive presentation of data—indeed, there are few figures and tables—in favor of a narrative style that weaves scholarly based results and theory into the given topic. Because Berry does this so well, and because the book is comprehensive in scope, it forms an excellent foundation for a course on interest group politics. Each chapter can frame a section, which can then be supplemented with lectures and readings that go into more depth on particular subjects (chapters from *Interest Group Politics* [Cigler and Loomis, 1996], or books like *Interest Groups and Congress* [Wright, 1996], just to give two examples). I will add that, at least here at the University of Missouri, students generally have praised earlier editions of *The Interest Group Society*. This new edition should receive a similar response.

References

Jeffrey Birnbaum and Alan Murray, *Showdown at Gucci Gulch: Lawmakers, Lobbyists, and the Unlikely Triumph of Tax Reform* (New York: Random House, 1987).

Allan Cigler and Burditt Loomis, eds., *Interest Group Politics*, 4th ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 1996).

Jonathan Rauch, *Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government* (New York: Times Books, 1994).

John Wright, *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).

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 list discussion logs at:
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Garry Young. Review of Berry, Jeffrey M., *The Interest Group Society*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. February, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=813>

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.