

6-1-1995

Icons of Democracy - American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats, by B. Miroff

Michael A. Genovese

Loyola Marymount University, mgenovese@lmu.edu

Repository Citation

Genovese, Michael A., "Icons of Democracy - American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats, by B. Miroff" (1995). *Political Science Faculty Works*. 10.
http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/poli_fac/10

Recommended Citation

Genovese, Michael A. 1995. "Icons of Democracy - American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats, by B. Miroff." *American Political Science Review* 89(2):501-502.

alents, underestimating payouts, leasing, and avoiding full funding requirements are some of the accounting tactics he describes to show how the structure of accounting for money can affect budgets and funding streams.

Similarly, he shows that underfunding, playing with the baselines, selective collaboration and isolation, creative use of inflation, and other budget decision procedures help make decisions that change how the game is played. The ability to dedicate funds, capitalize high support levels, diversify financing sources, index spending, and maximize administrative discretion are shown to create favorable outcomes. Meyer also presents numerous rationales for the spending of money that help program advocates continue to prosper. In effect, his treatment of rationales walks the reader through a handbook of budgeting rhetoric.

Some may find the book a bit journalistic in style. He tells stories, he makes arguments, he prescribes. In some parts, he seems to be saying, "trust me," because his methodology is dependent on evidence and testimony from sources and persons whose identity he cannot reveal. Yet the preponderant weight of evidence he presents is available from the public domain and so should be credited. Meyers adds one more series of data to the discussion on why the academic incremental explanations are lacking. At the *details* level of providing information, the book makes signal contributions. As a theory or embracing perspective, it could be tighter, but it helps us understand what is really happening in many arenas of federal budgeting.

Although the book begins as an attack on the received wisdom of incrementalism, it ends as a series of policy prescriptions. Meyers wants to see budget reform and finishes with a rather skeletal series of recommendations.

University of Illinois, Chicago

JOHN WANAT

Icons of Democracy: American Leaders as Heroes, Aristocrats, Dissenters, and Democrats. By Bruce Miroff. New York: Basic Books, 1993. 422p. \$25.00.

Is there such a thing as "democratic leadership," or are the two terms (in Thomas E. Cronin's words) "warring concepts"? In this ambitious, and thought-provoking work, Bruce Miroff examines "the rich variety of forms that American political leadership has taken" (p. 2) and explores the possibility of achieving forms of democratic leadership in the United States.

Recognizing that "leadership has rarely fit comfortably with democracy in America," and that "the most committed democrats have been suspicious of the very idea of leadership," Miroff asks, "What kinds of democratic leadership and followership might be possible in America?" (pp. viii, 1). Is the tension between leadership and democracy creative or destructive of democratic values?

Miroff finds four types of leadership in the United States: *aristocratic*, *democratic*, *heroic*, and *dissenting*. The author then examines each of the styles of leadership as practiced by representative figures in American history. Aristocratic leadership attempts "to tame the democratic passions of the American masses" by allowing those of "superior eminence" to rule over the people (p. 5). The two different but related examples of aristocratic leader-

ship discussed by Miroff are Alexander Hamilton and John Adams. This leadership style, according to the author, is not compatible with democracy. Democratic leadership "requires a respect for followers, rooted in a recognition of what Herman Melville called the 'democratic dignity' of every individual" (p. 2). The goals of democratic leadership are egalitarian. Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt serve as Miroff's icons of democratic leadership, with Lincoln serving as "the best model Americans have of democratic leadership" (p. 124). Dissenting leadership tends to come, understandably, from outsiders. They challenge the status quo. They are change agents with a distinctly antiestablishment tinge. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eugene V. Debs, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are Miroff's examples of dissenting leaders. The heroic leader "assumes the mantle of democratic champion to pursue a self-aggrandizing role that jeopardizes democratic public life" (p. 7). The leader presumes to be the larger-than-life embodiment of the people; and the masses are spectators, not democratic citizens. Theodore Roosevelt and John Kennedy serve as examples of heroic leaders.

The case studies are uniformly strong and integrate the concerns for leadership style with the stories of each individual leader. Especially valuable are the chapters dealing with Lincoln and King. Miroff is at his best when assessing the contributions of these two men, whom he clearly admires.

Given the rich variety of leadership models in the United States, Miroff stresses that "if democracy is in need of nurturance by leaders committed to democratic values, then how Americans conceptualize leadership becomes all the more important" (p. 350). To accept the aristocratic or heroic models of leadership is to accept an elite model of leadership incompatible with democratic values. Miroff opts for some variation on the democratic and dissenting models. "We possess," he writes, "a rich and complex tradition, and it includes exemplars of democratic and dissenting leadership that can, with suitable adaptations, still be emulated" (p. 358). If we are truly concerned with creating a healthy democratic leadership, we must remember that "greater American leadership rests on fuller American citizenship" (p. 358).

In Miroff's vision, the only form of leadership compatible with democracy rests on respect for the citizen, the role of the leader as teacher and principled visionary, empowerment of the people, the promotion of egalitarianism, and the meshing together of the masculine and feminine sides of the individual (Lincoln's *forté*, according to Miroff).

While stressing the importance of strong citizenship, Miroff gives us few clues as to what, in the citizen, responds to different types of American leadership. What needs do these different types of leaders satisfy in the citizenry? Are there times when we might, quite legitimately, want—and even need—strong or heroic leadership? Under what circumstances might aristocratic leaders elevate the tastes and ways of the masses? Is democratic leadership a leadership for all seasons? A work of this scope and ambition cannot be without its faults, but those faults are minor compared to the wealth of insights contained within these pages.

Icons of Democracy is a most impressive work, which should serve as a major contribution to the study of American politics. Especially useful for advanced political science courses in leadership studies, the presidency, and American political thought, this book is an

example of outstanding scholarship and should have a significant impact on the study of American political leadership for years to come.

Loyola Marymount University MICHAEL A. GENOVESE

Politics, Process, and American Trade Policy. By Sharyn O'Halloran. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. 200p. \$37.50.

The purpose of this book is to document, historically and with a few econometric models, the extent to which we can explain changes over time in U.S. trade policy by invoking the structures and procedures of the U.S. Congress, particularly its willingness to delegate its constitutional power over foreign trade to the executive.

The book begins with a succinct summary of some of the strands of trade policy literature, though the survey is not without error. The pressure group model does not need to assume that capital is mobile (as the author asserts on p. 13). The mobility or otherwise of factors simply determines whether interest group demands are factor-specific or industry-specific, which, in turn, depends partly on whether one wishes to explain policy in the long or the short term.

Chapters 3-5 specify and test three hypotheses. The first is that when a new party attains power, the shift in trade policy will be larger than that predicted by a simple median voter model, because the median party member is some distance from the median voter (p. 29). This is tested in a time series regression of average tariff levels on party control of the Congress, with a control variable (GNP) to account for interest group influences. The author concludes that "even after accounting for changes in constituency demands, party significantly influences the tariff" (p. 68). One may question whether GNP is an adequate proxy for interest group effects, and the amount of variation in the tariff level that the author explains is very small for time-series data. I also believe the author might better have used tariff changes—rather than levels—as the dependent variable, since overall levels are the result of a very long historical accretion.

The next two hypotheses are that Congress will delegate more to the executive when it has similar preferences and that protection will decline with more delegation, since the president speaks to a larger constituency and may favor freer trade. The econometric test cited (chap. 5) shows how Congress delegates more trade authority to the executive when the economy is healthy and that such delegation yields lower tariff levels. Again, one may question whether fluctuations in GNP measure the consistency of executive and congressional trade preferences, particularly when the author has already used GNP to measure interest group influence.

Chapter 5 also provides a history of trade bills to 1984. The last chapter contains an admirably clear discussion of the evolution of "fast track" from its introduction in 1974 up to the vote on the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 and how Congress uses "fast track" provisions to reduce uncertainty and acquire information, while still retaining a great deal of control over trade policy delegated to the executive.

This book should be of interest to scholars of Congress and trade policy alike, and the argument that "institutions matter" is surely convincing. The author's attempt to separate congressional process and interest group

influence on U.S. trade policy is less successful, since the latter is usually more amenable to cross-sectional test than to time-series tests.

University of Iowa JOHN CONYBEARE

Community Power in a Postreform City: Politics in New York City. By Robert F. Pecorella. Armonk: Sharpe, 1994. 240p. \$45.00.

This monograph focuses on how the "inherent divisions between citywide and community-based interests" are "a central focus of regime transformation in New York" (p. 195). It offers both an analysis of historical trends in administrative and political centralization and decentralization and an assessment of the city's system of *community boards* as of the mid-1980s. By putting the city's current efforts at administrative decentralization in a broad historical and theoretical framework, Pecorella reminds us that the city continues to be a fascinating, if often frustrating, laboratory of urban democracy.

Pecorella distinguishes three periods in the New York's political development, each triggered by a fiscal crisis growing out of the breakdown of prevailing governing arrangements among business elites, political leaders, city agencies, and the attentive public. In Pecorella's reading, the era of machine politics began in the 1870s and lasted through the 1920s. Its rules of governance, or regime, centralized influence over administrative practices in the hands of party leaders, who struck deals with business elites, while decentralizing political ties to neighborhoods through ward and patronage politics.

The entropic tendency of ward politics, compounded by Tammany's inability to reproduce skilled leadership at the top, opened the way, during the Depression, for reform intervention. Led initially by Fiorello LaGuardia, reformers cut out the influence of particularistic interests and concentrated power in newly professionalized bureaucracies. Over time, however, this reform regime led to the fragmentation of administrative functions and hampered the ability of citywide political leaders to exercise central authority over policy. Following Martin Shefter's work, Pecorella sees the New York City fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s partly as a consequence of the inability to control demand for these functionally specialized services and partly as a strategic moment in which business elites, acting through fiscal monitors, reimposed control over the fragmented bureaucracy of the reform era.

At the same time, pressure from below had also welled up against autonomous bureaucracies. Demands for community control, citizen participation, and greater responsiveness to neighborhood concerns led those who reformulated New York City's charter in 1975 and 1989 to formalize a system of 59 community boards with advisory influence over city budgeting, land use decisions, and service delivery. Because it reforms the reform regime, Pecorella terms this period the "post-reform" regime. He argues that it is characterized by the centralization of overall fiscal control in the office of the mayor and the fiscal monitors and the review of agency practices by geographically decentralized bodies.

After criticizing the antidemocratic tendencies of fiscal centralization, Pecorella turns his attention to how well this community board system is functioning. Drawing