

Serow, Ann G., and Everett C. Ladd. 2016. *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*, 6th edition. Baltimore, MD: Lanahan Publishers.

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It was a great pleasure to read the many classic and contemporary essays and excerpts included in this very popular reader. Serow and Ladd deserve a great deal of credit for weaving together a large volume with a wide selection that offers instructors a great deal of leeway in reading assignments and course direction. It is not a sermonizing volume that takes us down a solitary or narrow path to emerge at the end with only a single set of conclusions about the American democratic tradition and evolution. We are, instead, allowed to explore the messiness of American democracy—messy in terms of values, processes and outcomes in a dynamic political, social and economic environment.

Classic authors such as Tocqueville, appearing twice in the reader, offer us a great foundational understanding of American democracy and its values. Tocqueville is the first author in the reader. The selection of the famous French observer's writings in *Democracy in America* places a great deal of emphasis on the condition of equality that he saw in the lives of "free" individuals in American society. The reading and other selected readings are stand-alone, perhaps leaving the work of knitting together the many contradictions underlying Tocqueville's observation to students and instructors exploring the never-ending struggle to expand the nation's vision of freedom and equality. Clearly, equality has yet to be fully realized, which is highlighted in a selection by Cornel West.

The selections on the Constitutional branches were carefully chosen. Classic works paired well with selections from more contemporary voices. There are separate sections for the Presidency and the Executive Branch. Robert Reich's essay was particularly effective, but would

be better served if the selection was part of a broader section called “Bureaucracy” rather than “Executive Branch.” Reich is speaking to the issue of administrative leadership in a large bureaucracy. He is also speaking to the issue of what it is like to be a political appointee in a system composed of both appointees and career civil servants. If that theme were further developed in a section called “Bureaucracy,” it would strengthen the anthology.

The selection of tweets transmitted by Senator McCain to his, for lack of a better term, “followers” was particularly interesting. Twitter has not been part of my experience, but clearly will be an important political tool in the hands of both Senator McCain and President Donald Trump. What I learned from these tweets is that the technology is a great tool for anyone interested in spouting off about anything. I did get a chuckle out of Senator McCain’s disparaging comment about wasting a million dollars on Mormon cricket abatement. As a Gentile (non-Mormon) resident of Utah and a former resident of Nevada, I found McCain’s insensitive comment about Utah culture was well-blended with his highly uninformed comment about Mormon crickets. Having experienced Mormon cricket swarms in the more desolate parts of Northern Nevada, I think that a million dollars for abatement sounds like a pretty good deal. The little bugs eat everything...roofing, furniture, wall coverings, carpet, and each other. In terms of his list of supposed wasteful expenditures, McCain uses short bursts to score political points.

My point here is a bit less about the crickets and a lot more about how technology shapes ill-informed political dialogue. It ties in well with articles about conflict-laden media content which draws in the public looking for interesting often content-free drama. It would be interesting to see how the use of rather banal technology, rather than foreign hacking, has driven American populism. Twitter and related technology is a great tool in the hands of those on the

Left and Right who have little to say but who seek to influence the masses with brief commentary. In the process, we reject the use of dialogue to fully understand the priorities of others in the democratic process.

The edited book could do more to make this connection clearer to the reader. As one thumbs through the volume, one notices the thoughtful and well-crafted words of authors from a pre-Internet Age. As was pointed out innumerable times, the Founders intended to create a system where change is difficult to achieve. Thoughtful dialogue and consensus on the need for collective action moves a system built to resist change; but building that consensus requires minds open to ideas and solutions. Paradoxically, the forces of change—to include technology—pose a unique challenge to the processes, dialogue, and outcomes in the American political process. In practice, technology has too often served to limit consensus-building across ideological lines.

Future editions of the book should, of course, highlight the history and current reality of American populism. I, too, am an author and entirely sympathetic to any political science scholar who published a textbook in 2016! Who would have guessed? All the more reason for a seventh edition that includes reference and reflection on a unique election and its impact on institutions, processes and policy outcomes. The section on Political Economy and Public Welfare would surely be impacted in significant ways. I think that bringing together some key articles on sanctuary laws and immigration would be quite useful. How have things changed and how have they remained the same in the nearly two centuries since Tocqueville's visit to the United States?

In general, I found the Lanahan reader to be much superior to the Nivola and Rosenbloom reader that I had used a quarter century ago when I first taught American Politics.

The inclusion of a wide range of authors in the Lanahan reader offers choice to the student and instructor. It is a balanced selection that incorporates the voice of free market economist Milton Friedman. The Friedman selection was prescient given the current political climate and the role that market capitalism will play in the short and possibly long term. The selections are presented without an interpretive agenda, which makes the book more accessible to a broader range of student learners and instructors. That alone might explain its unique and lasting place in the American politics canon.