

# Letters

## Studying Black Politics

I have read with interest the series of articles about black political scientists and the study of black politics in the U.S. Most recently, Ernest Wilson III has offered an explanation for "Why Political Scientists Don't Study Black Politics, but Historians and Sociologists Do" (Summer), and the argument he presents is certainly thought-provoking. Professor Wilson thinks the answer lies in the emphasis political science places on the study of elites, and of course blacks have not generally been included among elites. Blacks, he says, have historically been deprived of elite status and hence rarely are involved in authoritative decisions; they are more frequently the objects or victims of the use of power; politics, as such, often involves the creative design of adaptation to disenfranchisement and economic domination through reliance on nonformal channels like the black church." But couldn't the same be said of women? And yet we have an abundant literature on women in politics! Substituting "women" for "blacks" (with suitable substitution of feminist groups for "nonformal channels like the black church") in Professor Wilson's syllogism would produce a false conclusion: "political science doesn't study women in politics." I therefore think there must be some additional explanation for the particular plight of black politics in American political science—though I have no alternative hypothesis of my own to propose.

I might also add, in a self-serving way, that there are more recent books about black politics written by political scientists than Professor Wilson chose to cite in his article. Among them are two published by our Press: Leonard Cole's *Blacks in Power: A Comparative Study of*

*Black and White Elected Officials* (1975) and James Button's *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960's Riots* (1978).

Sanford G. Thatcher  
Editor-in-Chief  
Princeton University Press

Ernest J. Wilson III ("Why Political Scientists Don't Study Black Politics, But Historians and Sociologists Do") deserves applause for his excellent and thought-provoking article exposing the paucity of scholarly attention political scientists give to the examination of Afro-American political life. Wilson rightly takes both black and white political scientists to task for this neglect. He also posits, by way of a syllogism, that as a result of its emphasis on power holders and decision-making, political science largely ignores those individuals and groups who are less powerful, including black Americans.

While I consider Wilson's argument sound in most respects, I wonder if our profession's neglect of Afro-American political life actually is due to the elitist paradigm. As a matter of fact, a very fruitful area of investigation for political scientists is the issue of power in and around black institutions in which there are black power holders. For example, the processes of governance and decision-making, leadership styles, conflict emergence and resolution, organizational cultures, and internal dynamics and external environments in relation to historically black colleges and universities could very easily be the focus of political-science examination and analysis under the prevailing elite paradigm. However, political scientists choose not to investigate this aspect of Afro-American life either.

My judgment is that the lack of scholarly attention given to Afro-American political life results not so much from a paradigmatic problem but from a numbers problem. Simply put, the numbers of black political scientists—those who actually need to take the lead in the analysis of Afro-American political life and thought—are unfortunately small. Black American politics will gain a respected place in the discipline of political science when there is a critical mass of Afro-American political scientists who focus their scholarly attention on the study of Afro-American political life.

Floyd W. Hayes, III  
Consultant to the Chairman  
Equal Employment Opportunity  
Commission

### **Arms Control at the Annual Meeting**

I was one of about 500 who crowded into Hilton's Napoleon Ballroom in New Orleans on August 31 for an APSA plenary to hear Brent Skowcroft, Robert McNamara and James Schlesinger talk about arms control. I went away bemused at their discussion and sharply critical of APSA.

To start with APSA. Those responsible for the plenary acted narrowly in their choice of speakers. The former public officials on the dais represented a narrow spectrum of views, and though Skowcroft is a self-professed conservative (having served with Ford and Reagan) his contribution, as that of the Kennedy-LBJ-Carter appointees, did not deviate from a self-proclaimed moderate position. Actually it is not moderate at all but rather a highly instrumentalist and conventional mode of thinking that enforces an immoderate reliance on the kind of technocratic expertise they are good at, on more and more extreme sophistication in the structure of nuclear arsenals on all sides, and on huger and huger economic outlays to purchase such sophistication.

A George Kennan should have been there. Or an Admiral LaRoque. Or, on the other side, a Richard Perle. That would

have kept the presentations and debate within reach of intellectual diversity and perhaps—because of the resulting contestation—within reach of a degree of intellectual honesty. The technocrats might then have had to face the harder questions instead of repeatedly asserting that “of course” Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) is inappropriate and “of course” movements like the Freeze are well-intentioned nonsense. This is as far as they got in even acknowledging that others differ from them for good reasons or that there might be from some quarters a fundamental critique of their darling deterrence theories; or of their Orwellian penchant for dressing up the USA's first strike posture in Europe as “extended deterrence”; or of the degree to which they remain immersed in the old-think of mutually assured destruction (MAD).

For me, their MADness seemed to reach new proportions when in response to a question from a young man at one of our military academies who asked whether it might be so that the United States over the years has in effect forced the Soviets to adopt our way of thinking about nuclear strategy (and thus succeeded too well), Schlesinger took the question as an opportunity to joke about how well we educate the Russians, thereby also filling the air with gentle hints of praise for himself and McNamara. A Kennan would not have let him get away with that.

Nor would a Kennan have failed to introduce and introduce early the problem posed by the imminent proliferation of real nuclear capability to other nations. It is a problem in its own right, but it is especially a problem for those attached to deterrence theory. The question is overwhelming: whose mutually assured destruction will be guaranteed by whom at what time and under what conditions, given not just two players, but three four five six. . . ? But the panel never raised it. I did, when I finally got the attention of the chair, but it was the last question and people, and the moderator, wanted to go to Bourbon Street or the nearest bar. The panelists solemnly took turns to assure everyone that yes proliferation was a problem. And that was that. Not a glimmer even then that maybe they would

have to re-think what they think they know.

I don't believe this is an isolated instance of "limiting debate," and thereby short-changing APSA members. The previous evening's plenary on Reform of the American Political System, featuring Barber B. Conable, Thomas E. Cronin, and Lloyd Cutler was if anything even more restricted in the scope of views presented and if possible even more a tedious regurgitation of old critiques and old middle range and instrumentalist solutions.

Perhaps the multitudinous panels that dominate the daily agenda of our APSA meetings may be forgiven for failure to provide serious contestation or for failure to probe issues from the roots. Perhaps. . . . But surely APSA *plenaries* must rise to contestation and serious intellectual challenge of assumed verities.

Or what are we about?

John Rensenbrink  
Bowdoin College

### The Chair Replies:

As we put together the Saturday evening plenary for the 1985 meetings, program chair Joe Cooper and I had several criteria in mind. We wanted people who had senior-level government experience grappling with arms control issues. We wanted that experience to span several administrations, Republican and Democratic. We wanted panelists, moreover, who were intellectually alive and active in the current debate. And we wanted them, once in New Orleans, to give their frank opinions about issues at the top of the current arms control agenda.

We believe that we accomplished all of these objectives. We got a strong panel. We got a lively (certainly not "technocratic") discussion. That discussion concentrated on one of *the* crucial arms control issues: the interplay between offensive and defensive systems. We got a responsive audience, which seemed to appreciate also the exposure to faces not regularly seen at APSA annual meetings.

We thought the Association was well served.

Of course there could have been other perspectives represented—though James Schlesinger was, to set the record straight, a *Nixon* appointee as Secretary of Defense, and the current convergence of his and McNamara's thinking on SDI is itself an interesting commentary on present policy. Of course the primary substantive focus could have been nuclear proliferation. Or it could have been the danger of nuclear terrorism, or world hunger, or the threat of global financial crisis, or another very important world issue.

Hopefully future plenaries will in fact cover these and other subjects, with varied mixes of panelists. Hopefully their organizers and chairs will not be thought to be "limiting debate" because they encourage a focused discussion, recognize some audience hands before others, or bring a session to a conclusion 20 to 30 minutes *after* its scheduled closing time. Hopefully those APSA members who could not be present that final evening of August will consult the on-the-record views of the panelists: McNamara, for example, co-authored with George Kennan and others a major article arguing *against* our "extended deterrence" policy in Europe. And hopefully others who did attend the 1985 plenaries will let planners of future programs know *their* reactions. Did they too come away "bemused" and "sharply critical," as Professor Rensenbrink did? Or did they leave the Versailles Ballroom in different frames of mind?

Whether the plenaries of 1985 were the sorts APSA ought one day to repeat should depend, in the last analysis, on what APSA members want: what stimulates them, enlivens their teaching and research, offers what they do not get at their home ballparks, improves their comprehension of politics and public issues. Only they can be the judges. Hopefully they will keep the comments coming.

I. M. Destler  
Senior Fellow,  
Institute for International Economics,  
and Chair,  
1985 Plenary on Arms Control

## Recruiting Minorities

I have a comment on the Benedict–Nelson–Schwartz–Shea study which appeared in the Fall, 1985 *PS* (pp. 789–96) that I would like carried in the forthcoming edition.

As a minority Ph.D. candidate who will be undertaking the tortuous enterprise of securing a teaching/research position in a year or two, I was somewhat impressed by the minority recruitment methods undertaken by the University of Utah in at least one respect.

There are political and institutional constraints that undermine efforts by black political scientists to secure teaching and research positions of value. In the context of the institutional constraints some university administrations adopt a farcical approach to equal opportunity employment, totally devoid of any sincerity to the postulates of equal employment and minority outreach. They go through the motions of affirmative action, but hire no ethnic minorities. This is attributable to several reasons, ranging from political sensitivity on the part of an administration, through the racial composition of the college/community environment, to concerns about damaging the prospects for attracting a certain kind of financial support with the possession of a "colored" image.

The difficult job prospects in the field is one practical reason for the dearth of black political scientists and the small number of blacks and Hispanics who consciously decide to make scholarship in the field a career objective. In this respect the Utah approach offers some reassurance of at least some institutional initiative which goes the extra mile. Some departments don't even go one foot in this kind of search.

While I agree with the writers that wide adoption of the Utah approach does not guarantee a positive effect on affirmative action, it seems reasonable to suggest that emulation of that approach by political science departments of other universities could serve at least two purposes. First, it could provide a framework for genuine outreach to the small pool of minority political science talent. Second,

it could serve to instill confidence in minority graduate students and prospective scholars that there really are functional mechanisms that could enable them to fulfill their occupational and intellectual desires.

The Benedict–Nelson–Schwartz–Shea study and the concern about the low levels of entry into the field by blacks and Hispanics suggest what could become a fruitful undertaking by either the APSA or the National Conference of Black Political Scientists—a study of recruitment methods of ethnic minorities by colleges and universities across the country. Such a study could reveal the variety of methods employed for this purpose, including the non-existent ones, and permit a comparative cost-benefit assessment of their use. More importantly, though, such a project could provide insights into ways of attracting minorities to a field so close to the heart of many.

Ivelaw Griffith  
City University of New York

## Insuring Executive Compliance

Although my thoughts on this topic were occasioned by President Reagan's evasion of Congressional mandates with respect to funding for the *contras* harassing the Nicaraguan government, there is a general principle that transcends this particular issue on which I should like to hear colleagues' opinions.

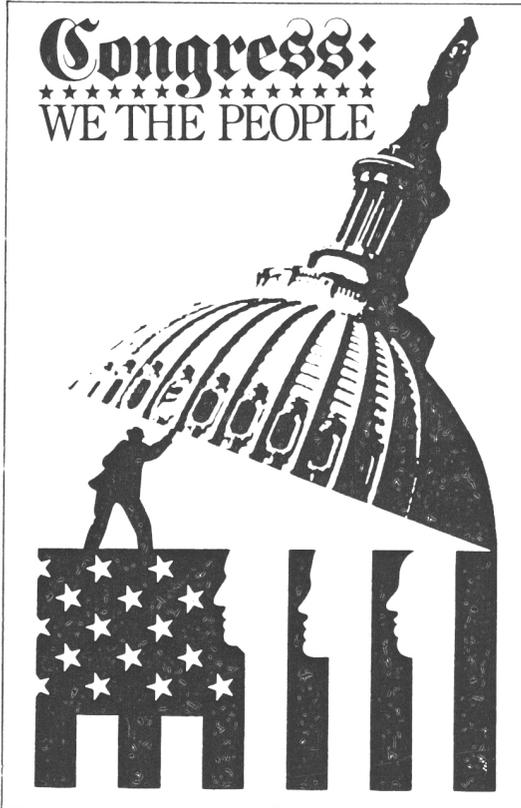
The Congress has a General Accounting Office to monitor expenditure of appropriated funds, and its own Budget Office. It seems to me that we are overdue for an Office of Legislation Compliance, which would, on request of a member of Congress, or of a minimum number of members, ascertain if an executive officer or agency was not enforcing the law, or violating it in some other way; and which would act as the legal arm of the Congress in pursuing remedies through the courts to secure compliance. Occasionally this type of action is taken by individuals, and sometimes by groups of congressmen and senators acting independently; but it seems to me that it should be a function of the legislative branch as

a whole, and a continuing rather than a sporadic one.

I should be interested in your readers' comments.

Martin C. Needler  
University of New Mexico

# Congress in Action



For more information about how you might use **Congress: We The People** call 1-800-LEARNER. For review copies of the Study Guide and Faculty Guide which have been designed to accompany the series call the American Political Science Association, 1-202-483-2512.

Educational Excellence  
Through Telecommunications



Annenberg/CPB Project

**Congress: We The People** is an exciting new resource for political science courses on Congress and the legislative process.

The series includes 26 half-hour video cassettes that show the day-to-day activities of Congress and provide analysis and commentary by leading political scientists.

Faculty are finding that **Congress: We The People** is an excellent supplement to existing courses. Among the topics addressed are: congressional elections; committee leadership; lobbying; constituent relations; lawmaking; budgeting; ethics; and congressional relations with the President, courts and the media.

The series is also being used as a complete broadcast telecourse for students who complete most of their study off-campus, and as a resource for noncredit and informal study.

**Congress: We The People** is hosted by Norman Ornstein, Catholic University, and Edwin Newman, noted journalist. It was produced by the American Political Science Association and WETA, the public television station in Washington, D.C.

A special feature of **Congress: We The People** is its adaptation for use with any of following three commonly used textbooks:

- **Congress and Its Members** by Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, D.C. 1985.
- **The United States Congress: People, Places and Policy** by Charles O. Jones, the Dorsey Press, Homewood, Illinois, 1982.
- **Congress: Process and Policy** by Randall B. Ripley, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1983.