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I have taught introduction to US politics for thirteen years at four different universities in four different regions of the country. Around this time every year, I reconsider three questions: Should I assign a textbook, and, if so, which one? Is there a better “reader” than the one I am using now? Finally, is there a current work of political science – something like *Bowling Alone* or *Culture War*?— that is worth assigning to non majors?

These are probably fairly standard questions. The problem with the textbooks is that they almost always seem too elementary and therefore an (expensive) insult to students. Why not skip the textbook? The problem with the reader is that there just doesn’t seem to be the perfect one. I’m looking for a collection of primary documents (say Brutus, Supreme Court opinions, and key speeches by Presidents) combined with classic selections from political science (from Downs, Mayhew, etc.). I’ve assigned nearly ten versions over the years, and I am still surprised at how disappointed I am with these.

Happily, the textbook question is easier than the other two questions. More years than not, I have assigned Landy and Milkis’s *American Government*, now in its third edition. The primary reason I choose this textbook is that it does not insult my students. If anything, it challenges students with its comparatively dense writing. But the book is challenging for another reason, and this brings me to the other reason why I choose this one over others.

Landy and Milkis force their readers to confront the development of American politics over time. Put differently, this textbook is way more historically oriented than its competition. And this helps me make some progress on what has become one of my main objectives for the class: teaching American political history to students who, for whatever reason, lack a basic knowledge of it. Without being

forced to learn in it in my class, the vast majority of my Honors students – students who boast SAT scores as high as those from all but a handful of colleges and universities-- would become college graduates without being able to distinguish the New Deal from the Great Society, the Revolution of 1800 from Jacksonian America, the War of 1812 from the Cold War. Many of them would know that campaign finance reform is a controversial topic, and perhaps could identify what number of senators it takes to end a filibuster, but very few would be able to identify major developments in the constitutional order over time. Almost none would be able to explain how the parties have changed their positions and their constituencies in the last 100 years.

It is true that many have observed this problem in our college graduates, and it's hard to know who holds responsibility for it and whether it can eventually be fixed. But at the level of choosing a textbook, assigning Landy and Milkis a pretty good step in the right direction. Each of the eleven substantive chapters is arranged historically, and the authors' expertise is clear in the chapters on the presidency, parties, and federalism. For those who know their *Presidential Greatness* (University Press of Kansas, 2000), it won't come as a surprise that the authors know how to succinctly and expertly present what is essential in understanding the parties and the presidency. But just as strong is the chapter on federalism, which more than any account of which I am aware, explains just where new federalism is new and where it is not and where it is evolving in our current practice. Also worth mentioning are chapters four and six, "Political Development" and "Political Economy." In my graduate seminars and upper level courses, I've pointed international students to the chapter on political development in order to provide a crash course in American history. The chapter on political economy is worth mentioning for its unusual clarity in explaining material that I have always found difficult. Moreover, some students are attracted to its central virtue, following the money to understand politics.

To be sure, there are costs to choosing a historically inclined textbook. For me, one is that I sometimes wonder if I should choose a textbook that replicates so closely my own objectives – that is, maybe I should save some of the historical material for class discussions. Another is that there is the concern that the historical angle will lose students who chose the class because they are most interested in partisan

politics today. I would add that the book's seeming density might be amplified by its old school (and less pricey) layout: it lacks the colorful boxes that seem standard in today's textbooks. These are very real questions and a reminder that the choice of one textbook over another narrows choices down the road. I sometimes adopt Coleman, Goldstein, and Howell's *Cause and Consequence in American Politics* for its attention to the problem of causation in politics. It, too, avoids insulting students. Others will wonder if Landy and Milkis give enough attention to public opinion and political behavior.

But these costs, like the price of a textbook itself, are in my view worth it. They are especially so in this case because Landy and Milkis's version wears well over time and pairs very nicely with courses that emphasize the use of court cases and other documents. Hopefully, they will continue their collaboration and make that reader I need.

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Years ago, I assigned the first edition of this book. I found it clear and full of information that was especially salutary for students with little education in political history. I did not assign it again because its historical narrative was difficult to adapt to my more topical course. There was no single chapter, for example, on political parties, and I had to select pages from all over the book in order to cover this, and other, topics. Doing so, moreover, undermined the principal virtue the book, the narrative and analysis of political development.

This new edition has been redesigned with the aim of accommodating a topical course structure without corrupting that virtue. The shortcomings of this adaptation will be discussed below, but because they are more and greater, I will begin with and concentrate on the book's many good qualities.

First is the relationship between content and style. In many introductory texts, unnecessarily technical terminology disguises relatively simple or trivial points and crude dichotomies simplify complicated ideas and problems. Landy and Milkis's text is, on the other hand, a good read, and the authors do not sacrifice complexity or rigor to achieve this. They present important and challenging ideas and arguments in prose that is nuanced but lucid, jargon-free, and pleasant in cadence and variety. This I mean as high praise, especially for a textbook.

This text is a richly analytical course in politics rather than in contemporary political science. It is not confined in its reach to what formal political science methods can grasp, so it can be, as it is, serious about and appreciative of politics as an irreducibly human enterprise. The lows are presented without superciliousness and the highs, of exceptional politicians, without either hagiography or the antiseptic righteousness of revisionism. Notably, therefore, the text can discuss forthrightly and fairly the knotty dilemma of slavery, neither discounting slave ownership among the founders, nor dismissing, for that reason, the authority and sincerity of their principles. Anecdotes throughout the text remind the reader that

circumstances may limit alternatives to hard choices, but they also highlight the essential and constructive role of deliberation and decision in resolving crises and redirecting the course of politics. (I generally emerged from these examples wanting more rather than less, which is the right side of the line to leave students.)

This judicious blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary should discourage students from escaping into easy cynicism or facile idealism. It will instead confront them with the challenges to intellect and prudence posed by the moral and practical complexities of politics.

The text has, of course, its own method, “political development,” and the introduction clearly defines the elements of this approach, critical choices and path dependence. It also neatly introduces the principles of the Declaration and artfully demonstrates their relevance to recent developments and contemporary controversies. Especially appreciated is the connection at the outset between what students have heard about many times, Martin Luther King, and what many have been taught to dismiss as propaganda or hypocrisy, the principles of the Declaration of Independence. The authors do the same good work with the Constitution’s preamble, which students recognize but seldom think about. Each phrase is explained as a crucial purpose of government and then illustrated through examples in political history and contemporary politics.

The body of the book follows a fairly standard sequence but in admirably distinctive ways. The first part, on “Formative Experiences,” begins with “Political Inheritance and Political Culture” which covers concisely Puritanism, slavery, the disputes and ideas leading up to the revolution. It then develops at length the origin, meaning, and importance of the Declaration. There is a separate and excellent chapter on the framing and ratification of the Constitution and a longish chapter that charts the path of political development from these origins.

The next two chapters, Federalism and Political Economy, elaborate the development theme. The chapter on political economy is especially welcome. The general understanding of students, reinforced in college curricula, is that economics and politics are separate and equal disciplines. This chapter explains their

interrelationships, the centrality of economic questions to many of the most significant political disputes and dilemmas in U.S. history, and the way the political questions of general welfare and justice often determine economic policies.

For those with a more topical bent, each of the major institutions (including bureaucracy and political parties) has its own chapter. Each begins with an overview of the Constitutional design and the main elements of the institution's contemporary characteristics. For example, the chapter on Congress covers the structure and role of committees, bicameral politics, the Senate's distinctive regulation of debate, reapportionment and redistricting, staff, and the CBO, GAO, and CRS. The rest of each chapter is devoted to the institution's political development, which illuminates nicely other elements of the structure that have changed significantly over time. This section of the chapter on Congress, for example, explores the rise of careerism, incumbency, and the varying importance of party leadership, and it ends with reflections on contemporary congressional politics and the politics of divided government.

The addition of topical chapters produces some repetition, but repetition is not the enemy. It underscores the wide-ranging influence of particular decisions and developments. Students should see, moreover, how the same problems, decisions, and developments arise in different historical, institutional, and analytical contexts.

A reviewer's bona fide is established, of course, by criticisms. One is that I would like to have seen a more concentrated discussion of the development of the interstate commerce clause, which is so critically important to the vast expansion of national powers. Much on this topic can be found in the book, but it is dispersed. I would also have preferred a fuller and more concentrated discussion of the extraordinary polarization of contemporary congressional parties, the most consequential political development of the last half century. This new circumstance has altered significantly inter-branch relations and the roles and behavior of almost every organizational element of Congress.

One text, however, cannot be everything to everyone. Filling holes and elaborating specific topics are functions for supplementary materials and, lest I forget,

professors. Any other minor criticisms I might have would be little more than the fussing of someone set in his ways. I will indeed adopt this text again next year. If I already had a course with elements of political development, I would definitely adopt it even if I had not been using a general textbook. If I were nearer the beginning of my teaching career, I would design or redesign my course around this unique and excellent text.