

## Symposium: Power and Voice in the USA

A fundamental lesson in political sociology concerns the association between agenda-setting and power: the ability to control or influence which issues receive consideration—and on what terms they are considered—has great consequence for subsequent action. The contributors to this issue's symposium have used the 2012 election in the United States and its aftermath as a point of departure to reflect on how structural and cultural influences affect which voices and messages are heard in decision-making. The insights of the symposium offer perspective on the limits and possibilities of economic, fiscal, and social policy during the coming years.

### In this Issue

Book Abstracts	11
Article Abstracts	12
Announcements	14
Interview with Award Recipient: Greta Krippner	15
Journal Profile: Socio-Economic Review	18
Teaching Political Sociology	20

## The American Corporate Elite and the Election of 2012

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The popular press and Democrats have described the 2012 election as a victory, if not for liberalism, then at least for moderation; it was not. It is true that Barack Obama became the first Democrat since Franklin Roosevelt to win a popular vote majority twice and that he did so in the midst of a sluggish economy experiencing nearly eight percent unemployment. It is also true that the Democrats increased their hold on the Senate and even received a majority of votes in House elections, although gerrymandering by Republican state legislators ensured that the Republicans maintained control of that chamber. When we look at the content of the political discourse in this election, however, especially when viewed in the context of the previous century, it is apparent just how far to the right American politics has moved. Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, and Dwight Eisenhower all advocated policies more progressive than those pushed by President Obama, and even Ronald Reagan sought tax increases on multiple occasions. *Continued on page 2.*

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### Other Symposium Articles

- Isaac Martin, "A Fiscal Sociology of the 2012 Election" 4
- Robin Stryker, "Re-Interpreting Freedom? Obama's Second Inaugural Address" 6

*The American Corporate Elite and the Election of 2012, continued from page 1*

Gerald Ford was ridiculed for his “WIN” (“whip inflation now”) buttons, which implied that the problem could be solved by exhorting individuals to “whip it.” Yet in the same speech, President Ford also proposed a tax cut exclusively for low and middle-income Americans (those with incomes below \$15,000, or about \$70,000 in today’s dollars). He also proposed a public works program, in which the government would hire 175,000 workers, to be funded by an excess profits tax on oil companies. Richard Nixon, another Republican president, proposed a national health insurance plan that included an employer mandate (requiring employers to pay at least 75 percent of the cost), a government-run program covering anyone without access to an employer plan, treatment for mental health and addiction problems, and dental care for all citizens up to age 13. Nixon’s plan, which was more progressive than either the Clinton health care plan of the 1990s or the Obama plan that eventually passed in 2010, was rejected by Democrats who viewed it as too conservative. Senator Edward Kennedy at the time had proposed a universal single-payer plan similar to the one that Canada had recently adopted.

There are several explanations for the rightward turn in American politics since the 1970s, among them the globalization of the world economy, the decline of manufacturing, the shift from “Fordist” to post-Fordist production for the manufacturing that remains, and the development (or resurgence) of neoliberal ideology. I do not dispute these accounts, but I believe that there is a more fundamental issue at the root of these changes: what I call, in my forthcoming book, the fracturing of the American corporate elite (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674072992>). I argue that in the postwar period—from 1945 through about 1973—the leaders of the largest American corporations adopted a pragmatic, moderate approach to politics, in which they played a mediating role between liberals and labor on one hand and traditional laissez-faire conservatives on the other. This group turned rightward during the 1970s, however, and became increasingly fragmented during the 1980s. The resulting vacuum in the political center allowed extremist right-wing elements to reemerge, and to flourish.

American businesspeople have been overwhelmingly conservative since the nineteenth century. Their modal views have included support for free markets with minimal

government intervention, low taxes—both business and personal—and especially, abhorrence of attempts by workers to organize. Yet in the twentieth century, first during the early 1900s but most notably after World War II, a relatively small group of leaders from large corporations developed a more moderate, conciliatory perspective with respect to both government and labor.

In the early 1900s, the National Civic Federation, an organization of moderate business leaders, attempted to temper the most draconian consequences of corporate capitalism, supporting, among other things, the right of workers to organize into independent unions. This quest ultimately failed, and the group was largely dormant by the 1920s. During the Depression, however, several major business leaders expressed support for at least some aspects of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. And during World War II, a group of forward-thinking businesspeople formed the Committee for Economic Development, which became the most prominent expression of the moderate approach taken by the American corporate elite.

The leaders of these large companies were neither liberal nor altruistic. They were strategically pragmatic, however. They recognized that in order to maintain their privileges, it was necessary to have a well-functioning society. This meant a robust economy with high employment, and a workforce with sufficient purchasing power to secure the commodities that American industry was so adept at producing. In adopting these principles, the leaders of large American corporations made their peace with Keynesian economics. They grudgingly came to accept the right of workers to organize into independent unions. They were even willing to support various social programs, including not only increased spending on Social Security but also the expansion, albeit gradual, of civil rights and equal opportunity. Along with this was a willingness to tackle major economic issues in a balanced manner, an attempt to play a mediating role between liberals and labor on one hand and laissez faire conservatives on the other.

One consequence of the corporate elite’s moderate approach during the postwar period was that the right-wing elements within the American business community became increasingly marginalized, with views that were considered outside the bounds of acceptable political discourse. President Eisenhower, in a letter to his brother Milton explaining why he had chosen not to turn back the programs of the

New Deal, referred to these right-wing elements as “stupid.” When this group did manage to nominate one of its own for president, Barry Goldwater in 1964, the result was a near-historic Democratic landslide, led in part by the defections of big business from the Republican fold.

Three forces compelled big business to maintain this moderate approach in the postwar era: a relatively active and highly legitimate state that provided a growing social safety net; a relatively strong labor movement that helped workers achieve an increasingly middle-class lifestyle; and a financial community led by the large, money market, commercial banks that, through its central position in interfirm social networks, served as a source of cohesion within the larger corporate community. The economy was strong, the average standard of living increased sharply, inequality was low, and despite enormous social turmoil, the system worked relatively well.

The postwar consensus broke down in the 1970s, however. Serious economic problems, especially soaring inflation, led big business to mobilize against what it viewed as excessive government regulation and an overly aggressive labor movement. To do this the group aligned itself with traditional conservatives.

Working through right-wing think tanks and foundations, the group mounted an offensive against government regulation and organized labor, and worked to make taxes increasingly regressive. By Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980, the corporate elite had largely succeeded in defeating these two primary sources of constraint. Then, beginning in the early 1980s, the commercial banks began to experience difficulties, which led them to shift their focus away from lending and toward fee-for-service activities. As a result, they began to relinquish their role as a mediating and moderating force within the corporate elite.

With the three major constraints no longer operative, a paradox occurred. Having won the war against its adversaries, there was no longer a need for the elite to be organized, and the group began to fragment, with individual companies going their own way. This became evident as early as the fights over the Reagan tax increases of 1982 and 1983, but it was especially evident in the 1986 tax law, in which busi-

nesses, according to Reagan administration official Richard Darman, were “brought down by the narrowness of their vision” (quoted in Birnbaum and Murray 1987: 287). The coup de grâce came with the takeover wave of the late 1980s. No longer did corporate CEOs have the luxury of sitting back and thinking about the long-term implications of their actions for business as a whole, or the larger society. Instead, CEOs were in peril, constantly in danger of being acquired by another firm and summarily dismissed. After a century of enormous stability, nearly one-third of the Fortune 500 disappeared during the 1980s. CEO tenure accordingly declined, from an average of 9.4 years in 1980 to only 6.8 years by 2002.

The consequence of this upheaval was that the corporate elite was no longer capable of acting collectively to address business or societal-wide concerns. This became evident

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during the debates over the Clinton health plan in the early 1990s. Large corporations had been stung by sharply increasing health care costs, and they realized that something must be done. The Clinton health plan initially received considerable support from big business. Eventually, however, the companies withdrew their support, in part under pressure from Republicans in Congress. Small businesses were strongly unified against the plan and had made their views known in Congress. The corporate elite was divided, however, with a relatively small number of health care providers (primarily insurance companies) able to prevent the much larger number of health care consuming firms from enacting reform. No longer capable of collective action, the corporate elite saw itself rendered ineffective, while the more right-wing small business community held sway.

A similar lack of effective action occurred on taxes. Large corporations had routinely supported tax increases from the 1940s well into the 1980s, even exhorting George H. W. Bush to raise taxes in defiance of his promise of “read my lips, no new taxes.” By the 2000s, after George W. Bush’s tax cuts, however, the corporate elite had become silent on the issue, despite its seeming concern about the deficit. Even the *Wall Street Journal* (April 8, 2004:A2)

criticized the Business Roundtable for its unwillingness to link the deficit to the Bush tax cuts.

This inability to address issues of business-wide concern reflects the fragmented nature of the contemporary corporate elite. Individual firms have become highly successful in lobbying to gain favors from the government. Collectively, however, they are incapable of accomplishing the most routine tasks. In the 2011 debt ceiling crisis, the Business Roundtable issued a vacuous, virtually content-less statement pleading with the President and Congress to fix the problem, without providing a single specific recommendation. More recently, even as some large corporations have finally begun to express support for tax increases and for raising the debt ceiling without negotiation, they have had little success influencing Republicans in Congress to comply. As a recent article in the *New York Times* suggested (January 16, 2013:A16), corporate leaders “have pleaded publicly with Republicans to raise their taxes for the sake of deficit reduction, and to raise the nation’s debt limit without a fight, . . . , but the lobbying has been to no avail.”

The upshot is that a group of right-wing extremists has effectively taken control of the political agenda. The group is so adamant in its views that even when it fails to get its way, it succeeds in forcing liberals and moderates to move sharply to the right. President Obama may be more liberal for his time than Richard Nixon was for his, but Nixon’s policies

were more liberal in content. Even much of Ronald Reagan’s agenda, which included several tax increases on business, would be considered too liberal for twenty-first century American politics. The reason for this, I argue, is not a shift in public opinion, however. It has resulted from the fragmentation of the corporate elite, and the group’s consequent inability to serve as a mediator between liberals and traditional conservatives. President Obama’s victory and the leverage he had, which enabled the first increase in income tax rates in nearly two decades despite record deficits, has helped to stem what might have been an even more aggressive right-wing offensive. It has not led, nor is it likely to lead, to a serious attempt to address the major problems of our age, from a decaying educational system and infrastructure to the health care crisis and, perhaps most seriously, global warming. The best hope for pushing these issues forward would be a resurgence of social movements. The most tractable solution, however, would be a resurgence of responsibility—a return to its earlier doctrine of enlightened self-interest—by the leaders of large American corporations.

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## A Fiscal Sociology of the 2012 Election

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Taxation, as usual, was one of the most important issues in the presidential election campaign and, as usual, both of the major-party candidates tried to outdo each other in their zeal for cutting taxes. President Barack Obama harped on his record of cutting taxes for middle-income families. He objected to his opponent’s plan to cut rich people’s taxes, but only because, he said, paying for the tax cuts favored by his opponent would require Congress to impose tax increases on lower-income families. Mitt Romney pointed to his own record as governor of Massachusetts, in which he claimed to have cut taxes nineteen times. If elected, he promised to cut the top federal income tax rate to the lowest level in eighty years.

On reflection, this familiar ritual presents us with some sociological curiosities. One is the apparent consensus that income taxes are bad. Even in President Obama’s “you didn’t build that” speech—which sounded to me when I first heard it like a full-throated defense of the public sector—he argued for public investment in collective goods like roads, schools, and the internet, without actually arguing for raising taxes to pay for those public goods. He did say he intended to “ask for the wealthy to pay a little bit more,” but only so that middle-class people could pay less. His most explicit and emphatic message about taxes in the speech was this: “I’m running to keep middle-class taxes low.”

Must every American candidate always run to keep

taxes low? If you have spent even a little time in another developed country, you will recognize that there is something peculiar going on here. (If you need an illustrative point of contrast, I just finished reading Eric Klinenberg's *Going Solo*, in which he quotes a Swedish politician from the liberal party—that is, the party of Swedish neoliberalism—who told him, “We pay a lot of taxes and we think that’s a good thing, because it allows us to take care of each other” [2012: 217].)

Another sociological curiosity is that both candidates used taxation to talk about relations of exploitation. Sociologists often assume that talk of class conflict is muted in American politics because American politicians do not talk much about conflict between capital and

labor. But they do talk about exploitive relations between other social groups, sometimes quite openly. President Obama argued explicitly on the campaign trail that tax breaks for million-

aires come at the expense of a hard-working “middle class.” Romney, in his most notorious fundraising speech, cast the election as a contest between the 53 percent of Americans who pay income tax and the 47 percent who, he said, live at their expense. Both candidates appealed to taxpayers by telling them that someone else was profiting from their effort.

They were both onto something. Taxation is coercive, and it does redistribute. It does so in complicated ways that are much more difficult to measure than we usually acknowledge, along lines that do not always conform to Marxian intuitions about class conflict. Although the Internal Revenue Code is one of the many places in American law where you will find legal discrimination in favor of owners of capital and against sellers of labor power, you will also find there legal discrimination in favor of debtors, people who have children, people who are married, people who are in college, and people who have expensive health conditions. When we argue over tax policy we are arguing over how to transfer the produce of our economic activity among these numerous, overlapping, and potentially antagonistic social groups.

We are arguing, that is, over what our class structure should be.

This understanding of taxation as a struggle over social relations helps to make sense of the American obsession with tax cuts. Politicians campaign to keep taxes low in the U.S. because they are protecting particular groups that have well-defined claims to privileged tax status. Tax policies institutionalize patterns of conflict and alliance. These patterns define political identities. They also define battle lines for subsequent political conflicts. The current Republican Party’s emphasis on protecting high-income people from tax increases is a legacy of prior policies that have defined people in the top tax bracket as a category with common interests—

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and therefore as a potential constituency to be mobilized. The Democratic Party’s emphasis on protecting middle-income people from tax increases is at least in part a legacy of specific tax privileges that favor middle-income

people, and that also have taken on the character of entrenched property rights.

What, then, are the implications of the election for this ongoing struggle over taxes? The president’s party won, and the post-election deal to delay the so-called fiscal cliff included an income tax increase on tax units reporting more than \$400,000 in taxable income. The White House and Congress are now debating further tax increases on incomes over \$1 million. You might think these are signs that the era of obsessive tax cutting that I have called “the permanent tax revolt” (Martin 2008) is over. I do not think it is.

Here is what I expect to see going forward:

- Federal tax policy will not change much. President Obama has argued for raising revenue through a big, base-broadening income tax reform. Such reforms are often promised and rarely delivered. “Base broadening” means doing away with income tax exclusions and deductions that privilege particular interest groups. In some cases these interest groups may not even have existed as organized in-

terest groups before the tax law lumped their members together and granted them special treatment. Once such a group exists, however, its members can usually be counted on to defend their property rights, and to do so effectively.

- Rich people will mobilize. Almost every time that Congress increased top-bracket tax rates in the twentieth century, some rich and almost-rich people perceived it as a threat to property rights more generally, and responded by founding social movement organizations to demand that Congress reduce or limit or abolish the taxation of income (see Martin forthcoming). I expect some such mobilization is happening now, though I do not expect to read much about it in the *New York Times*.
- The struggle to untax rich will move to the state house. The reason I will not read much about rich people's movements in the *Times* is that rich people's movement organizations generally lobby in low-profile venues, especially state legislatures in the South and West where conservatives hold power. All of the most extreme anti-income-tax proposals put forward by Tea Party Republicans in the last Congress—including proposals to abolish

the IRS, amend the Constitution to limit income tax rates, and repeal the Sixteenth Amendment—had been the subjects of grassroots campaigns sometimes decades earlier in states far away from Washington, D.C. The statehouse is the incubator where rich people's movements hatch policies that eventually find their way to Congress.

Nothing in social life is permanent, of course, but I feel safe—if not very happy—predicting that our politics will remain captive to competing coalitions of tax cut enthusiasts for a long time.

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## Re-Interpreting Freedom? Obama's Second Inaugural Address

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A month has passed since President Obama delivered his second inaugural address. The speech and the buzz of pundit commentaries—laudatory and otherwise—have faded, despite the recently released White House photograph showing the text as work in progress, complete with Obama's handwritten notes. We are now deep in the muck of everyday politics, including the looming insanity of sequestration. Still, now that the partisans of left and right have had their ample says, I want to return for a moment to the President's speech, to consider it from the point of view of a political sociologist who has spent much time analyzing political culture and discursive framing.

As I watched and listened to the inaugural address, I

was completing a chapter on the role of culture, including discourse and framing, in policy development, for Oxford's new *Handbook of U.S. Social Policy*, edited by Daniel Béland, Christopher Howard, and Kimberly Morgan (Stryker and Danielson forthcoming). So I was especially primed to wonder what the President's discursive strategy would be as he crafted the speech and what it might signal about his view of the opportunities and constraints confronting his second term policy agenda and his legacy.

To my delight, the President's speech exemplified a more general discursive strategy that, over the years, I have highlighted in my research and writing on political culture—collaborations with other political sociologists

including Nicholas Pedriana and Pamela Wald (Pedriana and Stryker 1997; Stryker and Wald 2009). This basic strategy is one of trying to convert apparent constraint into new opportunity by reinterpreting an enduring abstract and general American value. In Obama's second inaugural speech, this value is freedom.

The rest of this essay will first outline the discursive strategy and the context in which my co-authors and I suggested that it would be most likely to emerge. The essay then will show how President Obama's second inaugural address exemplifies the strategy and how the speech's context corresponds with the conditions we predicted would give rise to the strategy.

Previous instantiations of this strategy—including the one that prompted Nick Pedriana and me to identify the strategy in the first place—involved discursive efforts to shape debate over specific policies so as to substantially change course in US domestic policy-making. On the one hand, there was the somewhat curious case of the Nixon Labor Department resurrecting and defending the Philadelphia Plan mandating race-based affirmative action for federal government contractors in the construction industry. First crafted by the Johnson Administration, the Philadelphia Plan both fundamentally reinterpreted the core American value of equality of opportunity, and also ultimately led to affirmative action contract compliance with Executive Order 11246 in all industries nationwide (Pedriana and Stryker 1997).

On the other hand, there was the rhetoric of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Congressional Republicans promoting enactment of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. In the run-up to the vote and President Clinton's signing of the legislation eliminating Americans' 60-year-old entitlement to a government-provided safety net protecting them from abject poverty, Gingrich and Congressional Republicans mounted a calculated, concerted effort to redefine compassion. Though not as "core" or "central" as equal opportunity to what the United States stands for, compassion nonetheless is an enduring value in U.S. social policy (Stryker and Wald 2009).

Just as equal opportunity set the backdrop and constitutive parameters for the affirmative action debates of the late 1960s while also guiding competing strategic framings, compassion—even before the Congressional

debates over the PRWORA—had a taken-for-granted extant meaning in social policy and also widespread acceptance among the general public (Stryker and Wald 2009). From opposite points on the political-ideological spectrum, both cases illustrate that enduring American values operate as potent symbolic resources in policy debates precisely because "entire sets of contested symbolic packages can be built around values that are widely shared" (Pedriana and Stryker 1997: 640).

At the abstract level such values as freedom, liberty, equality, and compassion are both general and ambiguous enough to operate as enduring expressions of an American character and unified American national identity. Politicians and the public alike want to be viewed as embracing and enacting these values. Yet people attribute different concrete and specific meanings to these abstract, general values. At any particular time, one side may find that mobilizing the value for front-stage framing is completely straightforward and readily promotes its point of view, given that it can easily show that its preferred policies are consistent with the value's dominant, virtually taken-for-granted meaning. The other side, meanwhile, is constrained to make its discursive claims on a value terrain that favors its opponents. Unless, of course, that side can reinterpret the generally accepted value so that its own policies, rather than those of its opponents, now embody it.

It is no easy feat to successfully reinterpret the concrete specifics of an enduring abstract, general value. Two conditions are most likely to prompt actors to attempt this strategy. First, the extant dominant or taken-for-granted definition works against the adoption of the actor's preferred policies. Second, the value's centrality to what the United States stands for and what it means to be American make it difficult for the actor to sidestep the value and rely solely on arguments based on alternative values in policy debates. By deploying a value-reinterpretation/redefinition framing strategy, the actor becomes the true heir to and embodiment of enduring U.S. political cultural legacies. The actor continues to adhere to core values while at the same time promoting radical policy and institutional change.

So how did this work with the Nixon revival of the Philadelphia Plan and Gingrich's advocacy for welfare reform? And why do I argue that President Obama's

second inaugural address exemplified the same general strategy?

In Congressional hearings over the controversial Philadelphia Plan, supporters of the Plan's affirmative action policies, including Nixon's Labor Department, fundamentally recast the meaning of the enduring American value of equality of opportunity. The prior, generally taken-for granted meaning of equal opportunity required "color-blindness." Philadelphia Plan opponents took advantage of this conception, emphasizing repeatedly that the new policies blatantly contradicted color-blindness. Yet after an uphill reframing battle, the Nixon administration, federal courts and corporate America institutionalized affirmative action. For a time, the dominant specific meaning of enduring equal opportunity values in employment had been transformed so that equal opportunity required race-conscious remedial action correcting for prior systemic patterns of race discrimination (Pedriana and Stryker 1997).

In the case of 1990s welfare reform, Democrats in Congress tried to head off elimination of welfare entitlement by drawing on what had been the generally accepted meaning of compassion. This meaning—which Democrats and Republicans alike, including Ronald Reagan, embraced for almost 60 years—required the government to provide a safety net for the poor. Congressional Republican leaders perceived that their opponents would criticize them and their proposed reforms relentlessly for lacking compassion, and indeed a chorus of liberal Democrats did just that. Republican leaders also perceived that the American public widely supported the value of compassion, so Republicans could not just ignore compassion and make their case around an alternative value (Stryker and Wald 2009).

Instead, Republican supporters of radical welfare reform defined themselves and their preferred policies as compassionate. They argued that the "true" meaning of compassion called for eliminating the trap of welfare dependency, reducing the welfare rolls, and, in so doing, promoting work, self-sufficiency, opportunity, and fiscal and personal responsibility. This true meaning, they argued, dated from the beginning of the nation, far before the New Deal construed and enacted compassion in the perverted form of a government-provided safety net (Stryker and Wald 2009).

As President Obama crafted his inaugural speech, we cannot know whether he had in mind any such examples of successful reinterpretation of core values. We can imagine, however, that he wrestled with how best to craft a speech that would appeal to and reinforce an enduring form of government and unified national identity constructed around core American values, and also promote a specific interpretation of those values consistent with his policy priorities.

As would be expected for one with his biography, political background, and partisanship, President Obama appealed to and highlighted the core American value of equality. Most commentary on the address emphasized how the President drew on our "allegiance" to equality as enunciated in the Declaration of Independence "made more than two centuries ago"—a value that is a key part of "what makes us exceptional—what makes us American." In referring first to Seneca Falls, then to Selma, and finally to Stonewall, the President showed that his commitment to extending equality for gays and lesbians is a natural extension of the earlier American commitment to equality for women and African-Americans. This strategy, however, involved extending a pre-existing frame without reinterpreting the core value driving it.

The President's task of mobilizing the value of freedom was not as straightforward. Indeed, the President may have felt compelled not just to appeal to and highlight the core value of freedom (or liberty as its synonym), but also to reinterpret it. Without such reinterpretation, he could not easily present himself, his view of government's role, and his administration's policies as true heirs not just to the equality tradition, but also to the enduring American tradition of freedom.

Yankelovich (1994) listed freedom, as well as other values, including patriotism, democracy, equality, fairness, and achievement as core American values. Unsurprisingly, Obama's speech wove many of these core values together into a coherent argument supporting his view of the necessary and appropriate role of government in American society. It is unlikely that anyone would dispute freedom's status as a "core American value." Liberty of course is invoked alongside equality in the Declaration of Independence. Obama's speech repeatedly invoked both values, linking them by pointing out that, once the nation had been founded on "principles of



liberty and equality,” it could not survive “half slave and half free.”

The President’s strategy of redefining freedom as part of our “common creed,” however, linked the realization of “individual freedom” to the necessity for “collective action,” “rules to ensure competition and fair play,” and “risk-taking” backstopped by government programs, including “Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.” Freedom is not reserved just “for the lucky.” Freedom, realizable for all Americans, requires the collective provision of economic security that allows for independent initiative, creativity, and risk-taking. The “American soldiers” who successfully defended American freedom against “the forces of fascism or communism” did so through government-coordinated and led collective action.

Leaders and policy-makers have repeatedly drawn on freedom—universally recognized and taken-for-

granted as a founding American value—to justify U.S. domestic and foreign policy. They did so even before the colonies became the United States, and they continue to do so today. Over time, they have attributed more specific meanings to freedom, including the

idea of freedom as a collective or community right to self-determination (the American Revolution exemplifies this meaning) and the idea of freedom from. President Franklin Roosevelt framed World War II as a defense of four freedoms: freedom of religion and speech, but also freedom from want and fear (Chen 2009). In his book of the same title, Anthony Chen characterizes the civil rights movement as a quest for “the fifth freedom”—freedom from second class citizenship (Chen 2009).

Still, one can only imagine President Obama reflecting that his political opponents currently have the upper hand in interpreting the value of freedom. For the last 40 years, Republican politicians and conservative think tanks, pundits and public intellectuals have made freedom synonymous with free markets, freedom to exercise one’s Second Amendment right to bear arms, and free-

dom from government intervention and regulation. The dominant interpretation makes freedom something that pertains to the individual, pitting the individual against the government and requiring the protection of the individual and his/her property rights from government interference.

In the current interpretive rendering, the only “common good” is one in which no regulatory rules rein in an individual’s activity, whether for economic benefit or self-defense through firearms. Yet market fundamentalists, gun advocates, and many Republicans might not extend their conception of freedom to encompass an individual’s reproductive rights, or right to marry someone of the same sex—a blatant contradiction. This contradiction, however, has not eroded the ultra-libertarian meanings of freedom that predominate discussions of gun ownership or the economy. Hence, one can readily

imagine President Obama reflecting on his preferred fiscal policies, consumer protection initiatives, and above all his post-Newtown battle to secure new gun-control legislation, and wondering how he might change the widespread belief that where contemporary Democrats are the natural defenders

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of equality, contemporary Republicans, market fundamentalists, and the NRA promote freedom.

Preparing an inaugural address delivered in the political and cultural climate of early 2013, President Obama probably would have perceived himself constrained to make the enduring value of freedom an important touchstone. At the same time, he likely would have perceived the need to reinterpret freedom to enhance its perceived consistency with other values driving his political agenda, and with his preferred policies, including gun control.

Obama highlighted core values including freedom, democracy, opportunity, and equality, and recognized explicitly that “being true to our founding documents ... does not mean we will all define liberty in exactly the same way.” In so doing, Obama extended equality to new rights bearers, but also reinterpreted freedom. While

highlighting continuity in adherence to core American values, he also emphasized the legitimacy of redefining core values to meet emerging challenges. As the President stated:

Through it all, we have never relinquished our skepticism of central authority, nor have we succumbed to the fiction that all society's ills can be cured by government alone. Our celebration of initiative and enterprise; our insistence on hard work and personal responsibility, are constants in our character. But we have always understood that when times change, so must we; that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges; that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collection action.

The President closed similarly by reminding his listeners:

You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time—not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals. Let each of us now embrace, with solemn duty and awesome joy, what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom.

No matter how eloquent, clever, lauded, or vilified, an inaugural address is, in the end, only one speech. Only time will tell whether the President and his political allies will mount a concerted and consistent effort to redefine freedom and invoke the value strategically to frame and promote the President's second term policy agenda. It is equally unclear whether such a reinterpretation and reframing effort ultimately could help lead to enhanced gun control and other policies consistent with the President's priorities. Still, the speech itself may represent a start toward reconfiguring the discursive terrain around the enduring and widespread American value of freedom.

## Endnotes

1. My co-authors and I discuss at great length assertions about core, central, enduring, and widespread American values, and we draw upon substantial evidence of different kinds, including historical writings, expert judgments and public opinion polls (Pedriana and Stryker 1997; Stryker and Wald 2009). We also discuss measurement of the concept of value centrality.
2. For the full text of the President's second inaugural address, including passages quoted here, see [http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/01/21/16626094-obamas-inaugural-speech](http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/01/21/16626094-obamas-inaugural-speech).

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## Abstracts

### BOOK ABSTRACTS

Tom R. Burns and Peter M. Hall, eds. 2012. *The Meta-Power Paradigm: Impacts and Transformations of Agents, Institutions, and Social Systems Capitalism, State, and Democracy in a Global Context*. New York: Peter Lang.

This work presents, elaborates, and illustrates what is arguably the most important concept in the social sciences: power. It focuses particularly on a major class of power phenomena, meta-power, that is, power over power, transformative and structuring power. This encompasses powers to establish, reform, and transform social systems (institutions, power hierarchies, cultural formations, and socio-technical and infrastructural systems). Understanding meta-power is essential to the effective analysis of the formation of societal structures, their dynamics and evolution. This collection presents numerous illustrations and case studies at local, meso, and macro levels, showing how meta-powering is mobilized and operates in different contexts. The book should be of particular interest to business and management researchers, anthropologists, historians, legal scholars, political scientists, and, of course, sociologists.

Dan Lanier-Vos. 2013. *Sinews of the Nation: Constructing Irish and Zionist Bonds in the United States*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

*Sinews of the Nation* offers a new way to study nation building. Instead of asking how participants imagine themselves as members of a nation, it examines how, given deep differences and conflicts, the groups that make up the nation cooperate. Specifically, the book examines the Irish and Israeli attempts to secure financial resources from their compatriots in the US through the floating of national bonds in the 1920s and 1950s, respectively.

Finance may not seem like an obvious place to examine how groups negotiate their position in the nation. Money is typically understood as a resource, as something that allows movements to do certain things. In the context of studies of nationalism, therefore, scholars typically assume that people give money when they

identify with the nation and that fundraising, therefore, is secondary and dependent on prior identification. But money can also be understood as a medium through which social ties are negotiated, stitched together or dismantled. From this perspective, fundraising mechanisms are not simply ways of maximizing resources but also tools that, when successful, bind and even create groups.

A close consideration of the technical details of the Irish and Israeli bond projects brings nationalism down to earth and challenges accepted truisms. In contrast with current theories of nationalism that focus on the imagination of the nation as a unified whole, I show that nation building also relies on the creation of organizational mechanisms that allow different groups to maintain their difference and yet cooperate. As an alternative to the concept of “identification,” which implies some level of homogeneity, I offer the concept of “attachment.” The concept of attachment directs attention to the practical challenge of weaving diverse groups to the nation.

Kathleen C. Schwartzman. 2013. *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants and Corporations across the America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

This study highlights the contemporary American dilemma: economic transformations have left the U.S. labor market with jobs that “nobody wants,” jobs that are shipped overseas, and jobs for which American workers are unqualified. It also highlights the Global Dilemma: in developing nations, as rural survival continues to be undermined by international trade, people attempt to alleviate their poverty by packing their suitcases and abandoning their country. *The Chicken Trail* demonstrates how the externalities of free trade and neoliberalism become the social problems of nations and the tragedies of individuals. This book describes three concurrent population displacements: African American workers in the southeastern U.S., peasants in rural Mexico, and Mexican emigrants. It links each of them to the unfolding global processes that converged in the middle 1990s—a period of exceptional growth in both trade and migration.

*The Chicken Trail* focuses on the impact of global-

## Abstracts

ization—and NAFTA in particular—on the North American poultry industry, focusing on the displacement of African American workers in the southeast United States and small holders in Mexico. It documents how the U.S. poultry sector increased its export capacity and changed the nature and consequences of labor conflict. The book documents how globalization—and NAFTA in particular—forced Mexico to open its commodity and capital markets, and eliminate state support of corporations and rural smallholders. As a consequence, many Mexicans were forced to abandon their no longer sustainable small farms, with some seeking work in the industrialized poultry factories north of the border.

### ARTICLE ABSTRACTS

Suzanna M. Crage, Melanie M. Hughes, Peter Mohanty, and Terri E. Givens. 2013. "Gendered Jobs: Integrating Immigrants vs. Controlling Immigration in the European Union." *Politics & Gender* 9(1): 31-60.

Despite ideological commitment to gender equality in European Union (EU) Member States, women in political leadership in the EU continue to be segregated into "women-friendly" political domains. We investigate the persistent gendering of cabinet positions, focusing on immigration policy. In recent years, governments throughout the EU have dramatically altered immigration policies, and have restructured government accordingly. Amidst change, we suggest that immigration ministry leadership will still maintain a traditionally gendered division of political labor. Immigrant integration, similar to other forms of care work, may be more likely led by women, whereas the increasingly securitized portfolio of immigration control is likely to be led by men. We confirm these expectations for 2010 using descriptive statistics and logistic regression. This gendered pattern of political leadership sends powerful messages that women may not be fit to lead in all domains, suggesting implementation of EU commitments to gender equality lags behind the rhetoric.

Michael S. Evans. 2012. "Who Wants a Deliberative Public Sphere?" *Sociological Forum* 27(4):872-895.

Democratic theorists and social scientists suggest that a deliberative public sphere would be good for democracy by maximizing emancipatory possibilities and providing broad legitimacy to political decision making. But do ordinary Americans actually want a deliberative public sphere? I examine this question in the context of four contentious "religion and science" debates. Through a multidimensional evaluation exercise with 62 ordinary respondents, I find that evaluation of public representatives in these debates tends to favor open-mindedness and ongoing debate. Further, respondents explicitly discount elected representatives who participate in public debate precisely because they are seen as violating deliberative norms through their affiliation with electoral politics. Respondents want a deliberative public sphere. However, this desire reflects an understanding of the public sphere and institutional politics as disconnected arenas with incompatible rules and objectives, raising multiple questions for democratic theory and for political sociology.

Timothy M. Gill. 2013. "Why Mills, Not Gouldner? Differential History and Selective Commemoration in Sociology." *The American Sociologist* 44(1): 96-115.

Despite the close resemblances evident in their major works, their critical stance and their politics, C. Wright Mills and Alvin Gouldner have received strikingly different responses from their sociological peers, and they now occupy very different places in the collective memory of the discipline. This intriguing discrepancy provides the basis here for a comparative case study that examines both ongoing commemorative practices and historical evidence. This paper shows how the sociological community has frequently and approvingly commemorated Mills through introductory textbooks, as well as reading lists for doctoral comprehensive examinations, awards in Mills' honor, and biographies of Mills, while doing much less to preserve and promote the memory of Gouldner and his contributions to the field. In an effort to attain

## Abstracts

a better understanding of such differences, I compare the prescriptions that each advocated for the discipline, especially as these are expressed in Mills' Sociological Imagination and Gouldner's Coming Crisis of Western Sociology. The analysis emphasizes how Mills explicitly sought to move beyond sociology, in a narrow academic sense, and called for well-honed empirical endeavors with relevance for a variety of publics, whereas Gouldner proceeded largely as an academic theorist who demanded sociological-theoretical reform. Unlike Mills, he did not breach the gap between academia and the general public. These findings illustrate an apparent paradox, namely, that American sociology in the twenty-first century may reserve its most esteemed positions for internal critics who advocate movement beyond its contemporary confines.

Kristen Hopewell. 2013. "New Protagonists in Global Economic Governance: Brazilian Agribusiness at the WTO." *New Political Economy*. OnlineFirst: January 9, 2013. DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2013.736957.

The existing international economic order has been heavily shaped by US power and the US has been a key driver of globalisation and neoliberal economic restructuring, prompting speculation about whether the rise of new developing country powers could rupture the current trajectory of neoliberal globalisation. This paper analyses the case of Brazil at the World Trade Organization (WTO), a core institution in global economic governance. In the last decade, Brazil successfully waged two landmark trade disputes against the US and EU and created a coalition of developing countries – the G20 – which brought an end to the dominance of the US and EU at the WTO and made their trade policies a central target of the Doha Round. Brazil's activism has been widely hailed as a major victory for developing countries. However, I argue that rather than challenging the neoliberal agenda of the WTO, Brazil has emerged as one of the most vocal advocates of free market globalisation and the push to expand and liberalise global markets. I show that Brazil's stance has been driven by the rise of its export-oriented agribusiness sector. This case demonstrates

that business actors from the Global South are becoming significant new protagonists in global economic governance; they are taking the tools created by the states and corporations of the Global North – in this case, the WTO and its neoliberal discourse – and turning them against their originators. At the same time, their interests are being wrapped in and advanced through a discourse of development and social justice and a strategic mobilisation of the politics of the North-South divide.

### SPECIAL JOURNAL ISSUE

*Globalizations*, 10(1). Land Grabbing and Global Governance. Guest Editors: Matias E. Margulis, Nora McKeon, Saturnino M. Borrás Jr.

The issue on land grabbing and global governance contains 14 articles: introductory essay, 8 original research articles and 5 review articles of transnational instruments to regulate land grabs. The special issue analyzes the recent global land rush from a global/transnational perspective and takes into account the ever greater flows of capital, goods, and ideas across borders and that these flows occur through axes of power that are far more polycentric than the North-South imperialist tradition. In addition, the special issue features contributions from scholars and global civil society activists engaged in the present global contests to regulate land grabs in an effort to co-produce and mobilize knowledge. The contribution of the articles in this collection to the broader scholarship on land grabbing is that it provides a framework for analyzing land grabbing as concurrent struggle for control over local pieces of land and transnational regulatory institutions.

## Political Sociology Section Announcements

### A Collaborative Workshop: How should teachers respond to the corporate school reform movement?

As one of the Political Sociology Section's sessions at this year's ASA meetings, Charlotte Ryan ([charlotte\\_ryan@uml.edu](mailto:charlotte_ryan@uml.edu)) and Bill Gamson ([gamson@bc.edu](mailto:gamson@bc.edu)), with the help of the Movement/Media Research and Action Project (MRAP), are organizing a workshop that brings activists and academics together in a strategy planning session related to the current school reform movement. It is described below. Anyone who is interested in participating in this collaborative effort should contact Ryan or Gamson and we will be happy to add you to the advisory committee to receive relevant e-mails and updates.

This workshop frames the issue of contemporary school reform as a contest between what progressives have labeled the "corporate school reform movement" and a counter-movement that attempts to build a broad coalition of teachers, parents, and community groups concerned with improving the quality of public education at the K-12 level. Each table will have a mixture of sociologists and teachers, school administrators, leaders of parents and community groups and others who play an active role in public education.

After a short introduction, each table will be asked to address such questions as the following:

1. How does one frame the issue of school reform in a way that is conducive to an effective alliance with parent groups who share teachers' concerns with providing quality education for their children?
2. What are the most effective criticisms of the corporate school reform movement? Where is it most vulnerable?
3. Design a campaign involving teachers, parents, community groups, and sociologists in a chosen city or metropolitan area to promote your preferred framing. Indicate the initial steps needed in such a campaign and the ways in which academic support could be most helpful.

In the last 30 minutes, we will reconvene in a plenary session in which each table will make a short report on its deliberations. Finally, the moderators will attempt to summarize the consensual points and to highlight points on which there were competing views of appropriate strategy.

### Call for Contributions: Recent Ph.D. Profile Feature

*States, Power, and Societies* will once again include in its summer issue a feature to profile Section members who are on the job market. This annual feature is scheduled to come out prior to the ASA meetings. In addition to providing exposure for Section members who have recently completed a doctorate, the feature can assist Section members whose departments are in the process of hiring (by giving the opportunity to identify promising candidates in advance of the ASA meetings).

To be included in the feature, please send a brief profile that includes the following information:

1. Your name and institution
2. Email address and/or personal website (optional)
3. Dissertation summary (200 words)
4. Dissertation committee (optional)
5. Other research interests (50 words)

To make certain of inclusion, please send the profile by May 10, 2013 to Erik Larson ([larsone@macalester.edu](mailto:larsone@macalester.edu)). To see examples of previous profiles, please consult *States, Power, and Societies* 17(2), Summer 2012.

## Interview with Article Award Recipient

# Greta Krippner

Interviewed by Carly Knight  
Harvard University

*Your book takes a historical, wide-angle lens to a topic that is currently making many headlines: the dominance of finance in the American economy. What motivated you to take on this project and this approach?*

GK: The origins of this project go back to the mid-nineties, when I was starting graduate school. At that time, a lot of the debate in economic and political sociology had to do with trying to understand the post-1970s period. What explained the really dramatic shift in the structure of the political economy? A lot of the work being written then focused on the welfare state and changes in labor markets. There were debates about post-Fordism and flexible specialization and the regulation school. So, initially, I approached this topic from the context of changes in labor market processes.

However, somewhere along the line, in all of my reading, especially of David Harvey and Giovanni Arrighi, I came to the idea that the really important changes in this period had to do with financial markets. At the time, there weren't many people doing this. Of course, some economic sociologists had been thinking about finance. But a lot of this work was at a meso-organizational level—how trading was organized on the floor of the stock exchange and so on. So the project came from trying to understand what was novel about capitalism in the post-seventies period, and my approach came from analyzing the financial system at the macro-level.

Of course, the hard part was figuring out what to do after that. It was obvious that something important was happening in financial markets. But the question was how to draw the parameters around the project. That was a difficult endeavor, and it took me awhile to sort that through.

*I'd like to hear more about how you started tackling that question. In your story, you identify three postwar crises that led the state to enact policies that promoted the financial turn - a fiscal crisis, a social crisis and a legitimation crisis. How did you come to identify these three causal factors?*

GK: Well, the crises themselves, which turned out to be the



anchors for the story I tell in the book, were fairly prevalent in the literature about the experience of the 1970s. In particular, there was a huge literature on the fiscal crisis and the legitimation crisis, so, it was a fairly natural way to think about the challenges confronted by the state in this period.

But the most critical part of the project was figuring out the narrative arc of the book, which became the three policy shifts that were responses to the various crises of the state. The first policy shift being the deregulation of financial markets, the second being the opening of the US economy to global capital markets, and the third being changes in monetary policy. Identifying those three policy changes as crucial was the hardest part of writing the book.

My strategy for figuring out that narrative arc was something I wouldn't necessarily recommend to anyone else. What I did was, I actually went to the library and I just started reading the business press. In particular, I read *Business Week*, starting from the mid-1960s. I actually sat in the library for a period of over six months and read it issue by issue up to the present. At the end of that time, I had a pretty comprehensive view of the key policy changes that were occurring alongside the economic shifts I was analyzing. This gave me an intuitive feel for what was important and where the narrative movement was.

You'd have to be insane to do that now. I should have had a sampling strategy but instead I just plowed through. But I did learn an awful lot about these events and their effects week by week.

*If you could do it again, what would you do differently? Do you have any advice on how to craft an analytic framework onto large and expansive questions such as yours?*

## Interview with Article Award Recipient

GK: It is hard. My advice to students is to think in terms of a narrative. For me, this helps to demystify the research process. When you're dealing with some large, unwieldy, macro-social transformation, you need to first learn enough about it to be able to craft a story. When you construct this narrative, you implicitly theorize. Then, it becomes a question of making these choices explicit and framing them in a properly sociological way.

That's how I begin with any project: What story am I trying to tell? Who do I think the actors are? Approaching these macro-processes as narratives helps me to theoretically find a kind of organization to the story.

The flip side of this, of course, is that one has to be self aware and self-critical about what is left out of the narrative. In my own case, there was a lot of condensation. You can't possibly give an exhaustive history. You have to select events. But you need to learn as much as you can about what you don't include in order to be sure that what is left out wouldn't change the story. Intellectual honesty is required in working with complex historical processes.

*Part of what I love about the book is how Daniel Bell bookends your story of America's financialization, and how you salvage insights from his ultimately failed predictions from *Cultural Contradictions*. Do you see your work as being in line with Bell's?*

GK: I didn't start out with Bell as the touchstone for the book's argument. In fact, I came to that towards the end. I knew his work on post-industrialism and had starting reading *Cultural Contradictions* as I was writing up the history of the fiscal crisis. And immediately I realized how deeply it spoke to the problems I was discussing in the book.

It's a wonderful experience for the researcher when you find something that resonates so strongly with what you are trying to do, something that makes you think: how could I possibly write this book without this? Bell, particularly, was so important in how he analyzed the deep tensions between market economies and democratic political institutions. I use him to talk about how distributional questions get pushed onto

the market. But the market doesn't have a mechanism to settle distributional questions. These are matters of politics. His great prescience was to pinpoint these tensions. Of course, not every one of his predictions on the resolution of these tensions was right. But he was right in identifying the location of tensions, the issues that would arise.

*Someone who gets less mention than Daniel Bell is Karl Polanyi.*

*Yet I imagine that your book could have been written through his lens as well: the supposedly free market was a creation of the state. So why not?*

“What I hope... is that there will be a shift in public discourse, so that we are in a better position to have a dialogue about how we allocate resources ... [and] share the financial burden for getting our economy back to a state of fiscal health.”

It's funny. I wouldn't have identified myself as a Daniel Bell fan before this project, whereas I do have that relationship to Polanyi. I'm unabashedly Polanyian.

I guess the answer is that I have imbibed Polanyi so deeply that it's almost

as though I don't have to spend a lot of time on him. In a way, I assume Polanyi. Polanyi's fundamental thesis about the co-constitution of markets and politics, the social embedding of the market, is a part of all the work I do.

*I suppose you don't have to convince many sociologists of Polanyi?*

Yes, that battle has been waged and, at least in sociology, for the most part, won. I think of the book as deeply Polanyian, though I didn't make it explicit. I wish I had done more with Polanyi than I did. I wish I had given him a larger role because his role is so large in my thinking about the economy.

*I would love to hear your thoughts on Marxism. In Marxist theory, the turn to financialization is inevitable. Zero-sum competition in a global economy drives down returns from productive investments. Firms are driven into the arms of financial activities given that they can no longer compete on their core competencies. Financialization defers the impending crisis. I was struck by the degree to which your story aligned with, yet wholly differed from, this approach. You see financialization as a deferral of crises, yet, unlike in Marxism, it is hardly inevitable. Rather, the core thesis*



## Interview with Article Award Recipient

*of the book is that things could have been otherwise. How deep a critique is this of the Marxist reading?*

GK: It's a good question. The answer depends on which Marxism we are talking about. There are many different Marxist accounts, and the one my book engages with most directly is a world-systems account, associated with Giovanni Arrighi.

I'm certainly arguing that these were not inevitable outcomes, that there was an important inadvertent aspect to these political and economic shifts. By contrast, the tendency in a lot of Marxist thinking is structural, determinist. However, I think Arrighi's thought is a lot more contingent than people give him credit for. He's often lumped into a heavy-handed structuralist tradition, but I find his account retains a kind of open-endedness.

I suppose I depart from Arrighi, however, in terms of the degree of contingency I would ascribe to the actions of the state actors I analyze. Arrighi chronicles a five hundred year shift. That's an impressive feat, but with that large a canvas, you lose sight of the particular actors and the particular historical mechanisms. I take one episode of financialization and drill down into the actors and their contexts. From a distance, things tend to look determined. If you zoom in closer, you see choices, and you see how things could have gone differently.

Also, a tendency in the larger Marxist literature is to see the state and finance as merged. One thing I wanted to do was to pull those actors apart and look specifically at the state, not as simply dictated by finance.

*In your book, you discuss how financialization allowed the state to defer important distributional decisions. How could those decisions have been resolved? In our time, what would dealing with these distributional decisions, rather than deferring them, look like in terms of policy?*

GK: I think it's more of what would it look like in terms of politics. It looks messy. The book describes the ways in which deregulating financial markets domestically and internationally enabled the state to avoid being the focal point of distributional conflicts over scarce resources.

Subsequently, what we've seen in our own political situation is what happens when we can no longer push these decisions onto a growing financial market. Now, the state is at the center of a fiscal crisis, just as it was during the seventies, the

point of departure for my book. In a way, we've come full circle.

I'm often asked about the concrete policy changes I would envisage. I'm always hesitant to have that discussion. I'm very mindful of how complicated these issues are. I could give you some generic recommendations: re-regulating financial markets. But that's neither controversial nor interesting. Most economic and political sociologists agree that's the direction we need to head.

One thing I do try to emphasize in the book—an idea that comes from Bell—is that, in the end, these distributional decisions are inherently political. There isn't a technical policy fix for democratic politics.

What I hope, as Bell also hoped, is that there will be a shift in public discourse, so that we are in a better position to have a dialogue about how we allocate resources. This discussion would have to be about how best to share the financial burden for getting our economy back to a state of fiscal health. We haven't been forced to have this discussion for many decades. Those are harder questions to address, of course, but they are also the critical ones.

*Finally, I wanted to ask you what is next on the agenda. Any hints on what you are working on now?*

One of the key themes in the book is about the tensions between market economies and democratic political institutions. In my next project, I'm interested in exploring the concept of market freedom in American political culture. The particular context I'm thinking about most now is the civil rights era. In particular, how does the discourse of market freedom get appropriated for diametrically opposed political projects? Both advocates and enemies of civil rights appropriated the language of market freedom to advance their views. Segregationists invoked the idea that market freedom allowed for discrimination: I can transact with whomever I damn well please. Civil rights advocates put forward a completely different idea of market freedom: markets are blind to status differentials; all are free to transact in the market. I'm curious about the malleability of market discourse in this context. I am interested in how these tensions and contradictions in the idea of market freedom get worked out in ways that perhaps set the stage for the ascendance of the market in our own neoliberal era. It's still fuzzy, but that's where I'm headed.

## Journal Profile

# Socio-Economic Review

Carl Gershenson  
Harvard University

The Socio-Economic Review (SER) provides a home for the many scholarly communities that study the economy, including political and economic sociologists, political scientists, legal scholars, organizational scholars, and institutionalist economists. As the official journal of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE), the SER also publishes articles by a multinational set of scholars. The editors have successfully turned the tensions inherent in an interdisciplinary, international journal into a focused, distinctive scholarly vehicle for the study of the economy. Founded only in 2003, the journal now ranks among the top 10% of sociology and political science journals in terms of Impact Factor. Despite increased submission rates in recent years, the editors have achieved an average time to first decision of 65 days. Around 13.5% of manuscripts are eventually accepted.

### Findings and Ideas from *Socio-Economic Review*

Political sociologists have linked tax revolts to both high tax burdens and visible forms of taxation, such as income and property taxes. Martin and Gabay's "Fiscal Protest in Thirteen Welfare States" (11: 107-130) directs attention to the importance of spending levels relative to the tax burden. They argue that structural budget deficits, not high tax rates, lead to fiscal protests (a category that includes tax revolts).

The authors assemble a dataset of 13 European countries from 1980-1995. They provide evidence for the relationship between structural budget deficits and fiscal protest through multivariate negative binomial regression models. The authors also show that budget-balancing reforms are the proximate mechanisms that trigger these protests.

The authors conclude that one cannot infer anti-welfare state sentiment from tax protests. Rather, these protests are driven by neoliberal austerity policies that "attempt to reconcile structurally incompatible policy commitments" (124). Where taxation and social spending levels are in harmony, high tax burdens neither generate anti-welfare state sentiment nor lead to civil unrest.

### Findings and Ideas from *Socio-Economic Review*

Sachweh's "The Moral Economy of Inequality: Popular Views on Income Differentiation, Poverty and Wealth" (10: 419-445) uses in-depth interviews to study the moral economy, "an implicit, collectively shared understanding of what constitutes a fair and desirable distribution of societal benefits and burdens" (420). Germany is an especially appropriate research site, as the recent economic crisis has brought inequality to the fore of German discourse. After decades of relative stability, economic polarization has increased severely, due to gains by top earners and losses by the bottom fifth of the income distribution.

Sachweh finds that Germans accept inegalitarian principles. For both functional and normative reasons, Germans agree that merit should be rewarded by higher income. However, members of both upper and lower classes share concerns regarding the effects of extreme inequality. German worries are more community-oriented than the "conservative egalitarianism" of the American moral economy, which is preoccupied with individuals' equality of opportunity. Germans are concerned that unchecked market forces will produce levels of inequality that will disrupt the civic sphere by segregating the "life-words" of the upper and lower classes. This tension between logics of merit and community both limits and justifies state policies dealing with poverty, redistribution, and inequality.

While the journal is perhaps best known for articles on comparative political economy, recent volumes of SER have also included work related to fiscal sociology, welfare state retrenchment, neoliberalism, labor unions, financialization, inequality, and the sociology of markets. The editors invite submission of research with explicitly political themes, either at the individual level (e.g. interests, ideology, and their relation to political behavior) or at the level of political and economic institutions (e.g. electoral systems or labor markets). Much interesting research at the intersection of political and economic sociology remains to be done on the influence of elections, parties, interest groups, and other political actors on the changing role of the state in the economy. While open to theoretical pieces, the editors generally prefer contributions to be wedded to strong empirics. The editors embrace methodologies ranging from sophisticated

## Journal Profile

statistical analyses to careful, historically informed case studies. Chief Editor Gregory Jackson stresses that, as SER is an interdisciplinary journal, the editors look above all for studies that extend concepts and produce implications across disciplinary boundaries.

SER typically publishes “State of the Art” articles three times per year. These articles review and synthesize the literature on topics, generally with the aim of framing and informing theoretical discussions in the journal. Other “State of the Art” articles attempt to resolve empirical stalemates in the literature through carefully weighing the appropriateness of the data, methods, and assumptions that various authors have brought to bear on a subject. The editors encourage authors interested in writing a “State of the Art” article to submit a proposal before submitting a completed draft.

SER publishes one special issue a year, focusing on a specific theme and hosting a team of guest editors. The next special issue is titled “The Political Economy of Skills and Inequality.” The editors invite proposals for new topics each year in late summer, following the annual SASE conference. The participants at these meetings, which usually alternate between American and European locales, are well representative of the national and disciplinary diversity of the contributors to SER.

SER has experienced great success in its first decade of existence. The journal occupies a unique niche in the study of the economy, and its editors have consistently shown willingness to publish both young academics and those scholars who are ambitious enough to tackle fundamental questions about state and economy that concern not just political sociologists, but multiple disciplinary traditions. As Chief Editor Jackson writes in a recent editorial, “The social sciences need less gap finding and more problematization, less borrowing of theories from other fields and greater attempts to blend those theories, and

### Findings and Ideas from *Socio-Economic Review*

Steiber and Haas’s “State of the Art: Advances in Explaining Women’s Employment Patterns” (10: 343-367) synthesizes multidisciplinary research on patterns in women’s employment behavior, including how state policy and institutions affect labor processes. The authors find little support for social-psychological models of labor processes. If anything, causality is more likely to run from women’s employment patterns to gender norms. This leaves much of the variance to be explained by state policies that affect the cost-structure of women’s employment.

Just how state policy affects labor processes, however, remains controversial. The authors criticize cross-national research using aggregate measures of women’s employment rates for giving insufficient attention to variation across subpopulations (e.g. educational groups and family structures) and interaction effects with regional contexts (e.g. local male and female unemployment rates). They also claim that such research suffers from measures masking great heterogeneity across nations (e.g., in the quality of childcare and the relative prestige of part-time work).

Finally, the authors discuss methodological advances that deal with the endogeneity that is omnipresent in the intersection between state policy and gendered labor processes. For example, they discuss a study showing that high rates of women’s employment may cause demand for state childcare services, and not vice versa. For this literature to progress, the authors stress the need for quasi-experimental methods or multilevel, longitudinal studies that can deal with endogeneity without loss of focus on regional context and variation across subpopulations.

renewed aspiration for relevance to big questions of our times” (11: 1-4).

## Call for Submissions: States, Power, and Societies Volume 18 #3

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We will publish our next issue in the early summer. Your input is welcome!

Please send your comments and submissions to Erik Larson at: [larson@macalester.edu](mailto:larson@macalester.edu)

## Teaching Political Sociology

# (De)Naturalizing Citizenship: Reviewing Civics & Exploring Ideologies

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Despite efforts to ensure an appropriate background sociological knowledge among students in undergraduate political sociology classes, many of us find that our students vary widely in their familiarity with U.S. history and politics. Vague recollections from pre-college civics classes are typical among students born and raised in the United States, while many foreign students are encountering American civics for the first time. Students need this basic topical knowledge to appreciate many of the field's most important insights. I like to take the measure of our common sense of core concepts like 'citizen' and 'democracy' early in the semester, and I have found that an in-class exploration of the U.S. naturalization process on the first or second day can accomplish this. It also helps to break-the-ice among students and cultivate some common ground for themes we will address throughout the term.

Students build on this exercise over the term. We begin by working our way through a dozen or so questions from the civics test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), though I introduce it as a benchmark test about U.S. politics and history. For the most part, the USCIS questions are designed for short answers, and we work through them together rather quickly. It is a notoriously easy test—nowhere near as detailed or complex as written tests for drivers' licenses—but there is still a range of difficulty (e.g., from "name one branch of government" to "name one of the writers of the Federalist Papers"). Once we have done this, I explain the source of the questions and invite some discussion of the naturalization process. (If we don't have anyone who knows the process from personal/family experience, we almost always have a critical mass of students who have seen "Much Apu About Nothing" on *The Simpsons*.) We then proceed to a short video.

"A Promise of Freedom: An Introduction to U.S. History and Civics for Immigrants," created for USCIS by the National Constitution Center, is an English-language film—but versions with Spanish or Chinese captions are easily available (and prompt students to think about ethnicity and citizenship). After watching the film, each student takes about 5 minutes to com-

plete a short paragraph beginning "We the People' means..." and addressing how this meaning has changed historically. (I collect these and pool the responses into an anonymous collection we share as a class, revisiting our benchmark statements at the end of the term.) At this point, everyone in the class has a shared frame of reference, and each student has begun to reflect on it critically.

The final stage of the exercise is to probe the naturalization test, ceremony, and instructional materials as ideological constructs. (I return to constructs like 'ideology' and 'hegemony' later in the term, but in this exercise I want students attending to ways in which the manifest content of USCIS resources may obscure latent possibilities.) "We the People" opens class discussion to the ways in which citizenship simultaneously excludes as it includes, and we review some of the historical exclusions based on class, race/ethnicity, and gender. We also discuss how the official representations of citizenship foreground notions of representative rather than direct/participatory democracy and begin to make some comparative notes, as we revisit the particulars of the naturalization test. Why a president rather than a prime minister? Why is a two-party system so stable in the U.S.? Why parties? Students very quickly start asking pertinent questions as well as educating each other about the social construction of citizenship and democracy.

### Resources

Both the video and a pamphlet entitled "Learn About the United States: Quick Civics Lessons for the Naturalization Test" are available online. There is a short-cut/stable URL for the video: [http://www.uscis.gov/a\\_promise](http://www.uscis.gov/a_promise). The pamphlet covers 100 questions actually used by the USCIS (and the officially-correct answers) and provides references to other resources. It is not indexed well, but a search at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> for "M-638" should produce a link to the PDF.