

**The Racial Logic of Politics: Asian Americans and Party Competition.** By Thomas P. Kim. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2007. 208p. \$69.50 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

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— Andrew L. Aoki, *Augsburg College*

This is a welcome effort to extend the study of race to American political institutions. A major contribution is the exploration of the way that Asian American political prospects vary across institutions. Thomas Kim argues that the party system serves Asian Americans poorly but that their prospects are better in Congress. Given the systemic barriers in party politics, Asian Americans would be better served by building their own political base and agenda, but that goal is undermined by the misguided efforts of Asian American political elites, he believes.

Kim follows the path blazed by Paul Frymer's *Uneasy Alliances* (1999), which argued that African American political interests were undermined when they were "captured" by one of the major parties. Like Frymer, Kim criticizes the argument that that competition drives parties to seek the support of uncommitted voters. In the case of Asian Americans, however, their downfall has come not from being captured but rather from being perceived as fundamentally alien, greatly diminishing the incentive of any party to make them a visible part of a partisan coalition. "Rather than help integrate them, two-party competition works to maintain the positioning of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners" (p. 6), fueling public hostility toward them, Kim argues.

The book draws heavily on work done primarily in Asian American and related cultural studies: in particular, the influential ideas of Michael Omi and Howard Winant (*Racial Formation*, 1994) and Lisa Lowe (*Immigrant Acts*, 1996). Following Omi and Winant, Kim describes Asian Americans as a racial formation that has been defined as inherently foreign. The American polity is a liberal one, Kim assumes, and so Asian Americans have been depicted as illiberal, making them easy and tempting targets for parties seeking to appeal to mainstream voters.

Like many students of Asian American politics, Kim devotes considerable attention to the campaign finance scandal of 1996, widely considered by activists to be a major setback for Asian American political fortunes. The fear of public backlash led the national Democratic Party to view all Asian Americans with suspicion, while the Republican Party pressed its presumed advantage by warning of the dire consequences of this latest yellow peril.

While the institutional logic of two-party competition works against Asian American interests, congressional "countermajoritarian norms" have been beneficial, Kim argues. To put it simply, well-placed members of Congress (MCs) can wield disproportionate power, and a small number of well-placed Asian American MCs did just that to advance Asian American interests in such policies as cen-

sus categories and reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

Kim's concluding argument is that Asian American interests are best served by community organizing that builds a grassroots political agenda. He believes that Asian American "political elites" have failed to do this, however, and claims that they have allowed themselves to be "pushed by major party elites to focus on developing relationships with powerful politicians rather than on building community-based political power" (p. 116).

The author's interpretation offers a valuable cautionary tale for those who believe that two-party competition is the solution to political inequities, but his analysis has a number of shortcomings. While he makes a convincing argument that Asian Americans continue to face deeply rooted political disadvantages, his claims need much more qualification.

First, he may overstate the disadvantages facing Asian Americans. There is little doubt that they continue to be seen as foreigners, but it is less certain whether this perception is as deeply rooted and disadvantageous as Kim (and many in Asian American studies) assert. Most significantly, high intermarriage rates among third- and later-generation Asian Americans suggests that the barriers are dramatically lower than they once were, and much lower than those facing African Americans. Asian Americans still are routinely seen as alien, but their marginalization in American society may be less rigid and more nuanced than Kim suggests.

Second, his criticisms of "Asian American political elites" lacks supporting evidence. He claims that they are disconnected from their communities, calling that disconnection "the contemporary nadir of Asian American political development" (p. 125). However, the media reports that supply much of his data provide no support for this claim, and most community mobilization efforts are unable to attract the media gaze. However, Janelle Wong's extensive research on immigrant communities (*Democracy's Promise*, 2006) documents a wealth of grassroots organizing and mobilization, and finds that it was traditional party mobilization efforts that withered and failed to incorporate new Americans.

Third, some of Kim's theoretical foundation is questionable. He frames two-party competition within a liberal consensus, without considering the shortcomings of this interpretation, which has been severely challenged by scholars over the last four decades. Rogers Smith, for example, has argued that an inegalitarian tradition is deeply rooted in the U.S., alongside the liberal and republican ones (*Civic Ideals*, 1997). Kim's argument that Asian Americans are viewed as "illiberal" seems to require a level of sophistication that may be widespread among the citizenry. Smith's notion of an inegalitarian tradition offers a more parsimonious and plausible explanation for the political vulnerability of Asian Americans. When the media

portray them in an unfavorable light, it becomes easy for political opportunists to draw on a tradition that portrays some groups as inherently inferior and undesirable.

Finally, Kim's analysis of congressional dynamics is likely to leave Congress specialists unsatisfied. His description seems to draw on an older model of powerful committees and extensive decentralization and does not reflect the substantial increase in leadership power in recent decades. The full story of Asian American legislative successes is somewhat more complicated.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Racial Logic of Politics* deserves attention. It both supports and expands Paul Frymer's argument that race continues to exert a powerful influence on political party dynamics. We know far too little about the interaction of race and political institutions, and Kim has made a valuable contribution toward addressing this substantial shortcoming.

**Business and Environmental Policy: Corporate Interests in the American Political System.** Edited by Michael E. Kraft and Sheldon Kamieniecki. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007. 372p. \$62.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.  
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— Robert F. Durant, *American University*

Perhaps nowhere has more rhetorical heat been generated amid less empirical light than on debates over the influence of business on public policy. Moreover, researchers tackling this important question systematically reach dissimilar conclusions. No one doubts that business influences public policy. At issue is the extent of its influence relative to other actors. In the tradition of Charles Lindblom's classic *Politics and Markets* (1977), some recent scholarship has found that business holds a privileged position in policy debates because of its unparalleled resources and centrality to the nation's economic prosperity (e.g., see Kay Schlozman and John Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*, 1986; David Vogel, *Kindred Strangers*, 1996; Richard Lehne, *Government and Business*, 2001). Others tread more in the tradition of Raymond Bauer, Lewis Dexter, and Ithiel de Sola Pool's 1963 classic, *American Business and Public Policy*, finding that business is constrained and increasingly on the defensive amid an explosion of politically and media-savvy interest groups (e.g., see Mark Smith, *American Business and Political Power*, 2002; Jeffrey Berry, *Interest Group Liberalism*, 1999; Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leach, *Basic Interests*, 1998).

Into this debate sprints *Business and Environmental Policy*. The book explores what we know, how we know it, and what else we need to know about business's power in the environmental policy domain. Edited by two leading and prolific environmental policy researchers, and with accomplished environmental policy scholars as contributors, this volume is a welcome addition to the literature. It addresses three key questions: What is business trying to

accomplish in the policy process, what factors affect its success, and does success vary in different institutional settings? From these analyses, the editors argue that business is less likely to dominate when the issue involved is highly salient to the public, when an industry is smaller and has fewer resources, when environmental groups are strong and the general political environment is hostile, and when political institutions create electoral incentives for actors to embrace environmental protection.

For newcomers to this topic, the book offers a comprehensive, accessible, and informative introduction to the major issues, research, and research challenges informing the debate. For veterans, the book affords a uniquely well-integrated, nuanced, and thought-provoking synthesis that, at once, confirms and surprises. It does so by clearing away some of the conceptual underbrush (e.g., differentiating influence across different stages of the policy process); by unpacking the conventional wisdom (e.g., state renewable portfolio standards can be driven by desires as much for economic advantage as for reducing greenhouse gas emissions); and by exploring the methodological challenges facing researchers (e.g., the absence of state court databases), while simultaneously suggesting fruitful areas for future research.

Readers also will benefit from the unprecedented way the book assesses the impact of business from each level of the Madisonian system (federal, state, and local), across various stages of the policy process (problem definition and issue framing, adoption, and implementation), within different decision fora (legislative, administrative, and judicial), and over time. In the process, the contributors disabuse readers of any notion of historical determinism favoring industry. The chapters consistently chronicle outcomes produced by the interaction of history, shifting sociopolitical contexts, and the seizing of immediate advantage. In the process, various contributors summarize trends in the patterns of interest group politics, strategies, and tactics in such issue areas as energy exploration (Dorothy Guber and Christopher Bosso), global warming (Judith Layzer), air pollution (Gary Bryner), land use (Kent Portney), and renewable energy (Barry Rabe and Philip Mundo). Joining them are contributors who assess business's tactics and influence in political campaigns (Robert Duffy), agency rulemaking (Cary Coglianese), and the courts (Paul Weiland and Lettie McSpadden) involving mining, gas, transportation, and ranching issues.

The editors also provide a balanced overview of this complex topic. Readers will find different essays showing, for example, how court delay both advantages and disadvantages business (e.g., Weiland and McSpadden), and why the dice are either increasingly loaded for or against environmental groups jousting with industry. Various contributors also show how environmental interest group numbers in Washington have spiraled to prevent business dominance, but so too have industry contributions to