

Next, Gillespie uses the case study method to test the idea that Obama was a "paddling duck," an officeholder who appears to be moving smoothly across the lake but is paddling furiously just beneath the surface. Was Obama working assiduously to improve conditions for Black people while maintaining his deracialized identity for the sake of appearances? Gillespie examines press releases from four Cabinet departments (Labor, Education, Health and Welfare, and Justice) across the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations to answer this question. She also considers federal reports issued in the wake of police shootings of unarmed Blacks, and finally, she dissects how each president handled presidential pardons and commutations.

Gillespie uses these data in creative ways to answer her question. When looking at memos and press releases from the various departments, for example, she does not require that race is specified or that the memos include language about Blacks. Instead, she examines industries with an overrepresentation of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Gillespie's findings indicate that there was indeed a bit of paddling going on beneath Obama's gliding over the political waters. The differences are most apparent in the disposition of pardons and commutations. Presidents Clinton and Bush pardoned more white-collar criminals than Obama, whereas Obama tended to commute more sentences for violent crimes. What makes this work stand out is how carefully Gillespie treats her findings. She points out that pardons and commutations are no substitutes for systemic failures. She also incorporates most of the work done by scholars about the Obama years in making her assessments.

When Gillespie turns to symbolic representation and rhetoric, she again demonstrates an exceptional facility for the innovative use of available data. The integrity of her work emerges in each chapter, as she explains to the reader what we can and cannot infer from the data. She is forthcoming about how the data fall short of offering iron-clad explanations. Gillespie also references those outstanding scholars who have published critiques of Obama and seamlessly weaves in their contributions (Michael Dawson, *Not in Our Lifetimes: The Future of Black Politics*, 2011; Lorrie Frasure, "The Burden of Jekyll and Hyde: Barack Obama, Racial Identity and Black Political Behavior," in *Whose Black Politics? Cases in Post-Racial Black Leadership*, ed. Andra Gillespie, pp. 133–54, 2010; Shayla Nunnally, "African American Perspectives of the Obama Presidency," in William Crotty, ed., *The Obama Presidency: Promise and Performance*, pp. 127–50, 2012). She finds some presidential press conferences that support her argument that Obama was committed to transcending race but also (as did the other three presidents) that he tended to default to individualistic explanations for inequalities as opposed to systemic causes.

Moving into the value and meaning of symbolic representation, Gillespie compares the number and substance of the many commencement addresses made by both Barack and Michelle Obama. She finds that Barack Obama was more likely to rebuke African Americans when speaking to an African American audience. The Obamas also accepted more invitations from historically black colleges and universities. This recognition matters, and what political leaders state in their speeches adds context and nuance to policy decisions.

An overview of the Obamas' public personas and the kinds of artists invited for a White House performance, especially those televised on the Public Broadcasting System, may not seem significant. However, Gillespie convinces us that these kinds of culturally symbolic activities matter when it comes to elevating minority groups' sense of belonging. She follows this chapter with one that reveals an intriguing finding: that Blacks were not, as many people believe, "Obamabots." Black people were in fact somewhat skeptical when rating Obama's overall performance.

It is difficult to connect disparate sources and build a cohesive argument, but Gillespie manages it quite well. This book is an excellent source of information about how the Obama presidency was both "politics as usual" and "transformative politics." She demonstrates that the question of whether Obama's election and time in office signaled an era of hope for achieving full equality for African Americans cannot have a "yes" or "no" answer. Gillespie reminds us that context matters and that the executive branch is constrained by many factors, not the least of which is our two-party system.

The most remarkable feature of this work is that Gillespie makes her methodology clear and accessible to nonacademics. Although the general public may not care to scrutinize the results of her regression models, they will understand the findings through her smooth and engaging prose. Gillespie also points out the shortcomings of her methodology every step of the way. She leads us to other scholars whose work challenges her own. Finally, Gillespie carefully calibrates her data, making this work an excellent example of the best of political science research.

Can America Govern Itself? Edited by Frances E. Lee and Nolan McCarty. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 368p. \$99.99 cloth, \$28.99 paper.

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The title of this book raises a critically important question that, so often, produces a depressing answer: Is US democracy doomed, destined to collapse on itself because of the pressures of shrinking equality and rising polarization?

That question in turn builds on an even deeper puzzle: Has James Madison's grand design sowed the seeds of the country's ultimate downfall, because intuitions constructed to solve the eighteenth-century's cross-pressures have proved to be a poor match for the twenty-first-century's challenges?

This book, which grew from the Social Science Research Council's Anxieties of Democracy program, concludes that we have plenty to be anxious about. Indeed, in summing up the book's contributions, editors Frances E. Lee and Nolan McCarthy claim that the source of the greatest angst facing the country "might be seen as the sins of James Madison," especially because "checks, balances, and federalism are enormous impediments to government action." That is surely enough to make any reader swallow hard in thinking about the prospects for US democracy. But the editors also sum up the book's biggest finding on a more hopeful note, suggesting that "the very fragmentation of power that makes our system so difficult to manage and mobilize also serves as a bulwark against democratic erosion and executive aggrandizement" (p. 343).

The authors of the chapters in this wonderful collection remind us that the US experiment has sailed through even tougher seas. The book is a rich, textured, and detailed consideration of the biggest issues facing governance in the United States. It is an important collection of essays by first-rate scholars, a sweeping survey that deserves careful reading by anyone who cares about the country's political system.

There is a lot jammed into this book that deserves to be carefully unpacked. The chapters are uniformly strong, and each has important insights, built on a careful review of the literature and a thorough examination of the evidence. Indeed, the book is invaluable both as an outline and a core text for courses seeking to help students understand what is really going on under the hood of US politics.

Woven throughout the book are two threads: *inequality* and the strains that the growing differences between the rich and the poor are putting on the system, and *polarization*, which challenges the role of political parties and political institutions. These threads create a rich fabric connecting the book's three major sections: the anxieties of power, influence, and representation (especially with challenges to political parties stemming from the power of business, interest groups, and big money); procedural anxieties (especially about whether Congress has simply broken down and whether political discourse has become dumber); and the anxieties of governance (especially in the effects of polarization on the bureaucracy and policy). With respect to these themes, most of the authors paint a picture of a situation that is bad—but not as bad as might be feared.

In his chapter in the section on the anxieties of power, for example, Anthony S. Chen finds that business

influence is surely large, but that there is not strong evidence that the power of big business buys policy outcomes. Rather, it tends to act as a drag on change, enhancing a bias toward the status quo. Daniel Scholzman and Sam Rosenfeld find that the political parties have become hollow, strong at marshaling the support of voters but weak in making nominations, bringing nonvoters to the polls, and framing lucid policies. Minority groups prove remarkably successful in finding ways to force attention to their grievances, Daniel Grillion and Patricia Posey conclude.

The section on procedural anxieties produces "perhaps the most reassuring entries in the volume," Lee and McCarthy write reassuringly (p. 335). It is hard to craft positive arguments about the role of Congress, but Peter Hanson and Lee Drutman find that Congress works relatively well on budgetary matters, with a sense of deliberation and bipartisanship, even as it otherwise gets sucked into a partisan morass. And is political discourse getting worse, culminating in a "dumbing down" of debate? Kenneth Benoit, Kevin Munger, and Arthur Spirling examine formal communication, ranging from Supreme Court decisions to State of the Union addresses, and find that political discourse is no less sophisticated than it was previously, although their analysis does not dig into the rising role of polarization-inducing tweets and other forms of social media. It is worth considering, for example, how different politics would be if the cap on Twitter posts had been 280 or 560 characters, instead of 140, or if the cloaked world of social media posts was more transparent to more people. This is perhaps the most surprising section of the book, because the authors argue that the forces of decay are not as bad as observers often think.

It is the last section, on governance anxieties, that is the most anxiety producing, with a picture of a national government increasingly falling out of sync with its ability to solve the problems it faces. The increasingly polarized Congress finds itself gridlocked in its capacity to deal with the challenges faced by big programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, Suzanne Mettler and Claire Leavitt contend. The capacity of bureaucracy to tackle big issues is shrinking, David Spence finds in a sweeping and powerful chapter, because its tools (ranging from public law to expertise) are lagging behind. Polarization not only hamstring administrators but also makes it far more difficult for Congress to provide guidance and to reshape policies in ways that keep up with changing social and economic conditions. Moreover, Nolan McCarthy discovers, these forces of polarization have cascaded down into state governments, which gives them "the enhanced opportunity and incentive to resist federal policy" (p. 323). In the states, increased polarization has brought less divided government, as more states have become locked into either Democratic or Republican majorities. That,

McCarthy concludes, may “produce more extreme policy outcomes and more variation in policies across states” (p. 324).

It is worth noting that most of the work in this volume preceded much of the turmoil of the Trump administration, whose full and lasting impact on governance in the United States will take years to sort out. It is very likely, however, that Donald Trump’s legacy will only reinforce some of the biggest anxieties that predated his election, anxieties that are richly analyzed in this book. Inequality has only increased, and fierce partisan conflict has surely deepened the forces of polarization. But despite the inability to provide an historical assessment of the Trump years, *Can America Govern Itself?* is nevertheless an important reminder that Trump did not create these forces but rather built his success on top of long-existing trends.

That makes this fascinating edited volume an even bigger contribution. It will be impossible to look ahead to the future without understanding how the US political system got to the present. *Can America Govern Itself?* not only helps us understand the historical roots of our current anxieties but it is also an invaluable guide to where Madison’s grand design has taken us—and to the questions we will need to answer if it is to survive, let alone thrive, into the mid-twenty-first century.

Black Women in Politics: Demanding Citizenship, Challenging Power, and Seeking Justice. Edited by Julia S. Jordan-Zachery and Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018. 314p. \$85.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592720000079

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The editors of *Black Women in Politics* have compiled an excellent set of chapters on current research on Black women in political science and the social sciences more broadly. They offer analyses of how many articles in mainstream journals have been published on Black women and assess how likely it is that the paucity of research on Black women will be corrected. Intersectionality work, which includes an expanded notion of what constitutes the political and on how gender is also racialized, classed, and sexualized, is a way that groups rendered invisible in academia can be included. “Black women,” Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd writes, “have in fact been central, not marginal, to political development in the United States and elsewhere in the African Diaspora” (p. 17). The analyses presented in this volume offer a powerful corrective to interpretations of politics that are misleadingly taught as complete and as representative of Black women.

It is more than 25 years since the publication of Jewel Prestage’s “In Quest of the African American Political

Women” (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 515, 1991). Intersectionality as a paradigm is about the same age, credited to two scholars working simultaneously in the late 1980s. The book contains powerful symbolism from a variety of sources; for example, Black feminist scholars are “holed up” in the attic spaces of their disciplines and, in this way, “garreting” themselves like Harriet Jacobs did for seven years in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Plowing—or digging deeply into research—and garreting enable the advancement of a “liberating politics.” Professional groups such as the Association of Black Women Historians, conference workshops, specialized journals such as *Gender and Society*, and special symposia on Black women and women of color represent other forms of garreting. These networks provide mentoring, intellectual and personal support, and publication venues for Black women working in the field of Black women’s studies. Nevertheless, for those who engage in intersectional work, there are still racist and gendered barriers to receiving equal professional credit for their scholarship.

Today, some critics argue that intersectionality work has outlived its usefulness. Their main point is that the Black female remains too central in the framework to provide a good understanding of the broader social and political phenomena at work in Black communities. However, Jordan-Zachery and Alexander-Floyd write that the primary focus of intersectional work has never been identity politics but rather social justice. In their book, the analytic frame is to reimagine “Black women’s studies as a subfield within Africana studies and women’s and gender studies” (p. xxii). Black women’s studies can then display its methodological approaches and concepts in considering how Black women fight for conditions that improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Selections from the volume include Jenny Douglas’s “The Politics of Black Women’s Health in the UK.” With some exceptions, and in contrast to the United States, research on the health of Afro-Caribbean women has been scarce compared to the study of the health of Black men. There also tends to be an overemphasis on the mental health of Afro-Caribbeans, which reinforces stereotypes of pathology, especially among Black men. For example, Afro-Caribbeans are six times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia. Yet Blacks are less likely to receive treatment for their higher rates of depression, which may be a function of their reluctance to seek care. Surveys show that Afro-Caribbeans fear racial harassment, and this fear could negatively affect their health and well-being. Douglas contends that work experience, particularly low-wage and public-sector work; class; home life; and racial conditions also have impacts on health. She makes this case for Afro-Caribbean employees of the National Health Service, where they work as both cleaners and nurses. Both Black men and Black women in the United Kingdom are twice