

Editor's Note: Annual Meeting Highlights

The December issue of *PS* has traditionally highlighted special addresses delivered at the Annual Meeting. This issue is no exception. We are pleased to publish W. Lance Bennett's 1998 Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecture, "The UnCivic Culture: Communication, Identity, and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics," and Louis C. Gawthrop's 1998 John Gaus Lecture, "The Human Side of Public Administration." Both lectures demonstrate that the unhappy condition of democratic life in America continues to occupy the attention of scholars from many subfields of the discipline.

We are all familiar with the pathologies of America's social order and polity: memberships in groups are declining, citizens are distancing themselves from each other, the social trust needed for community action is evaporating, and political knowledge is not expanding. Citizens' faith in government's ability to deal effectively with problems is diminishing as their mistrust of all but their own elected officials is expanding. In increasing numbers, citizens are not participating in the electoral process, the level of political disengagement being particularly high among younger generations. Social and political disengagement have been the topics of many *PS* articles, some questioning the existence of a problem (Nelson, March 1995; Putnam, December 1995; Norris, September 1996; Bennett, March 1997; Zaller, June 1998; Bennett, September 1998; and McBride, September 1998). The Bennett and Gawthrop essays extend the discussion.

Robert Putnam foretold Lance Bennett's Pool Lecture. Putnam's 1995 address, "Tuning In, Turning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America," inaugurated the Pool lecture series by laying social and political disengagement at the feet of television rather than the influence of time, money, mobility, suburbanization, the changing role of women, the welfare state, race, and the civil rights struggle. Putnam nevertheless conceded: "I cannot absolutely rule out the possibility that some part of the erosion of social capital in recent years might be linked to a more generalized sense of economic insecurity that may have affected all Americans" (1995, 669). Enter Lance Bennett with his version of the familiar refrain, "*It's the economy, stupid*," confirming that what we cannot rule out in social science research comes back to haunt us with daunting regularity.

Bennett doubts that turning off the television would sufficiently replenish our reserves of social capital. According to Bennett, the origin of disengagement is economic not technological change; materialism not television is what isolates citizens from each other and their government. Unlike Putnam, who holds that citizens actually have more free time but are choosing to spend it in front of television sets, Bennett sees a harried citizenry composed of men and women spending more time in more jobs pursuing an elusive sense of economic security.

Bennett is a bit more sanguine than one might expect. He observes that while the unmotivated and busy may not vote, they are not forsaking their social obligations entirely. Voting and party membership may be declining along with the rosters of bowling leagues, but increasing numbers of citizens are volunteering. According to Bennett, a new economic imperative is spawning different modes of social and political engagement.

Bennett's guarded optimism is echoed in Louis Gawthrop's appeal to the human side of public administration. Gawthrop affirms that democracy can be better served if we adhere less rigidly to the instrumental, value-free model of public administration and if public servants begin to educate citizens about the democratic values that inform government action. Public servants, charges Gawthrop, should become "barefoot democrats" working closely with citizens to determine not only the "what" and "how" of political action but the "why" as well. In this value-laden model of public administration, public servants must engage citizens in the processes and ends of governance to enrich their sense of community and encourage civility.

Gawthrop and Bennett make important contributions to our understanding of the dynamics of political disengagement, and of how we recognize and explain social and political change. The discussion will not end with them. *PS* readers are encouraged to add their voices to those of our distinguished authors by submitting essays that consider the micro- and macro-dynamics of political change.

—RJPH

1998 Award Lecturers

W. Lance Bennett, 1998 Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecturer, is professor of political science at the University of Washington. He has served as chair of the Political Communications Section of the APSA. His contributions to the study of communications and politics include analyses of political rhetoric, the symbolic uses of public opinion, narrative in criminal trials, the production and political effects of news content, and the ways in which communication media interact with governing institutions in different political systems.

Louis C. Gawthrop, 1998 John M. Gaus Lecturer, is Eminent Scholar and professor of government and public administration at the University of Baltimore. He has contributed to numerous volumes on public administration and has written extensively on the ethical dimensions of public service and public sector organizations. The focus of his most recent book, *Public Service and Democracy: Ethical Imperatives for the 21st Century* (1998), is on the ethical-moral dimensions that infuse the integral relationship between public administration and democracy.



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