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Toward "Total Political History": A Rational-Choice Research Program

Political history is at an impasse. As the subjects of history expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, and as the prospects of societal change through political means dimmed in the 1980s, the study of war, diplomacy, and the writings and sayings of statemen—the principal raw materials of the old political history—lost favor with students and young professors alike. The organizing frameworks of politically centered history—Charles Beard's class analysis, Frederick Jackson Turner's stress on sectional splits, Louis Hartz's Lockeian consensus, Lee Benson's ethnoculturalism, and Walter Dean Burnham's critical-elections theory—have come under telling attack.[1]

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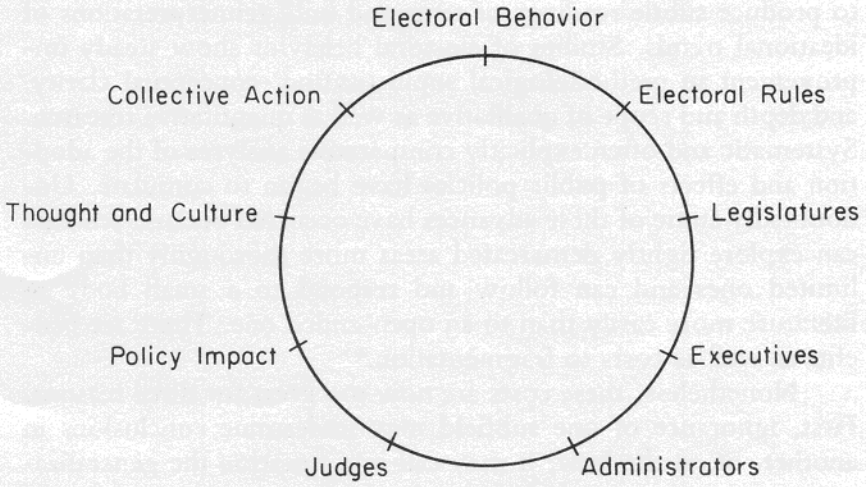
1 For fuller documentation of the points made here and elsewhere in the text, see the Caltech Social Science Working Paper # 581 (Pasadena, 1988) version of this paper. In 1979, Richard L. McCormick asserted that American political history was "experiencing a crisis." McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History*, LXVI (1979), 279–298, reprinted in *idem, The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York, 1986), 197. Although he has more recently asserted that "The field of American political history is enjoying a remarkable burst of creative and diverse scholarship," he discusses few examples, his judgments of some recent works may be disputed, and his own comments indicate that his claim of a recent "burst" is exaggerated. "Political Parties in the United States: Reinterpreting Their Natural History," *History Teacher*, XIX (1985), 15–32. Allan G. Bogue's masterful "Systematic Revisionism and a Generation of Ferment in American History," *Journal of Contemporary History*, XXI (1986), 135–162, reflecting Bogue's understandable nostalgia for the early days of the "new" post-World War II histories, implies by comparison much less enthusiasm for current scholarship. The obvious response to a recent article, Daniel J. Gans, "Persistence of Party Success in American Presidential Elections," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XVI (1985), 221–237—that persistent national party success is not what the critical-elections theorists meant by stability—points up the vagueness and underdevelopment of critical-elections theory itself.

Braudellians scorn all political history as mired in the superficial and transitory, many Marxists dismiss quantitative historians as apologists for bourgeois pluralism, and spokespersons for the New Right condemn the "new history" for shattering myths that they allege are necessary for national unity and legitimacy. Recent appeals for a revival of interest in power and state formation merely emphasize the impression that political history has become a backwater. Social and economic historians often either assert that political contests and decisions were irrelevant to their subjects' lives or casually project the implications of their studies onto the political plane without performing the detailed research into political events and institutions that would be necessary to sustain their conclusions. Those who cannot count, and refuse to learn, damn cliometric works as boring and elitist, and as futile attempts to apply the methods and modes of the physical sciences to the fundamentally indeterminate thoughts and actions of humans, and they themselves often proceed as if quantifiable evidence were inferior to that from literary sources or were inconsequential for all important questions.[2]

Yet, at the same time that political history as a whole has been deserted, disorganized, denigrated, and divided, many subfields are flourishing. What are those subfields and how do they fit together? There are nine major divisions, and they may usefully be conceived as arranged on the circumference of a circle, a line having no beginning or end and implying no hierarchical relationships among the areas of study (see Figure 1). Histories of

2 For views from France, the left, and the right, see Jacques Juilliard, "Political History in the 1980s: Reflections on its Present and Future," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XII (1981), 29–44; Nancy Fitch, "Statistical Fantasies and Historical Facts: History in Crisis and Its Methodological Implications," *Historical Methods*, XVII (1984), 239–54; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 8, 18–19, and reports of speeches to publishers by Gary L. Bauer and Marlowe Teig, in *Washington Post*, 16 Jan. 1986. For a jeremiad against social scientific history, see Lee Benson, "The Mistransference Fallacy in Explanations of Human Behavior," *Historical Methods*, XVII (1984), 118–131, and my response, "Must Historians Regress? An Answer to Lee Benson," *ibid.*, XIX (1986), 62–81. There are many more telling criticisms of particular works of quantitative history by other observers. Indeed, cliometricians so readily and often effectively lambaste each others' work as to leave little to be done by nonspecialists. Such criticisms are a normal and necessary part of the growth and refinement of knowledge, and are not necessarily indicative of fundamental flaws in the works criticized. Many traditional historians' overreactions to the criticisms directed at Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross* (Boston, 1974) mistake this point.

Fig. 1 The Wheel of Politics



political thought, ideologies, cultures, values, or attitudes have traditionally attracted a great deal of attention and, as the recent deluge of articles and books with the words "republican" or "political culture" in the title suggests, still do. Next to thought and culture, we might place extraparliamentary collective action, such as strikes, mobs, and selective or comprehensive violence. This domain shades into the more formalized activity of voting behavior, which, like all collective action, involves an interaction between elites and masses. The rules for conducting these contests constitute a fourth subdivision. Electorates choose legislatures and executives, who in turn provide for the appointment of administrators and, usually, judges. Those officials determine and put into effect policies which have an impact on voters' behavior and attitudes, completing the circle.[3]

3 That seemingly all scholars would like to promote their own field as more basic or important than the rest and that it takes little thought to compose arguments for or against the primacy of any particular area imply that none is intrinsically more significant. A case could be made for including a tenth subfield, political discourse, rather than subsuming it in the category of political thought. Indeed, Wood and Pocock seem to claim that it is preeminent, on the grounds that the mind-set of an era or subgroup, as reflected in the

Recent scholarship in these areas has progressed, but on separate, disconnected tracks. Historians of political thought continue to produce subtle readings of texts and bold reinterpretations of ideational trends. Studies of electoral behavior show steady improvement in methodological sophistication, conceptual clarity, and depth and scope of qualitative as well as quantitative research. Systematic and often explicitly comparative analyses of the adoption and effects of public policies have begun to cumulate. Undoubtedly some of these advances have occurred because scholars can explore tightly demarcated areas more thoroughly than unlimited ones and can follow and respond to a small body of literature more easily than to an open-ended one. There are benefits as well as costs to fragmentation.[4]

Nonetheless, these costs are now too great for three reasons. First, ignorance of one subfield may undermine conclusions in another, or, at the least, it may call into question the generaliza-

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associated vocabulary, shapes men's perceptions and constrains the solutions that they can offer to political questions. See, for example, Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (eds.), *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 35; John Grenville Agard Pocock, "*The Machiavellian Moment* Revisited: A Study in History and Ideology," *Journal of Modern History*, LIII (1981), 52. There are three major difficulties with this position: First, if ideologies are the spectacles through which people perceive all events, how and why do they change their lenses? Second, how would an observer know if they had done so? Without another measurement of "reality," one cannot discover the characteristics of the lens, or decide which of two or more possible lenses was actually in place. Third, people may disagree on the implications of basic values on particular policy issues. If John Adams and Thomas Hutchinson each considered that adherence to a common "republican" ideology led them to take the (opposite) stands that they did on the American Revolution, why should we consider that ideology to have been determinative at all? Yet, if the culturally deterministic interpretation of political discourse is relaxed to meet these criticisms, and one allows for a multiplicity of competing basic conceptions at the same time and for conflict over what each conception means in practical terms, then what does the idea add to the simpler view that people just have different preferences?

4 I have in mind works such as Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). Although they disagree about many matters, the authors of recent studies of electoral behavior, such as Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848–1876* (Chapel Hill, 1983), and William E. Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War," *Journal of American History*, LXXII (1985), 529–559, perform statistical analyses of election returns as a matter of course. Recent studies of public policy include Carl Harris, "Stability and Change in Discrimination Against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, Alabama, 1871–1931," *Journal of Southern History*, LI (1985), 375–416. For other studies of policy outputs by historians, see the citations in Kousser, "Restoring Politics to Political History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XII (1982), 569–595.

bility of particular findings. Egalitarian political rhetoric, for instance, may mask antiegalitarian policies, and conclusions based on the one may be seriously compromised by an examination of the other—a point that is as often ignored in practice as it is enunciated in principle. Second, concepts developed in one area of a discipline, such as political theory or legislative behavior, may be inapplicable to others, rendering explanations that connect two or more such categories difficult if not impossible. If schemas drawn from symbolic anthropology are assumed to explain voter behavior, for example, then how do elected officials set policy, and what sort of theory could tie the two together? Third, narrowness may feed narrowness. Segmentation within political history may also encourage its divorce from social and economic history, as well as from the adjacent disciplines of economics, political science, and sociology. Implications of theories and findings in one division of knowledge may therefore be overlooked. How has geographical mobility affected party loyalty, and what impact have changes in economic conditions had on electoral behavior? Rather than the unifying hub of history that it once was, the study of past politics threatens to become a collection of tidy, segregated subdivisions isolated from the stimulus and challenge of continuous intra- and inter-disciplinary contacts, overspecialized, and, therefore, ignored by the rest of the historical and social scientific communities.[5]

The most common response to recognition of the present disorder in political history has been to seek unity by imposing some substantive synthesis drawn from one subfield on the others. Thus, Appleby asserts approvingly that the study of "republican"

5 Egalitarian rhetoric and inegalitarian policies are contrasted in Kousser, "Progressivism for Middle Class Whites Only: The Distribution of Taxation and Expenditures for Education in North Carolina, 1880–1910," *Journal of Southern History*, XLVI (1980), 169–194. The possible disconnections between electoral politics and policy formation are pervasive themes of McCormick's essays in *Party Period and Public Policy*. Citing McCormick's work, Jean H. Baker concludes that "voting choices" have no "relevance to political history" (a position that McCormick himself would not take). Baker, "The Ceremonies of Politics," in William J. Cooper, Jr., et al., *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 164. The implications of geographical mobility for politics are sketched in Kenneth J. Winkle, "A Social Analysis of Voter Turnout in Ohio, 1850–1860," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XIII (1983), 411–435; *idem, The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (Cambridge, 1988). Changes in income distribution are estimated in Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York, 1980).

and "liberal" ideologies has shifted the concerns of political historians from "the decision-making individual," political campaigns, and the sociology of voters to "the ineffable aspects of past politics." Similarly, Bender's recent appeal to historians to concentrate on the development of "public culture" includes a disparagement of the history of parties, elections, and administrations as "superficial," and an insistence that "History is not a technical discipline," which implies, among other things, that quantitative studies are not history. Both Appleby's and Bender's assertions and exhortations should be seen as attempts to subordinate studies of other aspects of politics to what they believe is the cultural/ideological core of the subject.[6]

Rather than seeking unity by narrowing the focus of political history and excluding certain methods and types of historical persons from its purview, I propose that political historians adopt an approach that offers at least the possibility of a common strategy for understanding all facets of the subject—thus, "total political history." This paradigm, rational-choice theory, has already proven useful in economics and political science. In this article, I cannot fully discuss the vast and, to historians, largely unknown literature. Nor can I produce many examples of its application by historians, because so few are curently aware of it. It is possible, however, to sketch a few of its central concepts, demonstrate how models drawn from its literature can illuminate some problems in current disciplinary practice, indicate the wide range of its impact in political science, and spell out some of its potential implications for political history. Instead of focusing on a single issue or policy, such as slavery or the protective tariff, I attempt

6 Bailyn, "The Challenge of Modern Historiography," *American Historical Review*, LXXXVII (1982), 1–24, is the paradigm of a call for synthesis. Joyce Appleby, "Introduction: Republicanism and Ideology," *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (1985), 462. Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History*, LXXIII (1986), 120–136. Although agreeing with many of the cautions that Eric H. Monkkonen offers in "The Dangers of Synthesis," *American Historical Review*, XCI (1986), 1146–1157, I would distinguish between substantive syntheses, which insist on the centrality of certain themes, and are therefore inherently narrowing, and common approaches, which broaden explanations and join subfields. Review articles, which often stimulate more research and point to new directions, may be helpfully synthetic. As Nell Irvin Painter and Roy Rosenzweig have noted, it is difficult to see how the history of blacks and other minority groups would fit into Bender's scheme except as victims. Painter, "Bias and Synthesis in History," *Journal of American History*, CXXIV (1987), 109–112; Rosenzweig, "What *Is* the Matter with History?" *ibid.*, 117–122.

to show how understandings drawn from rational-choice theory and its applications to current politics can illuminate many diverse problems of nineteenth-century American political history, especially that of the middle period.[7]

Social, public, collective, or rational-choice theory—no one phrase is yet standard—may be defined as the economic study of nonmarket decision-making, often employing formal logic, game theory, or other mathematical techniques to reach its conclusions. The "rationality" in question is of means, not ends. The theory is concerned with the ways in which individuals seek to attain their goals, not with the choice of goals themselves. Thus, a belief that slavery was good or bad is considered a normative judgment to which the term "rational," in the sense of the theory, simply cannot apply. Nor are the goals that people are assumed to be pursuing necessarily economic—they may have a preference for or against temperance, for example. Like other economists, social-choice theorists generally assume that the actors (usually individuals, but possibly groups with identical preferences on relevant issues) are egoistic, rational, utility maximizers. Empiricists often study how well various social-choice and other types of models explain actual practices, or laboratory or computer-simulated results.[8]

7 A narrower concentration would fail to convey the richness and breadth of rational choice, and it would give an incorrect impression of theoretical closure. Rational choice is still vigorously contested ground, and no comprehensive synthesis is likely for some years.

8 William Riker's *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven, 1986) provides a very easy and appealing entrée, complete with historical examples. More detailed, but still not mathematically difficult, are the pioneering work by Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York, 1975); an excellent short textbook by Norman Frohlich and Joe A. Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1978); and the more comprehensive book by Robert Abrams, *Foundations of Political Analysis: An Introduction to the Theory of Collective Choice* (New York, 1980). Somewhat more advanced are Charles R. Plott, "Axiomatic Social Choice Theory: An Overview and Interpretation," *American Journal of Political Science*, XX (1976), 511–596; Dennis C. Mueller, *Public Choice*, II (Cambridge, 1989). Despite protestations to the contrary, James M. Enelow and Melvin J. Hinich, *The Spatial Theory of Voting: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1984), requires a good deal of math and a tolerance for theorem-proving, but it is the most useful work for voting specialists. The most comprehensive text, which is at a medium level of technical rigor, is Peter C. Ordeshook's *Game Theory and Political Theory* (New York, 1986). On the assumptions of rational choice, see Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New York, 1951). As the well-known political stances of such contributors to the literature as Arrow, Paul Samuelson, and Amartya K. Sen imply, social choice is not

Historians are so often skeptical of the usefulness of theories or abstractions that their potential value needs justification. It is not unusual for skeptics to remark, on the one hand, that rational choice is "just common sense" (when they agree with some implication), and, on the other hand, that it makes such absurd assumptions that no thinking person could accept it (when they disagree with a deduction). Any significant theory about human behavior should elicit both reactions. If it never accords with standard observations, it will stand no chance of acceptance, whereas, if it always does, it will be rejected as mere excess baggage. Theories such as those grouped under the rubric "rational choice" play three useful roles. They provide succinct and general descriptions of experience, or help us to make sense of a seemingly complex and confusing world. They highlight connections that we might not otherwise recognize between different events or situations. And they make at least some predictions that differ from those of other theories, or change the emphasis that we might, as a matter of "common sense," place on certain elements in a situation. For examples of all three functions, I examine rational-choice theory by looking at four of its most important principles or models.[9]

The first is the "free-rider" principle. A hitchiker may ask why he should bother to pay for a ride when the truck driver is

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necessarily politically conservative. Nor is it necessarily strictly individualistic. If all members of a group have the same preference ordering (for example, they prefer no regulation of liquor to some regulation, and either to absolute prohibition), or partially so with respect to some issue or policy that they all consider important, then they can be treated as a single actor.

It is true, however, that collective choice implies that the sum of the values can be no more than that of the parts—that the collective preference must be somehow compounded of all of the individual preferences without anything more added. The collectivity itself, in other words, is assumed to have no preferences—there is no separable "public interest." But since conservatives as well as liberals and radicals may claim a belief in "the public interest" or "the community," this assumption does not tie collective choice to any particular ideology. For empirical tests of rational choice, see, for example, Benjamin I. Page, *Choice and Echoes in Presidential Elections: Rational Man and Electoral Democracy* (Chicago, 1978); Larry M. Bartels, "Issue Voting Under Uncertainty: An Empirical Test," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXX (1986), 709–728.

9 Historians are all too aware of the Procrustean use of theories by single-minded individuals who play fast and loose with facts. My purpose is to point out that theories employed with due care can be useful. On the importance of the logic of comparisons in historical arguments, see Kousser, "Review Essay: Reconstruction Compared to What?" *Slavery and Abolition*, VII (1986), 290–298.

going in that direction anyway. Despite its extreme simplicity, this idea has considerable power and a wide range of applications to political and social history. Since it takes time and effort to organize or take part in formal or informal groups, we should expect to find that the members of such groups most often include those who are directly affected by a policy or potential policy. Because the impact of tariffs on protected industries was large and tangible in the nineteenth century, owners and workers in those firms were active lobbyists, whereas consumers, for whom the effects of a tariff were only diffuse and indirect, were not well organized.[10]

Although social or cultural explanations for the decline in voter turnout in the north during the early twentieth century may stress the post-1896 disjunction between party and ethnocultural lines or changes in the style of politics, the free-rider principle points to a shift in the incentives for individual political activists. In particular, it suggests that the rise of civil service and the corresponding decline in the number of patronage employees having a direct interest in encouraging people to vote may account for at least part of the lower level of turnout in twentieth-century America, compared to that in the nineteenth century. Farmers' Alliance organizers received a percentage of the dues of every member whom they enrolled. Those who joined the Know-Nothing or American Protective Association movements apparently valued the camaraderie and ceremony of the lodges, and some small-time merchants signed up in hopes that their "brothers" would patronize their businesses. Individual interest in nonmaterial as well as in material benefits at least partially explains the pattern of organization (or lack of organization) in politics, and the free-rider principle suggests one reason why policy outcomes do not always perfectly reflect the attitudes of a populace and why the policies adopted should not be taken to be unambiguous indications of those attitudes.[11]

10 For an introduction to the free-rider problem, see Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

11 Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870–1980* (New York, 1982), 79–80; Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928* (New York, 1986), vii, 8. For suggestive evidence on the connection between patronage and turnout, see Kousser, "Suffrage," in Greene (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Political History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas* (New York, 1984), III, 1250–1251.

A second principle is the "paradox of voting." In his pioneering *Social Choice and Individual Values,* Arrow demonstrated that if one posits a few seemingly obvious traits of people's preferences, then, in distressingly typical cases, no way of making decisions, such as majority rule, is guaranteed to lead to consistent results. Consider the classic example in Figure 2. Each of three voters (denoted 1, 2, and 3) has a preference regarding each of three alternative policies (denoted A, B, and C). For instance, voter 1 prefers A to B and B to C, and, assuming that her choices are "transitive," she opts for A over C, as well. What is the three voters' collective will? Suppose that they rely on majority rule, and that they decide between one pair, with the winner then slated against the remaining policy. If they choose first between A and B, then A obtains the franchises of voters 1 and 3, and therefore wins, 2–1. But in the "runoff" between C and A, C obtains the votes of 2 and 3, so C is the overall winner. If they begin by matching B against C, B wins, by the votes of 1 and 2, but then A is victorious over B, so A gets the grand prize. Likewise, if A is matched first against C, then C against B, B wins overall. By the simplest of changes in the order of voting, therefore, we can produce any outcome. Often applied to cases of agenda manipulation by committee chairmen, this model may be used to explain, for instance, the unraveling of Henry Clay's omnibus bill

Fig. 2 The Voter's Paradox

	Voters		
	1	2	3
Preferences	A	B	C
	B	C	A
	C	A	B

on slavery and the territories in the 31st Congress, and the success of Stephen A. Douglas in passing a similar measure by breaking it down into sections, each of which enjoyed the support of a slightly different majority. The fact that the compromise of 1850 passed only because of Douglas' canny crafting of the agenda was hardly irrelevant to its eventual renunciation by all sides. Manufactured consensuses are not stable solutions.[12]

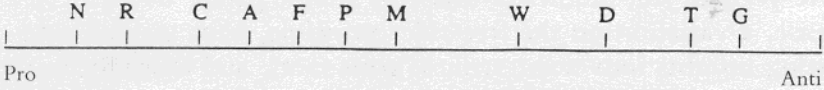
A third paradigmatic situation is the "Prisoners' Dilemma." Two people have been arrested for allegedly committing a crime. Each is questioned separately and is presented with the following alternatives: 1) If neither of you confesses, you will both get a year in jail; 2) If both of you confess, both get five years; 3) If you confess and the other does not, he gets ten years, and you go free; 4) If he confesses and you do not, you get ten years, and he goes free. The dilemma is that each self-interested prisoner would prefer that his partner remained silent, while he himself confessed. But since both realize this fact and since the penalty for "cooperating" with the other prisoner by not confessing is so high (ten years) if the other "defects," the only rational strategy, if the game is played once, is for each to confess. If each is logical and self-interested, therefore, each ends up with his third choice, five years in jail. Studies of this very simple game, which is, in a sense, a variation on the free-rider principle, have yielded interesting insights into wars, strikes, arms races, and other forms of bargaining. Repeated, regular interaction breeds cooperation, not merely from an emotional urge to appear agreeable, but from a self-interested fear of reprisals. Conversely, sporadic, irregular contact encourages strife; for example, because agent A thinks that B will try to throw the last punch, A will strike preemptively and B, reasoning similarly, will also try to land the first blow. The Fort Sumter crisis may be seen as an example of prisoners' dilemma. If James Buchanan had not allowed the vast majority of other national government installations to be taken over by the Confederates, Abraham Lincoln and the South Carolinians might have acted less precipitously simply because both sides would have expected to face the same dilemma again and again, and one side's action the first time would invite preclusive steps by the

12 Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*; Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington, Ky., 1964), 109–114, 133–150.

other side the next time. Similarly, transient labor organizers, such as those in the International Workers of the World, and rapidly growing unions, such as the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, are more likely than established unions to engage in strikes, not simply because they are more radical or less experienced, but also because the reprisal sanction had not yet disciplined them to cooperate.[13]

A final tool of great heuristic value for the study of politics, past or present, is the spatial model of elections. One of the easiest ways to visualize opinion and to begin to conceptualize the interaction between choices by candidates or parties and voters is through a one-dimensional representation such as that in Figure 3. In this graph, the endpoints of the scale are the extreme pro-slavery and antislavery positions, and the points in between reflect possible stances on the issue. Individuals are assumed, at any particular time, to have an "ideal point" or "bliss point," that is, a policy that they would like the nation to adopt. William Lloyd

Fig. 3 A One-Dimensional Spatial Model of the Slavery Issue

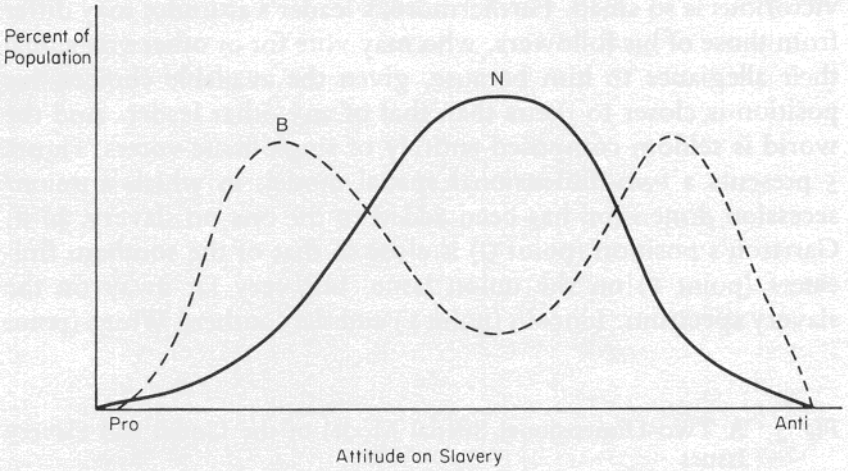


Politics Associated with Points:

N = Nationalization of Slavery
R = International Slave Trade Allowed
C = Congressional Slave Code for the Territories
A = Slavery Allowed in All Territories
F = Strong Fugitive Slave Law
P = Popular Sovereignty
M = Slavery Banned in Territories North of 36 Deg., 30 Min.
W = No Slavery in Any Territory
D = No Slavery in District of Columbia
T = No Interstate Slave Trade
G = No Slavery in United States

13 For an excellent, nontechnical introduction to the prisoners' dilemma, see Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York, 1984).

Fig. 4 Two Hypothetical Distributions of Public Opinion on the Slavery Issue



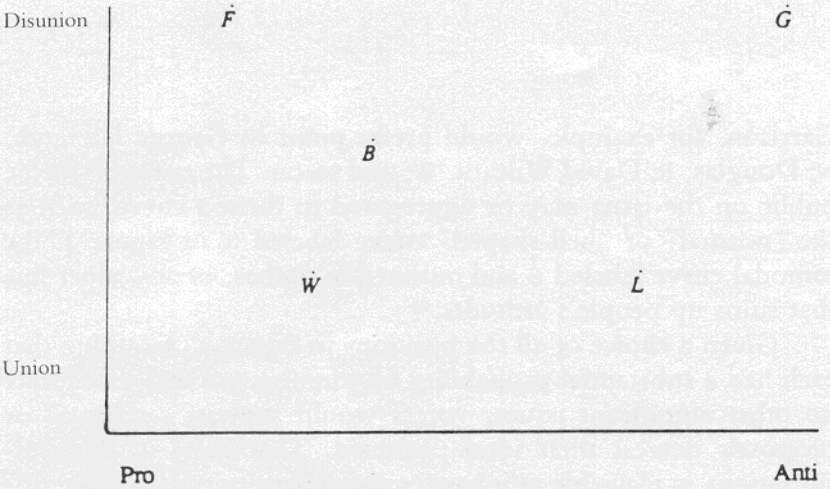
Garrison, for example, would prefer point G; George Fitzhugh, N; Douglas, P; David Wilmot, W; and so on. The opinions of the public on the issue may be aggregated to form a curve, such as the "normal" or "bell-shaped" curve labeled N in Figure 4, the bimodal curve labeled B and outlined in dashes, or any other line that sums up people's attitudes.[14]

Given a choice of all the positions in Figure 3, assuming that each had a substantial probability of winning and that there were no other significant issues, voters would support candidates or proposals nearest their ideal positions. That none of these assumptions is plausible emphasizes the difficulty of inferring attitudes from behaviors such as voting, and suggests that more complex models are needed. A political structure biased toward two-party competition and risk-averse politicians who fear to take extreme positions may constrain the choice sets offered to voters.

14 Spatial models have also been applied to other substantive areas, such as international relations. See, for example, James D. Morrow, "A Spatial Model of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review*, LXXX (1986), 1131–1150.

Many electors may agree with the stances taken by minor parties on specific issues, but vote "strategically" for one of the major parties because the possibility that the minority parties will be victorious is so small. Furthermore, a leader's attitudes may differ from those of his followers, who may vote for or otherwise signal their allegiance to him because, given the available choices, his position is closer to theirs than that of any other leader. And the world is seldom composed entirely of single-issue voters. Figure 5 presents a two-dimensional spatial model, in which a union/secession dimension has been added to the one on slavery. In it, Garrison's position (point G) is close to that of the southern fire-eaters (point F) on the union issue, but very far away on the slavery spectrum. Lincoln (point L) and the southern Whigs (point

Fig. 5 A Two-Dimensional Spatial Model of the Union and Slavery Issues



F = Southern "Fireater"
G = William Lloyd Garrison
L = Abraham Lincoln
W = Southern Whig
B = James Buchanan

W) also agree on the value of the union and disagree, although not so much as Garrison and the fire-eaters do, on slavery. Buchanan (point B) is represented as an extreme doughface, poised between the union at all costs and sacrificing it to protect slavery and avoid civil war.[15]

Adding a second dimension emphasizes another feature of the analysis of public opinion. People's positions on a particular proposal, say, the Wilmot Proviso, may have been a function of their stances on two or more larger issues, which may not have correlated perfectly. It is reasonable to say that one might prefer to see slavery abolished entirely, but that, since such a proposal would induce the south to secede, one would settle for ending slavery in the territories. Therefore, later analysts cannot unambiguously determine attitudes on slavery or any other issue from expressions of opinion or votes relating only to that topic unless all relevant policies were directly correlated. To be perfectly correlated in the two-dimensional case, the positions of nearly everyone would have to fall on a line at a 45 degree angle to each axis.[16]

In fact, there are generally more than two issues, people's opinions differ not only on what to do, but on how important each issue is, and people change their minds. Although it is difficult to represent three or more issues geometrically, there is no difficulty in doing so algebraically. Suppose we scale each issue from 1 to 10 and suppose that four issues dominated political discussion at the time. For concreteness, let us take these issues from Benson's "ethnocultural thesis" and call them temperance, slavery, internal improvements, and religious-school subsidies. "Puritans" would be likely to take the prohibitionist, antislavery, prodevelopment, and anti-parochial-school positions on this set

15 Naturally, in order for this model to explain anything, at least some voters must be attentive. Some scholars deny that nineteenth-century voters were. In her *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983), 325, for instance, Baker states, without any evidence at all, that the Irish, transplanted southerners in the Midwest, and other antebellum northerners, "though unfamiliar with specific campaign issues," joined the Democrats in order to experience "a sense of Americanness." If it were somehow verified, this patronizing statement would give pause to proponents of rational choice.

16 Historians have often recognized this point. See, for example, David M. Potter, "Why the Republicans Rejected Both Compromise and Secession," in *idem, The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 243–262.

of issues, which we may denominate, for convenience, scale position 1 on each issue. This point could be represented by the ordered vector {1,1,1,1}.[17]

But even if preferences were correlated across issues, people might differ on the weights that they placed on each and on the certainty with which they held their positions. To represent these facets of opinions in our algebraic formulation, we can simply add more lines to the issues vector to form a series of related vectors that might be called an "opinion matrix."[18]

In Figure 6, each issue is associated with a weight, scaled from 1 to 10, and an index of certainty is similarly scaled. The individual portrayed considers the last two issues very important,

Fig. 6 An Individual's Opinion Matrix

	Issues			
	T	S	I	R
Issue Positions	1	1	1	1
Weights	3	6	2	2
Certainty	5	4	1	3

T = Temperance
S = Slavery
I = Internal Improvements
R = Religious-school subsidies

NOTE The numbers are scale positions from 1 to 10, with 1 representing the most favorable view of temperance and internal improvements, and the least favorable view of slavery and subsidies to religious schools.

17 The endpoints and intervals are arbitrary, or, to speak more technically, valid only up to a linear transformation, but the scale preserves the order on each issue, which is the prime concern. The "ethnocultural thesis" was invented by Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961).

18 Historians often claim to be able to tell how much weight the voters placed on more than one issue. See, for example, Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York, 1985), 150; Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York, 1987), 371, 421.

the first, nearly as important, but the second, relatively unimportant. If she were considering which of two candidates to vote for, she would place much less emphasis on their stances on slavery than on internal improvements and religious school subsidies. Furthermore, although her view on internal improvements is very firm, she is not so sure of herself on religious schools, and is even less committed on temperance and slavery. Thus, she might easily be convinced to change her mind between elections or during an election campaign on the first two issues.

Even though it is true that historians will rarely have enough data to estimate the entries in such an opinion matrix, this and the other three models drawn from rational choice can add considerably to our understanding of the connections between thought, values, beliefs, or attitudes, and the behavior of voters, legislators, executives, or any other political actors. Treating political culture as a separate subfield of political history may lead to misinterpretations of political culture itself. Tying it to the study of other forms of political behavior by viewing political actors as purposive agents who seek to attain policy and personal goals, as rational choice does, may help us to avoid misconceiving political ideas. How might rational choice change our interpretation of the expressed beliefs of historical figures?

First, the opinion matrix heuristic suggests that people may change their behavior not because they have altered their opinions, but because the emphasis that they put on an issue has changed. Wendell Phillips, for example, opposed slavery before 1837, and spoke out prominently against it only after Elijah Lovejoy's lynching. Once the South seceded, and the fear of endangering the Union by favoring abolition was no longer relevant, many northerners felt freer to give vent to their antislavery feelings. Therefore, to determine the issue position—that is, the entry in the first row of Figure 6—we must look at evidence after, as well as before 1861.

Second, people may hold opinions, but not strongly. Thus, opposition to black suffrage outside the South was vehement in the years from 1865 to 1868, but, immediately after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, Democrats began to woo black voters. This evidence implies that, for all their bluster, many Democrats were not deeply committed to their previous racist opinions. That is, the entry in row two of Figure 6 relating to

black suffrage was small for many northern Democrats. Again, descriptions of their behavior should affect assessments of their thoughts and culture, and the heurisic value of Figure 6 is to point out that evidence from both subfields is necessary to make judgments in either. Historians who gauge opinion by quoting statements on issues often assume implicitly that every politician or voter puts the same weight on any particular issue, or that everyone is equally certain of her opinion, or that historians know the weight and certitude values of every person's opinion matrix.

Third, the explicit representation of attitudes throws light on claims that the public or subsets of it shared a common ideology or political culture. Analysts who make those assertions must implicitly believe that all people in the relevant group, followers as well as leaders, have identical or at least very similar opinion matrices, and that groups with different political cultures have different ones. This realization highlights evidentiary requirements that cultural and intellectual historians do not often address: elites' values or positions may differ from those of the masses, and the two types of data should not be confused; the same abstract values may well translate into different positions on concrete issues, or devotees of different ideologies may agree on practical policies; and the extent of overlap or difference between people's opinions must be determined empirically and taken into account in any causal explanation of people's behavior. The political culture of Whig leaders, for instance, may not have been that of the Whig voters; if artisans and their employers shared a "republican" ideology, it is difficult to attribute any causal importance to that ideology; and it is dubious to postulate a homogeneous Democratic political culture just at the time in the 1850s when large numbers of northern Democrats were deserting the party.[19]

19 A selection of "political culture" studies would include Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970); Lucian W. Pye, "Culture and Political Science: Problems in the Evaluation of the Concept of Political Culture," in Louis Schneider and Charles M. Bonjean (eds.), *The Idea of Culture in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 1973), 65–76; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984); Baker, *Affairs of Party*. In *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 1987), xiv, James L. Huston confesses: "There is danger in imputing the attitudes and sentiments of some for others, but I shall risk making the assumption."

Fourth, expressions of opinion may not be "sincere—that is, people may not reveal their "true" positions because they wish to move opinion closer to them in a sequence of votes, or because they are not offered a full range of choices, or because they have multiple objectives. If strategic behavior is pervasive, as the rational-choice approach stresses, then their statements cannot be unquestioningly assumed to reflect their views. For instance, congressmen may defeat moderate proposals in order to force moderates to join them in later votes against extremists from the other side; voters in winner-take-all elections may cast their ballots for their second or third choices to prevent the election of their least favored alternative; politicians seeking election may stay within the bounds of public opinion. Thus, the opposition of both antislavery and the proslavery forces doomed the Crittenden Compromise. Jacksonians loaded the "Tariff of Abominations" with higher duties in an attempt (which backfired) to defeat it. The fact that men in some northern states made the Know-Nothings, rather than the Republicans, temporarily the chief opposition party to the Democrats is no sure sign that they weighed nativism higher than antislavery in their preferences. Reconstruction Republicans no doubt downplayed the radicalism of the Fourteenth Amendment during the 1866 campaign in order to blunt Democratic attacks.[20]

Fifth, since behavior is often an indication of attitudes, any descriptive analysis of attitudes must attempt to distinguish slogans and rationalizations from "true" avowals of belief. The statement of a northerner who claimed to be against slavery, but voted for John C. Breckinridge in 1860, is suspect. Nineteenth-century paeans to republican virtue, liberty, and equality should be treated with the same healthy skepticism that we apply to similar oro-

20 The manipulability of agendas implies strategic behavior. Thus, insincere voting is a corollary of the paradox of voting, as well as of the difficulty of attaining stable equilibria in multidimensional spatial models. For strategic congressional behavior, see David Herbert Donald, *The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863–1867* (Baton Rouge, 1965); Lawanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership* (Columbia, S.C., 1981), 142–184. On the tariff of 1828, see Dall W. Forsythe, *Taxation and Political Change in the Young Nation, 1781–1833.* (New York, 1977), 76–87. Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority," 539–540, 547, neglects strategic considerations in a voter's decision to cast a ballot for the American ticket in 1855. For the Fourteenth Amendment issue, see Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863–1869* (New York, 1974), 196–202.

tundities today. For instance, the admission by advocates of the "republicanism thesis" that there was a growing disjunction between "rhetoric and reality" even during the Revolution, and that it widened later, should raise suspicions about the imputation of "republican" values to the populace. It is always difficult, even with survey questions that are specifically designed for the purpose, to distinguish rationalization from "real" motives, but, by repeatedly comparing behavior to belief, and one belief or set of beliefs to another, historians can often expose disjunctions or misrepresentations.[21]

Sixth, many current treatments of political ideas assume that attitudes always produce behavior, rather than, sometimes, vice-versa, and they do not specify whether a basic orientation, such as ethnoreligious identification, causes people to take specific stances on issues or whether that orientation merely summarizes positions on a series of related issues. Here, empirical findings from social psychology can supplement notions from rational choice. Pettigrew suggests that, in some instances, changed behavior can precede and influence attitudes. Forced by the national government to accept substantial amounts of racial integration in schools and public accommodations during the 1960s and 1970s, white southerners subsequently gave substantially more liberal responses on the desirability of interracial contacts. The failure of secession and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment seem to have reduced southern white proslavery opinion. Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo found that white attitudes on particular racial

21 For "republicanism," see Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXIX (1972), 72–73; *idem*, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *ibid.*, XXXIX (1982), 340–352; James T. Kloppenburg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History*, LXXIV (1987), 24. On rationalization, see Gregory B. Markus and Philip E. Converse, "A Dynamic Simultaneous Equation Model of Electoral Choice," in Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg (eds.), *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (Washington, 1984; 2nd ed.), 136–138. To give one example of comparing behavior to belief, the partisan and class motives of the southern disfranchisers of the turn of this century were rarely expressed publicly, but an analysis of the content and timing of the measures that they espoused makes it clear that the racial and "good government" rhetoric that they promulgated should not be accepted entirely at face value. See Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven, 1974). For a more detailed analysis of difficult problems in determining human motives, see *idem*, "Expert Witnesses, Rational Choice, and the Search for Intent," *Constitutional Commentary*, V (1988), 349–373.

issues in America from the 1940s to the 1980s were by no means all of one piece. Trends in survey answers to questions about racial intermarriage or housing were not precisely parallel to those about busing or the integration of public places. To array all of these views under the single rubric of "racism" or to contend that people's positions on a general racist dimension caused them to take specific stands or to behave in a particular manner is misleading. The contributions of rational choice and of the opinion matrix here are to make clear that positions on seemingly related issues may or may not be correlated in ways that observers may imagine—that the existence of connections ought not to be decided unconsciously by subsuming issues under such rubrics as racism or ethnoreligious conflicts—and to underline that the causal links between thought and behavior can run in both directions.[22]

As useful as rational-choice models are in illuminating some of the implicit claims of and problems with the study of political ideas, they are no substitute for that subfield, and rational choice and intellectual/cultural history may best be seen as complementary, not contradictory to each other. Like economists in general, rational-choice theorists generally do not attempt to explain how and why people arrive at their preferences. "Rationality," as they use the term, begins only after at least some values are chosen, however thoughtful or intuitive the process for arriving at them. Taking attitudes as given, students of social choice try to reason abstractly and generally about how people who want to attain specific goals would act, and then, sometimes, test these theoretical predictions against descriptions of actual behavior. The trouble is not only that they ignore the interesting and important process of value formation and the connections between broad ideas and specific policy stances, but that they often posit specific preferences for individuals or groups on the basis of distressingly little evidence.[23]

22 Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Prejudice," in Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin (eds.), *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 829, and other papers cited there; Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 71–138. For historians' treatment of "racism" or "prejudice" or "anti-Negro attitudes," see, for instance, Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961), vii; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, 1967), 1; V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago, 1967), 1.

23 For a thoughtful criticism of neoclassical economics' inattention to preference changes,

Another major concentration in political history, electoral behavior, is particularly twinned with its political-science counterpart, for electoral behavior, in American political science at least, has traditionally been an intensely studied subject. Yet, whereas the so-called "new political historians" of the 1960s and early 1970s were fully aware of and drew freely upon developments in their sister subdiscipline, most younger political historians today pay less attention to developments in political science, possibly because of advances in the typical level of mathematical techniques used in its books and articles. Still deeply influenced by the early Michigan School's overly deterministic social-psychological approach, its stress on party identification, and its contention that the masses of voters have no settled or organized political opinions, the vast majority of political historians have ignored the controversy over issue voting, the debate over the effect of economic conditions on elections, advances in such statistical methods as logit, probit, simultaneous equations, and LISREL (LInear Structural RElationships), and, most significantly, the development of the rational-choice perspective.[24]

Paradoxically, at the same time that historians have been reading less political science, political scientists have become more historical in outlook. Mesmerized by the powerful tools of survey analysis, possessing only a few scholarly nationwide polls, and

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see Albert O. Hirschman, "Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse," *Economics and Philosophy*, I (1985), 7–21. The topic of the relation between fundamental values and policy choices is underdeveloped in social choice, and it clearly needs further work.

"Preferences" may be thought of as basic aims, such as peace or health or prosperity, or as proximate goals, such as ending slavery or discouraging the consumption of alcohol or preventing government subsidies for Catholic schools. If broad, generally consensual values are emphasized, then theory can yield no predictions about behavior, because every politician will claim to endorse those ends. But if only immediate issues are treated, then analysts will miss politicians' efforts to convince the electorate or other politicians that certain means, but not others, will bring about desired ends, or that certain issues are more important than others, or that certain objectives are infeasible. As empirical applications of social choice, including historical applications, increase, theorists may realize more clearly how important it is to confront the "level of values" problem. The emphasis of rational choice on candidates' strategies, however, suggests that the approach will be more concerned with the problem than traditional social psychology has been.

24 For the continued dominance of the early Michigan School model, see for example, Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827–1861* (Princeton, 1971), 11–14; William G. Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832–1865* (Detroit, 1973), 17; Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (New York, 1977), 5–7.

mistrusting aggregate data because of the much feared and often misunderstood "ecological fallacy," most American political scientists of the 1950s and early 1960s ignored history and stated their findings as timeless generalizations. But the accumulation of three decades of opinion polls in America and other countries, the realization of the disadvantages of sample surveys, and the development of statistical methods for overcoming some problems of aggregation have led political scientists to pay much more attention to change, to emphasize different and variable factors in their explanations, and to investigate the pre-World II era.[25]

History and the Michigan branch of social psychology are so ill-matched that it is a wonder that the affair has lasted so long. The original Michigan School considered political issues as evanescent, and of little importance in elections, because voters, as Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes found, were usually too wedded to parties, too unconcerned with politics, and too nonideological and mentally disorganized to respond to ideas. Political historians, by contrast, traditionally have focused almost exclusively on issues, have believed that politics mattered to their subjects, and have treated the beliefs of the public as more coherent and standardized than even the most generous studies of modern public opinion find them to be. *The American Voter* took candidates' strategies and electoral rules as exogenously given, and elites and local contexts as practically invisible. Historians, even some of those whose citations to the political science literature are largely to the Michigan School, have lavished attention on just these facets of politics. In the Michigan model, normality is the mode, and anything beyond temporary deviations is difficult to explain. Historians gravitate toward change. The socialization literature tells us a lot about how children in general learn about politics, but little about why specific groups of people absorb different lessons, or how adults continue their education—topics with which historians are usually much more concerned. Michigan has little to say about legislatures, committees, bureaucracies, and policies; historians are or should be crucially absorbed in the study of these topics. Most important, Michigan is deter-

25 See, for example, Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John P. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); Gerald H. Kramer, "The Ecological Fallacy Revisited: Aggregate- versus Individual-Level Findings on Economics and Elections, and Sociotropic Voting," *American Political Science Review*, LXXVII (1983), 92–111.

ministic—party identification is a supplement to every baby's formula—but historians of nearly every ideological stripe treat individuals or classes of people as having the ability to choose.[26]

In each respect, rational-choice theory is a more attractive partner for political history. In the field of electoral behavior, social choice treats issues and policies as central, for voters are assumed to minimize the distance between their preferences (which may include opinions about the candidates' personal traits) and the stances of those who seek their support. In Figure 3, for instance, voters support the candidate whose position is closest to their own. Candidates, in turn, position themselves to win nominations, and parties, to win elections by moving, or seeming to move, toward popular orientations. Politicians running for office, committee chairmen, and bureaucrats shape voting rules and agendas so as to attain their goals, or at least to get as close to them as they can. Electors adopt shortcuts to reduce the cost of gathering information and making decisions. Shifts in the inclinations of the voters or in the tactics of candidates modify outcomes and policies. Since all players in the game, particularly the officeholders and officeseekers, continually reassess the posi-

26 Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York, 1960), and their *Elections and the Political Order* (New York, 1966) are the classic sources for the "Michigan" or "social psychological" model. For a defensive restatement that understates the theory-laden character of his model and the differences between it and the rational-choice approach, see Converse, "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass., 1975), IV, 75–169. More recent emendations have moved closer to synthesizing the two viewpoints. See, for example, Markus and Converse, "Dynamic Simultaneous Equation Model," 132–153; Morris P. Fiorina, "Explorations of a Theory of Party Identification," in Niemi and Weisberg (eds.), *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 406–423.

It has often been noted, for example in Frolich and Oppenheimer, *Modern Political Economy*, 134, that the Michigan School finding that voters' belief systems are not well organized reflects the political scientists' expectations that votes would fall neatly on a single right-left issue continuum. If, instead, the Michigan School had anticipated that the voters would emphasize several different issues, they would presumably have pictured the mass public as much more "rational." For example, Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 6, 423, cites Michigan, but marvelously describes campaign strategies. For normality as the mode, see Converse, "Public Opinion and Voting Behavior," 138–144. Good introductions to the socialization literature include David O. Sears, "Political Socialization," in Greenstein and Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*, II, 135–139; Charles H. Franklin, "Issue Preference, Socialization, and the Evolution of Party Identification," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXVIII (1984), 459–478.

tions, past moves, and possible designs of the other participants, there is little stasis or determinism.[27]

When they renounced narrative for a more structural approach, political historians of the 1960s and 1970s also embraced social psychology without entirely realizing the consequences of that act. The two chief organizing concepts of the new political history—critical elections and the ethnocultural thesis—have always been closely attached to social psychological models. From the time of its original formulation, the ethnocultural thesis has been tied to Merton's concept of "negative reference groups." In this view, people form positive identifications with certain social groups, such as religious or ethnic ones, define others as adversaries, and enter politics to win symbolic victories over their adversaries. Issues become merely convenient weapons in largely sham battles over relative prestige and nonmaterial social status. Neither Merton nor Benson, who introduced Merton's notion into history, made clear how positive or negative reference groups formed or maintained themselves, how they overcame the free-rider problem, or why they were satisfied with merely play-acted victories or defeats. Like the Michigan School, morever, the ethnocultural thesis is difficult to reconcile with anything more than minor fluctuations, for the only major sources of change are shifts in the balance of ethnocultural groups in the population. A recent, more sensitive attempt to determine the weight of antislavery, anti-foreignism, anti-Catholicism, and temperance in the shift from the "second" to the "third party system" abandons a deterministic social-psychological stance for a view much more consonant with rational choice.[28]

The critical-elections thesis has more diverse origins and is less clearly based on any particular psychological understanding. Nevertheless, its social determinism is most compatible with a

27 Those personal traits of candidates that affect their ability or willingness to carry out campaign promises are important to rational voters, whereas those that do not, such as glamour, taste in clothes, or avuncularity, are irrelevant.

28 On negative reference groups, see Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 285; *idem*, "Mistransference Fallacy," 124; Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York, 1957), 225–387. Gienapp treated the four issues as separable and often separated. Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 164, 279, 289. Whether this represents an abandonment or merely a radical modification of the ethnocultural thesis, it is much less consonant with Michigan and Merton than Benson's view was.

Michigan School view of politics. In Burnham's 1970 formulation of critical-elections theory, societal crises, such as the conflict over slavery or the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, transformed the political loyalties of a generation of voters. Once a crisis was past, the line of political cleavage was largely fixed until the next great upheaval. This American substitute for revolution also transmogrified and then stabilized the policy agenda. The focus is on the big changes, what Michigan termed the "long-term forces," not the minor oscillations or "short-term forces" within stable periods.[29]

In an electoral history influenced by the rational-choice perspective, the notion of critical elections and party systems and the ethnocultural thesis will not be abandoned, but their influence will be reduced, and each will be seen in a different light. Likewise, the notion of party identification will be redefined. Rather than assuming that people chose a party and then adhered to it unshakably, rational-choice-oriented analysts will consider party identification a continuous shorthand assessment of party and candidate performance and attractiveness, a summary measure of each voter's past and current expectations of how closely each competing set of politicians is likely to come to fulfilling the voter's goals. If this view is correct, then patterns of electoral behavior should be expected to vary somewhat from election to election, depending on the degree of similarity of candidates, issues, and economic conditions. Continuity of policies, competence, and a lack of economic or military upheaval give voters little reason to change and their opposites, much. Therefore, a rational-choice approach can encompass both change and stability in electoral patterns.[30]

29 Valdimer Orlando Key, Jr., the originator of critical elections theory, became one of Michigan's chief critics later in life (in his book *The Responsible Electorate* [New York, 1966]), and his work was one of the main sources of inspiration for the leading work in voting behavior that is infused with a rational-choice approach (Fiorina's *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* [New Haven, 1981]). The most comprehensive statement of the critical elections thesis is Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York, 1970), 1–10, 175–193. For a measured defense, see his "Periodization Schemes and 'Party Systems': The 'System of 1896' as a Case in Point," *Social Science History*, X (1986), 263–314.

30 Slight variations of the critical-elections thesis appear in William Nisbet Chambers and Burnham (eds.), *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* (New York, 1967); Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York, 1982). The nineteenth-century electorate was less stable than it appears in some works. For instance,

Because the functions of various governments differed and changed over time, and because the candidates and their positions on policy issues did as well, election results should often have diverged at the national and subnational levels. If a critical election is seen as merely an occasion when an unusually large number of voters made atypically great changes in their expectations about which party at the national, state, or local level was closer to their ideal points and was more likely to run the government competently, then variations in the patterns of voting at each governmental level should be seen not as anomalous, but as merely rational. Moreover, the contention that local politics was somehow more fundamental than national politics would no longer make any sense if the two alignments were not assumed to be perfectly correlated. Note the contrast between this stance and symbolic-anthropological, social-psychological, or sociological interpretations. If attachments to parties are considered subrational or voting is viewed merely as an uncalculating ritual act, the outcomes should be uniform across elections for different offices. Such theories and rational choice make very different empirical predictions.[31]

Thomas B. Alexander, "The Dimensions of Partisan Constancy in Presidential Elections from 1840 to 1860," in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (eds.), *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840–1860* (College Station, Tex., 1982), 70–121, overstates his case by artificially fusing Whigs, Free Soilers, Know-Nothings, and all varieties of Democrats into two groups and by disregarding turnout shifts. William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (Baton Rouge, 1978), and *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York, 1983), establishes his similar thesis more subtly by not considering voting returns systematically at all. As John F. Reynolds and McCormick have shown, split-ticket voting was much more common at the subcounty level during the 1880s than votes aggregated at the county or state levels imply. In New York and New Jersey, they conclude, "late nineteenth-century voting behavior was less stable and uniform than is commonly supposed." See their "Outlawing 'Treachery': Split Tickets and Ballot Laws in New York and New Jersey, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History*, LXXII (1986), 843.

31 On the primacy of local politics, see Silbey, Bogue, and William H. Flanigan, "Introduction to Part Three," in *idem* (eds.), *The History of American Electoral Behavior* (Princeton, 1978), 253–258, and works cited there; Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History as Social Analysis* (Knoxville, 1980), 53–56, 86; Kousser, "History as Past Sociology in the Work of Samuel P. Hays," *Historical Methods*, XIV (1981), 181–186; Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 10. Gienapp's view that the first stage of the breakup of the "second party system" occurred when voters in northern state and local elections in 1853–1854 turned to the Know-Nothing party does not necessarily imply that those voters weighed nativism more heavily than antislavery. States and localities could take anti-Catholic actions, whereas northern state governments could

Ethnoreligious issues undoubtedly did dominate many local and state elections, and some at the national level, but their importance should not be assumed constant or universal any more than the significance of class or race or region or corruption or general economic performance or foreign policy or any other issues should be. Rather than trying to decide which of two alignments, usually class or ethnocultural, pervaded all of the elections in a whole "era," political historians should be attempting to determine the mix of all issues that voters' and candidates' decisions propelled to the fore in each election and how those changed from election to election. Critical elections will continue to attract attention, but, if candidates and voters constantly monitored each other, then incremental, homeostatic adjustments should receive more emphasis than they do in much current historiography.[32]

Two recent historical studies, which reason explicitly from Fiorina's insights in *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, show that the rational-choice approach can usefully be applied to historical data. In a brilliant paper on elections from 1836 to 1844 that rests on an ingenious correlation of price series and voting, Holt demonstrated that, in this formative period of the Jacksonian party system, "economic issues and contrasting party records were the central determinants of voting behavior. . . ." Not only does Holt replace the static cultural determinism of the ethnocultural school with a dynamic view of voters responding to the apparent successes and failures of the Democratic and Whig economic policies, but he also shows that turnout spurted before the presidential campaign of 1840. It was not merely issueless, ceremonial hoopla about "Log Cabins and Hard Cider" that stimulated the electorate, but hard money and hard times. Unlike

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do little to abolish slavery in the south. Rational voters' antislavery opinions would surface in congressional and especially presidential, not municipal or state, elections. This gloss probably explains why Gienapp finds a much more pronounced trend toward the Republicans in senate than in gubernatorial races. See his *Origins of the Republican Party*, 129–187.

32 On class and ethnocultural factors, compare Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority," with Baum, *Civil War Party System*. My conclusion about attention to small changes is consonant with much of the analysis in Benson, Silbey, and Phyllis F. Field, "Toward a Theory of Stability and Change in American Voting Patterns: New York State, 1792–1970," in Silbey, Bogue, and Flanigan (eds.), *History of American Electoral Behavior*, 78–105, although the authors draw other conclusions.

political-culture interpretations of the Jacksonian era, Holt's rational-choice-based scheme integrates economic and political history, electoral behavior and policy, and thought and action.[33]

Likewise, in his richly detailed and methodologically sophisticated synthesis of changes in electoral behavior, voting rules, and policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kleppner views the post-1890 electorate as much more calculating and more often recalculating than he pictured the earlier electorate in his previous books. Voters punished the Democrats for the depression of the 1890s and for the intrusive, ineffective, and regionally biased national policies of World War I by shifting overwhelmingly to the Republicans, and moved the opposite way after 1906 partly because of a perceptible downturn in economic conditions during Republican administrations. Ethnoreligious issues were important, but did not divide the parties neatly, so prohibitionist voters, for instance, switched parties according to the changing positions of different party standardbearers. As more policies were determined by experts and fewer by locally elected officials, voters increasingly abstained. Whether it is ultimately accepted in all of its details or not, Kleppner's painstaking portrait of the voters as thoughtfully choosy will surely prove influential.[34]

Although limitations of space prohibit reviews of the more diverse literatures of the other seven subfields of political history, it is possible to gauge how the substitution of a rational-choice for a social-psychological or symbolic-anthropological viewpoint might alter the way in which political history is written, and to draw some specific suggestions for historical studies from the political-science literature. Large theories not only provide interpretive glosses, but also suggest topics and point to appropriate data. If adults are assumed to identify mindlessly with their parties, then researchers should concentrate on discovering lasting

33 Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting*. See also a useful review article on the literature, D. Roderick Kiewiet and Rivers, "A Retrospective on Retrospective Voting," in Heinz Eulau and Michael S. Lewis-Beck (eds.), *Economic Conditions and Electoral Outcomes: The United States and Western Europe* (New York, 1985), 207–231. Michael F. Holt, "The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jacksonian Voting Behavior," in Cooper, et al., *Master's Due*, 16–58; quotation at 58.

34 Compare especially the first chapters of Kleppner's *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892* (Chapel Hill, 1979), and his *Continuity and Change in Electoral Politics, 1893–1928* (New York, 1987).

group loyalties and unraveling the socialization process, rather than on issues and elite strategy. Alignments should only gradually erode except when the disruptions of war or depression or a sudden change in the population of electors orients a set of predominantly new voters overwhelmingly in a particular direction. Likewise, if politics is thought to have a primarily affective importance for the vast majority, then scholars should attend to the symbols and their manipulators, and to campaign rituals and politicians' charisma, rather than to the influence of the electorate on policies, and the reciprocal material and attitudinal effects of those policies on the public. If politics, by contrast, is conceived of as an arena in which voters, politicians, and nonelected officials, all of whom have relatively well-ordered preferences, usually attempt to maximize tangible, rather than expressive benefits, then fluctuations in electoral outcomes and their correspondence with changes in rules, candidates' strategies, and policy outputs become the very stuff of politics.[35]

By highlighting differences in the questions, choices of evidence, and ex-post-facto rationales that the theories suggest, I do not mean to imply that such frameworks are noncomparable or insulated from tests. Indeed, a great deal of political science over the last two decades has been concerned with delineating and assessing the implications of the social-psychological and rational-choice outlooks, and one of the concerns of political history in the future ought to be how it can contribute to that ongoing controversy.[36]

The widely recognized theoretical and empirical gaps and anomalies in the still developing social-choice field make it un-

35 To speak more in the language of the philosophy of science, large theories define what Imre Lakatos called "research programs" and supply what Carl G. Hempel termed "covering laws." See Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs," in *idem* and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1970), 91–196; Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (New York, 1965).

36 Two early tests of the rational-choice stance were Page, "Elections and Social Choice: The State of the Evidence," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXI (1977), 639–668; Frolich et al., "A Test of Downsian Voter Rationality: 1964 Presidential Voting," *American Political Science Review*, LXXII (1978), 178–197. Two examples of the estimation of spatial models that should be of particular interest to historians because they use mostly aggregate data are Howard Rosenthal and Subrata Sen, "Spatial Voting Models for the French Fifth Republic," *American Political Science Review*, LXXI (1977), 1447–1466; George Rabinowitz, Paul-Henri Gurian, and Stuart Elaine MacDonald, "The Structure of Presidential Elections and the Process of Realignment, 1944 to 1980," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXVIII (1984), 611–635.

likely that historians will embrace this viewpoint unthinkingly. Disequilibriums and counterintuitive notions lie at the very heart of the outlook: Voting paradoxes are not only possible, but prevalent. The logic of free riding makes it difficult to understand why any rational human would ever vote or take part in any group activity unless directly paid to do so. For most realistic political games, there is no "dominant strategy," and for most electoral situations, no "stable solution." Social choice theorists are a combative and pessimistic lot, and the field contains more proofs of nonexistence and impossibility than certitude about the pattern of human actions. Historians who see easy answers—miracle cures from the social sciences—should not expect to find them.[37]

It is precisely this skepticism about received notions, this doubting of traditional assumptions and conclusions, that makes social choice so appealing for empirical practitioners—it reminds us not to let down our intellectual guard, and it makes us active participants, not passive consumers, in the process of discovery. Why, in light of the free-rider principle, do people participate? How, if equilibriums do not generally exist, do politicians choose their positions on issues? Is there empirical historical evidence that cooperation develops, as Axelrod suggests, because self-interested players realize that the political game will be played repeatedly, and that the best strategy for all concerned is what he calls "tit for tat" (that is, "cooperate" if the other does, but retaliate by defecting if he defects first)? What allows democracies to resolve conflicts without devolving into dictatorships or oligarchies, as many theoretical results predict? Which of the intuitively plausible assumptions of social choice that produce such troubling results should be replaced, which constraints loosened? How is ration-

37 For instance, Mueller, *Public Choice*, is full of critical comments. For attempts to build altruistic impulses into rational-choice theory, see Howard Margolis, *Selfishness, Altruism, and Rationality: A Theory of Social Choice* (Chicago, 1982); Frederick Schick, *Having Reasons: An Essay on Rationality and Sociality* (Princeton, 1984). For an interesting discussion of some of the problems of applying rational-choice models to the study of rebellions, see George Kolsko, Edward N. Muller, and Karl-Dieter Opp, "Rebellious Collective Action Revisited," *American Political Science Review*, LXXXI (1987), 557–564. Historians sometimes give the impression that the theories or bits of theories that they borrow from other social sciences are universally accepted there, when they are, in fact, bitterly attacked. Consider, for example, the notion of "political culture" or of Geertzian cultural anthropology. Interdisciplinary borrowing is desirable, but it should be fully informed.

ality bounded in particular cases, to state the question in Simon's terms, or, to view it another way, what additional assumptions about information, uncertainty, and decision-making are necessary to model the real world? Like empirical political scientists and experimental economists, historians can play a role in refining general theories.[38]

To draw some examples from the Civil War era, why did turnout rise in the north in the 1850s? Was it higher in states with close elections—where the stake for each voter and party worker was larger—than in those where one party won overwhelmingly? Why did the Kansas-Nebraska Act, but not the Missouri Crisis of 1819 or the Mexican War of the 1840s lead to the formation of a viable antislavery political party? Why and how did the expectations of politicians about the potential success of such a party change? Could the breakdown of compromise during the 1850s or during 1865–1866 usefully be modeled as the abandonment of cooperative strategies in a prisoners' dilemma game? Does the ability of the national government to avoid dictatorship and to preserve most conventional political procedures during the Civil War and Reconstruction imply that, far from reducing the number of axioms, social-choice theorists need to add constitutional rules to their lists of assumptions?

Thus, political history can add realism and specificity to the "stylized facts" that social-choice theorists must explain, just as social-choice theory can assist in reorienting histories of political attitudes and electoral behavior. But what implications might that research program have for other areas of political history?

First, collective action unconfined to formal political institutions will be viewed not as a separate, largely emotional or symbolic sphere, but as merely another means of rationally seeking to attain political or economic objectives. Many historians and other social scientists have always considered this kind of behavior as fundamentally instrumental—the organization and suppression of labor unions, the formation of producer interest groups and of organizations of consumers or potential consumers of government services, the mobbing of abolitionists in the pre-

38 Axelrod, *Evolution of Cooperation*; Herbert Simon, "Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science," *American Political Science Review*, LXXIX (1985), 293–304.

Civil War North, and the violence against southern Republicans during Reconstruction. But if observers more often see conventional and extra-institutional modes as complementary or as substitutes for each other, the scope of political history will be usefully extended, and questions such as why an individual or group chose a particular mix of actions at a particular time may be harder to ignore. For example, confronted by well-entrenched parties in the 1830s, abolitionists organized primarily as an interest group, as farmers did in the 1920s and 1930s under similar political conditions. The collapse of one major party in the 1850s encouraged antislavery men to stream into a new political party, just as the frailty of state-level opposition parties in the south and west provided an opening for the Populist Party in the 1880s and 1890s. The failure of the Knights of Labor strikes in 1885–1886 made political action by the group more attractive. Furthermore, employing models more explicitly in this area may lead to better founded generalizations about sets of events. As Tilly has argued, most current collective-action models are static and ignore the effects of interactions between participants. If an individual's decision to take part in a movement is contingent on what others do, then only a dynamic theory can explain why any actions are taken at all. Although framing such a theory is immensely difficult, introducing sequential, interactive elements into notions of public choice may provide practical resolutions to some of the dilemmas of classical theory. The choices facing voters in presidential primaries or caucuses, for instance, are successfully winnowed down at the same time as the information available about each candidate grows. In the end, the choice problem usually becomes tractable for the delegates and voters—the selection of Lincoln, rather than William Henry Seward or Salmon Portland Chase is the rule; the deadlock over Douglas in 1860 becomes the exception.[39]

39 Describing action that one disapproves of as irrational may simply be another means of decrying it, as in much of Richard Hofstadter's work, or it may serve (despite the historian's intentions) as a sort of collective insanity defense—mobs or Klansmen cannot be held responsible if their motives were subconscious and uncontrollable. A decision to treat such activity as purposeful or otherwise does not necessarily imply approval, anymore than it implies disapproval. See Daniel Joseph Singal, "Beyond Consensus: Richard Hofstadter and American Historiography," *American Historical Review*, LXXXIX (1984), 976–1004; Charles L. Flynn, "The Ancient Pedigree of Violent Repression: Georgia's Klan as a Folk Movement," in Walter L. Fraser, Jr., and Winifred B. Moore, Jr., *The Southern*

A second major change will be that the study of regulation, policy, and the impact of the economy on the government and the government on the economy will become more important and more integrated with other areas in political history. A considerable literature has grown up about the degree to which regulatory agencies were created or captured by the interests that they were supposed to regulate. This body of scholarship will benefit from exposure to the new organizational economics and to theories of repeated prisoners' dilemma games, and from more self-conscious links with studies of elections and legislatures. This area of American research will eventually have the greatest international impact, because, although not all countries have contested elections, they do have bureaucracies.[40]

Some historians and students of business and bureaucracy have already made impressive starts. Whereas Hays, Wiebe, Keller, and others have adopted the functionalist view that the development of the economy or increasing urbanization and industrialization necessarily brought increases in government regulatory activity or in social-welfare schemes, McCormick has argued that specific campaigns by politicians in New York and other states and by muckrakers across the nation convinced the articulate public and, subsequently, majorities of the voters that the corruption of politics by business adversely affected their interests and that new regulatory institutions run by "impartial experts" were needed to combat it. McDonald has demonstrated that progressive politicians in San Francisco broke the consensus that taxes should be kept low and government services starved. Margo has made explicit the conditions under which electorally responsive school boards would distribute funds in a racially dis-

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Enigma: Essays on Race, Class, and Folk Culture (Westport, 1983), 189–198; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York, 1984). On the Knights, see Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor in American Politics* (Urbana, 1983), 30–31. On the need for dynamic models of collective action, see Charles Tilly, "Models and Realities of Popular Collective Action," *Social Research*, LII (1985), 717–747.

40 Terry M. Moe's "The New Economics of Organization," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXVIII (1984), 739–777, is a fine, nontechnical review article on the recent economics literature on this subject. On repeated games, see, for example, Andrew Schotter, *The Economic Theory of Social Institutions* (Cambridge, 1981). For the beginnings of a rational-choice view of public bureaucracy, see Thomas H. Hammond and Gary J. Miller, "A Social Choice Perspective on Expertise and Authority in Bureaucracy," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXIX (1985), 1–28.

criminatory manner, and Harris has shown how administrators who were relatively insulated from politics could partially mitigate short-term political trends in racial political power. Such efforts to pry open the "black box" of functionalism so as to expose the individual motives and actions that perpetuated or permuted political institutions or shared understandings have a natural affinity with the individualistic, anti-deterministic theory of rational choice.[41]

Two related topics where historians can learn much from the other social sciences and where we can make major contributions, the study of the relationship of government to economic inequality and of the impact of economic conditions on voting, also deserve major attention. The attractiveness to candidates of the median voter's position suggests that governments will, if they adopt redistributive policies at all, reward the middling classes, rather than the rich or the poor. To what extent has this pattern been true at different times and places and what accounts for any variations? Models of the so-called "political-economy cycle" imply that governments try to pump up the economy in time for national elections. Did pre-1932 governments try to create such cycles, and, if so, when did they start and how did incumbents and voters obtain sufficient knowledge about economic conditions to be able to act and react? As Holt and Kleppner have shown, Americans acted as if they weighed the economic fluctuations of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1890s very heavily in their voting decisions. Was that true in the 1870s as well, and how important were

41 Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); Naomi R. Lamoreaux, "Regulatory Agencies," in Greene (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Political History*, III, 1107–1117. An interesting recent study with implications for historians is William D. Berry's "An Alternative to the Capture Theory of Regulation: The Case of State Public Utilities Commissions," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXVIII (1984), 524–558. Many of these state commissions and much regulation of the economy originated in the nineteenth century. Hays, *Response to Industrialism, 1870–1914* (Chicago, 1957); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967); McCormick, "The Discovery that Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review*, LXXXVI (1981), 247–274; *idem*, *From Realignment to Reform: Political Change in New York State, 1893–1910* (Ithaca, 1981). Terence J. McDonald, "San Francisco: Socioeconomic Change, Political Culture, and Fiscal Politics, 1870–1906," in *idem* and Sally K. Ward (eds.), *The Politics of Urban Fiscal Policy* (Beverly Hills, 1984), 39–68; Robert Margo, "Race Differences in Public School Expenditures: Disfranchisement and School Finance in Louisiana, 1890–1910," *Social Science History*, VI (1982), 9–33; Harris, "Stability and Change."

economic factors, compared to such other issues as the temperance crusade or black rights? The cycle hypothesis states that economic growth in countries subject to self-interested intervention in the economy by politicians ought to show a regular pattern of fluctuations. What about these countries in the past, or the economies of nations without competitive elections in both the past and the present? Did electors behave as if they had adopted some simple, common decision rule, such as economic retrospective voting or a checklist of performance items, and under what conditions did voting become more concerned with nonpocketbook issues?[42]

Third, there will be more emphasis on legislatures. Here, the rational-choice perspective will seem more natural to traditional historians than the sometimes static and undramatic roll-call analyses of the behavioral approach. The extensive social-science literature on logrolling and vote trading formalizes and extends the treatments of narrative historians of legislatures, who usually focused on the contingent and dynamic and emphasized the roles of leaders. That agenda manipulation may involve timing and that evidence of it may reside in private papers once again suggest the natural attraction of rational choice to historians.[43]

Recent work in political science also suggests larger structural questions about deliberative bodies that story-telling historians generally ignore. Under what circumstances do legislatures make large and small changes in the structures and levels of funding of government? How are these associated with elections? Were the

42 For a fascinating, nontechnical introduction to the first topic, see Page, *Who Gets What from Government* (Berkeley, 1983). On the "political economy cycle" and the responsiveness of voters to economic conditions, good places to start are Kiewiet, *Macroeconomics and Micropolitics: The Electoral Effects of Economic Issues* (Chicago, 1983); Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *The American Political Economy: Macroeconomics and Electoral Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987); Holt, "Election of 1840"; Kleppner, *Continuity and Change*.

43 For recent comprehensive literature reviews on legislatures, see Margaret Susan Thompson and Silbey, "Research on Nineteenth Century Legislatures: Present Contours and Future Directions," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, IX (1984), 319–350. The newer, more sophisticated spatial procedures for roll call analysis should lead to more interesting conclusions than has simple Guttman scaling. For an introduction to the logrolling literature, see Abrams, *Foundations of Political Analysis*, 103–138. For an excellent example of a traditional historical treatment of legislative strategy, see Cooper, "'The Only Door': The Territorial Issue, the Preston Bill, and the Southern Whigs," in *idem* et al., *A Master's Due*, 59–86. The explicit connections in the rational-choice literature between unstable outcomes in committees or legislatures and preference structures of members or the public that form a "voters' paradox" suggest connections between the different areas of political life that should help to tie together various facets of the historical study of politics.

innovations of the members of Congress elected in 1866 less than those who took office after "critical elections"? To what extent are such extraordinary alterations due to elite turnover within or between parties? In the nineteenth century, when there was much more turnover in congressional seats than there is today, was there more or less change in legislative policies than currently? If legislators were less concerned with reelection than they are assumed to be at present, how can their actions be appropriately modeled? What types of policies were adopted consensually, which ones provoked conflict and delay, how did the mix of these vary from time to time and from place to place, and to what degree did uncertainty and differential access to information and expertise account for such variations? What devices did legislators use to push or block programs? To what degree were they ideologues, and to what degree, opportunists seeking to enhance their chances for reelection or higher office? How did they interact with bureaucrats and interest groups? How did the increasingly professionalized state education departments of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, for instance, cooperate with the short-term amateurs who sat on state legislative committees on education?[44]

Fourth, historians will become more conscious of the conditions under which candidates adopted varying strategies. Did candidates appear to move toward the voter with median opinions, as theoretical models suggest, and if not, why not? Did pressures from their "core constituencies" or from activists' ideologies lead them to take differing stands on issues and to adopt nonconsensual policies in office? Was it virtually inevitable that the white and black extremists who constituted the major blocs of the southern Democratic and Republican parties, respectively,

44 David W. Brady, "Congressional Party Realignments and Transformations of Public Policy in Three Realignment Eras," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXVI (1982), 333–360; Gregory G. Brunk and Thomas G. Minehart, "How Important Is Elite Turnover to Policy Change?" *ibid.*, XXVIII (1984), 559–569; Lynn Avery Hunt, *Revolution and Urban Politics in Provincial France: Troyes and Reims, 1786–1790* (Stanford, 1978), 122–128. Since the posited reelection motive drives many social choice models of legislative action, studies of earlier legislatures may have to reformulate those models, thus of necessity contributing to theory. For the reelection assumption, see, for example, Barry R. Weingast et al., "The Political Economy of Benefits and Costs: A Neoclassical Approach to the Politics of Distribution," *Journal of Political Economy*, LXXXIX (1981), 642–664. For the effect of uncertainty and information, see Kenneth A. Shepsle and Weingast, "Political Preferences for the Pork Barrel: A Generalization," *American Journal of Political Science*, XXV (1981), 96–111.

would eventually drive the two parties apart during Reconstruction and destroy the chances of moderates?[45]

Fifth, the increasingly studied topic of political rules will continue to burgeon. What distortions did electoral and allocation rules introduce into the political process and how consequential were they for the fundamental question of politics—who gets what? How did the rules shape the game that politicians and voters played? Such questions have fostered a literature in economics and political science that is so large—too large, in fact, even to begin to cite—that it has been termed "the new institutionalism."[46]

Sixth, the new tools of social-choice and principal-agent theories can help to reintegrate judicial into political history. If the courts "follow[ed] the 'illection' returns," did they respond to the median voter? What incentives did judges as principals use to control other judges, litigants, and potential litigants, and how were judges as agents influenced by executives, legislators, and constitution-makers? Did litigants as principals view the courts as separate from other facets of politics, or did they attempt to reach their goals by simultaneously or sequentially playing the game in several political arenas? How did judicial rules and agendas change, and what impacts did such modifications have? Explicit theory can offer some illumination on these and other traditional questions in legal history, and legal history can in turn alter the "stylized facts" that the theorists must attempt to encompass.[47]

Seventh, an emphasis on tangible interests, rather than irrational, symbolic appeals to prejudice against negative reference groups can help at once to integrate political, economic, and social history and to explain major anomalies in the analysis of political events. Historians have long wondered why nativism rose and fell so quickly in the north in the 1850s. In "Without Consent or Contract," Fogel has offered a daring and brilliant explanation.

45 This is one possible explanation for the findings of Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869–1879* (Chapel Hill, 1984).

46 For an excellent summary of the historical literature on rules, see Peter H. Argersinger, "Electoral Process," in Greene (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Political History*, II, 489–512; *idem*, "The Value of the Vote: Political Representation in the Gilded Age," *Journal of American History*, LXXVI (1989), 59–90.

47 See Kousser, "'The Supremacy of Equal Rights': The Struggle Against Discrimination in Antebellum Massachusetts and the Foundations of the Fourteenth Amendment," *Northwestern University Law Review*, LXXXII (1988), 941–1010.

A "hidden depression" gripped native northern workers from 1848 to 1855, spurring a reaction against immigrant job competition and immigrant-borne disease. Fortunately for the Republicans, immigration subsided and the industrial economy turned up in 1856, which allowed the party to turn the attention of workers to slavery and the "slave power conspiracy." By treating "nativism" as, at least in part, a rational response to economic and social trends. Fogel has reduced the weight of random or nonrational factors in the account of the period and rejoined three fields of history.[48]

Eighth, notions drawn from economics can help to clarify and systematize the study of wars and other interactions between countries. The American Civil War might well be seen as a Thucididean hegemonic war, with the previously dominant Spartans (the South) seeking to put down the threat of the commercial, expansive Athenians (the North). A rational-choice framework would add a focus on what each side wished to gain, their expectations about the outcome, and, most interestingly, their attitudes toward risk.[49]

Ninth, since social choice inevitably reopens large, often normative questions, a reoriented political history will necessarily counter the criticism that it must be mired in detailed, particularistic studies that ignore broad topics of lasting significance. The value-laden problems of how individuals should act to attain their goals, how fair rules should be written, and how political institutions should be structured so as to be responsive to public opinion are never far away from the descriptive problems of how, in specified instances, people did act, how procedures were set up, and how bodies were organized. By self-consciously attending to contemporary "scientific" theorizing, historians will simultaneously turn again toward the traditional role of history as "philosophy teaching by example."[50]

48 Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York, 1989), 354–369.

49 Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XVIII (1988), 591–613; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Contribution of Expected Utility Theory to the Study of International Conflict," *ibid.*, 629–652.

50 Plott, "Axiomatic Social Choice Theory," emphasizes the normative aspects of social choice. The triviality charge is common. See, for example, Bailyn, "Challenge of Modern Historiography."

The realization that a regime or a discipline is in difficulty stimulates many conflicting analyses of the reasons for the dilemma, and many proposals for solutions. Although most scholars who have recently focused on the fragmentation of historical study and its apparent lack of direction have suggested, in effect, that coherence be reimposed by concentrating on one aspect of the subject—typically thought or "culture"—such projects will only narrow and isolate political history. A common approach and a realization of the interrelationships of all of the subcategories of the field offer a more promising way to seek unity and reinvigoration. Not only are rational-choice models likely to bring the subdisciplines of political history into closer touch with each other; their use in economics, political science, and sociology offers the prospect of increased contact with those disciplines and their historical counterparts as well. Theory and empirical research in social choice also suggest new ways to conceptualize old questions and raise broad new questions that both traditional and behavioral political historians have largely ignored.

Major advances in disciplines generally come from outside or at the intersections of fields. To break through the current impasse, political historians need to begin listening harder to what economists and political scientists have recently been saying. Political processes and outcomes are best understood as a series of conscious choices by rational political actors.