

Fromm USF
June 21, 2021

Taking the Long View: How Parties Might Be Forces for Progress, Inclusion and Stability in Modern Democratic Politics

Lecture VII

Political Parties for and Against Democracy

Prof. David Peritz

The Starting Point: Political Parties are Indispensable Instruments of Modern Democracy

“Political parties, with all their well-known human and structural shortcomings, are the only device thus far invented by the wit of Western man which with some effectiveness can generate countervailing collective power on behalf of the many individually powerless against the relatively few who are individually—or organizationally—powerful.”

(Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and Mainstream American Politics*, p.133)

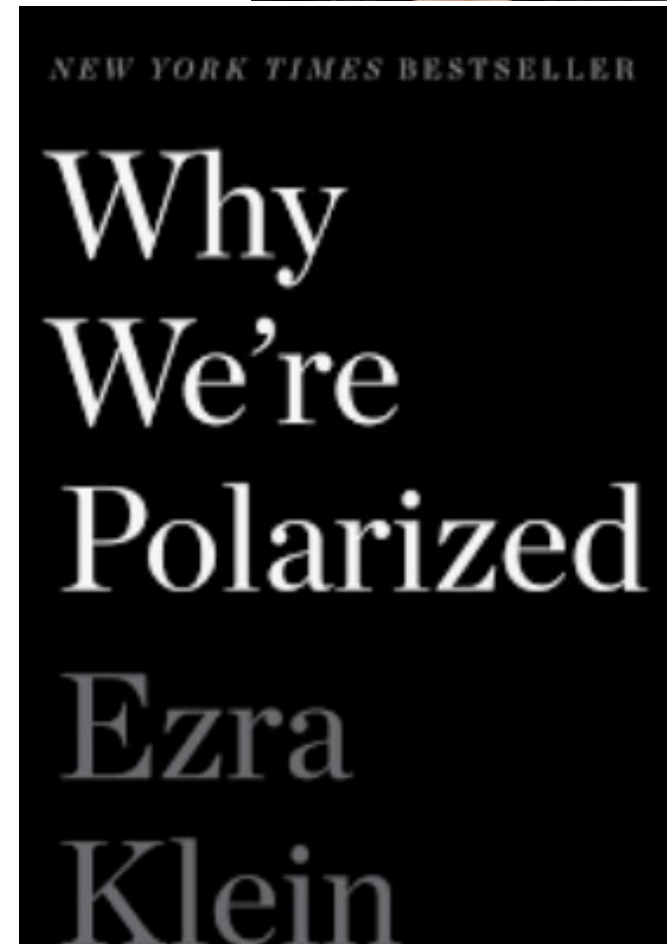
Some Lessons from Philosophy, Social Science and History

- I. Tendency of Parties to Pursue the Good of their Constituents in Place of a Plausible if Reasonably Controversial Conception of the Common Good
- II. Tendency to therefore Produce a Competitive, Pluralistic Conception of Democracy, which Violates the Idea that We are Governed by a Shared Will and hence Alienates Losers from Consent
- III. Nature of Parties not Fixed but Instead Vary with Electoral Systems, Social Conditions and Particular Political Dynamics, and therefore are Susceptible to Influence via Law and Politics (including social movements)
- IV. Parties also Have Intrinsic Institutional Tendencies, Including Bureaucratization and Concentration of Power in Leaders and Functionaries
- V. The Tendency to Elite Capture: Parties Need Resources and, When they Lack Public Support and Wealth is Concentrated, the Hyper-Wealth Will Normally Have Disproportionate or Exclusive Influence
- VI. The Law of Unintended Consequences: Party's Success May Produce Results Quite Different from their Aims (e.g. Republican Efforts to Promote Equal Opportunity Produce Oligarchy of Industry)
- VII. Parties may Mobilize and Exacerbate Deep Social Cleavages When this is to their Competitive Advantage (e.g. constant temptation to mobilize white racial resentment in American politics)

More Specific Reflections on Contemporary American Partisanship from Ezra Klein's *Why We're Polarized*



- I. Systemic Incentives and Structures Drive and Exacerbate Contemporary Polarization
- II. Identarian more than Ideological
- III. Self-Reinforcing Feedback Cycle
 - A. Polarization of Political Elites and Central Institutions (e.g. the media) Drives Popular Polarization
 - B. Popular Polarization Requires more Polarization from Political Elites and Central Institutions
- IV. Dangerous in the Context of the 21st Century American Political System Because It is Negative and Rooted in Deep Tendencies in Social Psychology that Cue Profound Animosity and Distort Cognition...
- V. And Because Polarization Defeats Our Capacity to Solve Urgent Problems—Identity Shapes Cognition
- VI. Results in Post-Persuasion Elections, Strong Partisanship, and Weak Parties



Some Positive Implications of Klein's Analysis

- I. To Manage Polarization, We Have to Manage Ourselves—Damp Down our Deep Rooted Group Psychological Circuits
- II. Think Slow About Politics
- III. Concentrate on the Scrutinizing the Arguments and Positions of Your Own Side as an Antidote to Negative Partisanship
- IV. Be Suspicious of Complete Partisan Identification and Agreement
- V. Refashioning Our Political Identities to Emphasize Being Open-Minded, Informed, and Reasonable Citizens
- VI. Bombproofing (e.g. Budgeting and Debt Ceiling Legislative Processes)
- VII. Democratizing: “The Republic Party has been warped by its ability to win elections without fashioning a majoritarian agenda.” (Klein, p.253)
 - A. National Interstate Popular Vote Compact
 - B. Reshape Congressional Elections with Multimember Districts and Ranked Choice Voting
 - C. Eliminate the Filibuster
 - D. Statehood for DC and Puerto Rico
 - E. Protect Voting Rights by Limiting Gerrymandering and Obstacles

Be Attentive to the Different Ways we Think: Responsiveness to Expertise and Social Knowledge, Slow Thinking, and “Identity Protective Cognition”

“[Dan] Kahan’s work suggests that cognition exist on a spectrum, ranging from issues where the truth matters and our identities don’t to issues where our identities dominate and the truth fades in importance. One implication of an era where our political identities are becoming more sorted and more powerful is that it will bring with it a rise in identity protective cognition and that’s particularly true if the relevant identity groups are able to construct sophisticated architectures of information that we can use to power our reasoning.”

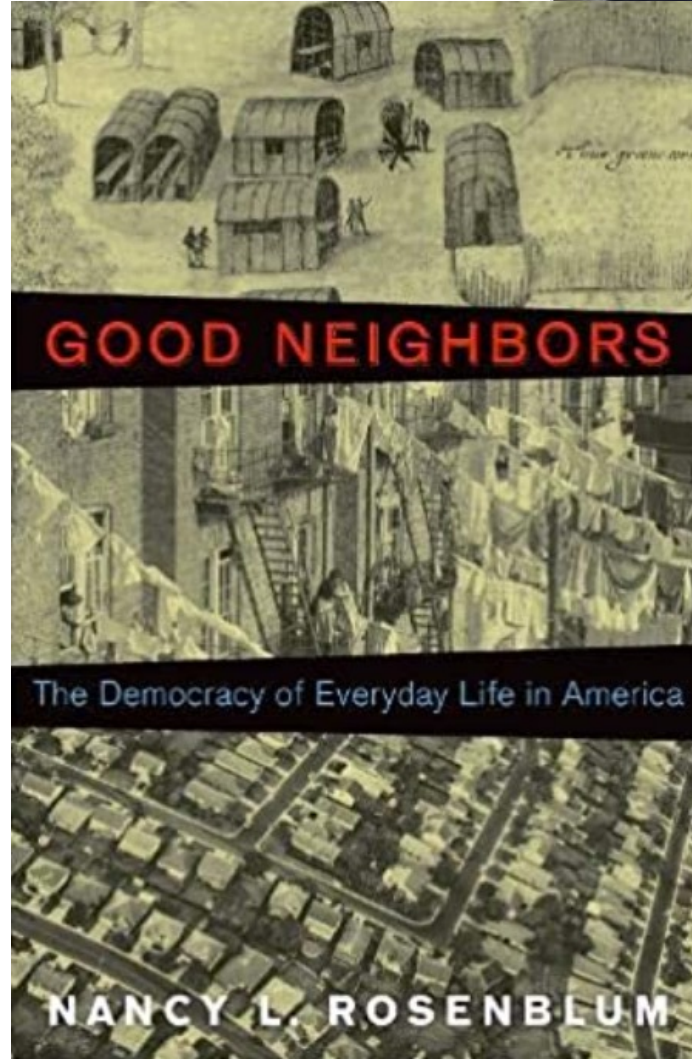
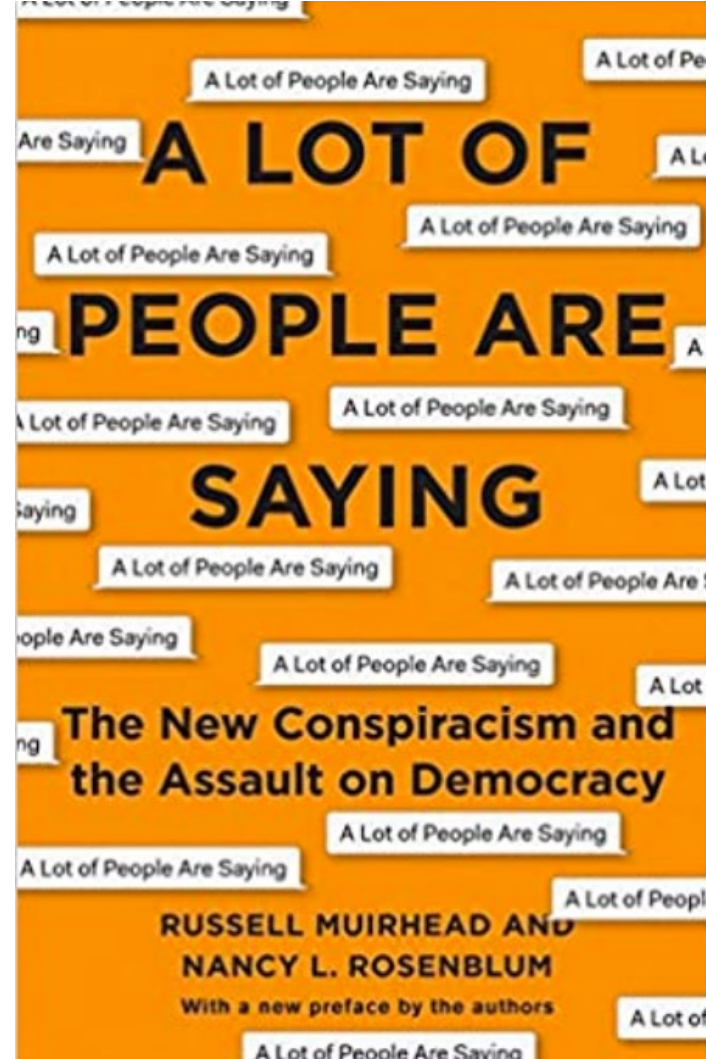
“Kahan is quick to note, that most of the time, people are perfectly capable of being convinced by the best evidence. There’s lots of disagreement about climate change and gun control...but almost none over whether antibiotics work...our reasoning becomes rationalizing when we’re dealing with questions where the answers could threaten our group...And in those cases, Kahan says, we’re being perfectly rational when we fool ourselves.”

Turning to a More Systematic Positive Agenda: Nancy Rosenblum's *On the Side of Angels*



ON THE SIDE OF
THE ANGELS
An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship

Nancy L. Rosenblum



Esteemed Traditions of Anti-Partyism In Political Thought and Practice and What Can be Learned from their Rejection

- I. Parties as the Orphans of Political Philosophy and the Darlings of Political Science
- II. Rosenblum's Starting Point: "Politics is Partisan" —The Fact of Pluralism Produces Passionate Disagreement which Requires Room for Open Expression and Constructive Collisions
- III. Political Holism: Politics Demands a Community Unified by a Consensus on the Common Good, and Parties Fracture this Community by Turning the Parts Against the Whole—and the Danger of "Majoritarianism as Shadow Holism" and the Question of the Degree to which the Current Majority Gains the Authority to Govern in the Name of the Whole People
- IV. Fatal Divisiveness: Major Social Divisions are Fixed and Should Be Institutionally Expressed so that Each is Represented and Plays its Role, But Parties Exacerbate these Distinctions or Introduce Destructive (if sometimes trivial) Schisms (e.g. the mixed constitution vs. parties)
- V. Opposition to Parties after the Consolidation of the System of Partisan Competition and Party Government: e.g. Progressive Anti-Partyism and its Reforms
- VI. "The Weightlessness of Independence" vs. Partisanship as a Stable Political Identity (the phenomenology of partisanship)

Evaluating Rosenblum's Defense of Partisanship & Parties

- I. Reversing the Priority of Political Science in Light of Democratic Theory: Partisans Before Parties, Parties as the Carriers of Partisanship
- II. Parties Create Political Interests and Opinions, Formulate Issues, and Draw the Lines of Division in Normal Politics (autonomy of democratic politics, not derivative from pre-political social cleavages and interests)
- III. Partisanship is The Political Identity of Representative Democracy and Carries with it a Strict Ethics Grounded in the Recognition of Partiality, Pluralism and the Likelihood of Loss—Regulated Rivalry and Fruitful Conflict
- IV. Values Governing the Political Morality of Partisan Identity
 - A. Inclusiveness as a Conscious Partisan Value
 - B. The Need to Create a Comprehensive Political Narrative that Constitutes a Majority and a Minority—a “Single Basic Cleavage”
 - C. The Disposition to Compromise—with Fellow Partisans, and with the Other Side
- V. Is Rosenblum's 2008 Account Persuasive in 2021?
 - A. The Problem of Political Ethics in the Absence of Policy to Enforce its Structural Pre-requisites
 - B. The Need to Balance Party Identity with that of Citizen
 - C. Social Movements, Experimental Democracy, and the Need to think of Extra-Partisan Political Organizations and Institutions

