Alexis de Tocqueville, who was an early French visitor to the United States and wrote *Democracy in America* (1835), believed that the essence of America was in the uniquely free and egalitarian ideas that abounded at its founding. Yet, Tocqueville noted that the treatment and situation of Blacks and Indians in the United States contradicted the American passion for democracy. He saw slavery and the denial of constitutional rights and protections to Blacks as the principal threat to the American democratic system. From his perspective, Blacks would never be included in America’s democracy; even the American Revolution’s egalitarian principles would never change Whites’ negative views of Blacks. Indians, he felt, would resist being civilized, and in so doing would be wiped out. Tocqueville believed that the institution of slavery should be abolished, but he also felt that the aftermath would be catastrophic because Blacks, Whites, and Indians would not be able to live together, so White genocidal violence against Blacks and Indians would follow.

For much of the history of the United States, the issues of race and the place of Blacks and American Indians, and later other racial or ethnic minority groups such as Asians and Latinos have been enduring threads in the American political fabric. Although they are still threads that can be pulled to generate angst and divisions, a great deal has changed since Tocqueville made his observations in 1835.

In 2008, Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) became the Democratic nominee for President of the United States and the first Black person to represent a major political party in the presidential race in the history of the United States. On November 4, 2008, Obama was elected the first African American president of the United States, with a wide margin in both the popular and electoral votes. He was reelected to a second term in 2012 by a substantial, albeit somewhat reduced, margin in the popular and electoral votes.

Many Americans view the historic election of a Black as president as a signal that issues of racism and inequality have been resolved and that there is no need for more or new public policies to address racial inequalities. They assert that any remaining inequalities are the result of a lack of individual initiative, not societal barriers. On the contrary, we believe that the election of Barack Obama brought into sharp relief the centrality of issues of race to American politics. In fact, President Obama’s success might make it more difficult, not less, to address some of the issues of inequality that continue to exist in the United States.
In this book, we are concerned with the complexities of the American political system and inequalities that continue to exist within it. If you read and understand the text, we believe you will benefit in four ways.

First, government is more than just a set of institutions, rules, and procedures by which those institutions operate. Government exists also in our perceptions about and our experiences with government. Every American might perceive government differently, and each of us behaves somewhat differently based on these perceptions. Describing government in this sense is not something that is feasible here, but we can report on the perceptions of different peoples grouped by shared characteristics. The United States is not “one nation . . . indivisible” but, instead, something different to each of us based on our citizenship status, socioeconomic class, religion, age, place of residence, race, ethnicity, gender, and many other factors.

Second, we offer a practical view of American government supported by empirical analysis. By using hard evidence to support our views, we hope to avoid a naive “how government should work” approach and give you a firm base for developing informed opinions. For example, we list the powers of the president, but in reality these powers are limited and the president is much less powerful than a simple list of official powers would suggest.

Third, you will have a sense of how race has played out in the American governmental system and its politics. Although some historical events present a sad and painful look at the American system, recent events such as the election of President Obama show a more hopeful albeit cautious look at the American political system and its politics.

Finally, reading this book will give you a more holistic and realistic perspective on American government. You will have a sense of what government can do and what American citizens must do to help government achieve its objectives. Regardless of whether that help comes through social movements, voting, or participation in other types of political activity, people—individually and collectively—are central to the American governmental system.

New to the Third Edition

- A sleek and modern four-color design and revamped photo program bring enhanced visual interest to this award-winning text.
- Updates and analysis place the 2016 election and its results into political and cultural context for students.
- Expanded coverage of Latinos highlights the importance and complexities of the political influence wielded by this growing demographic and voting group.
- Enhanced discussion of political science research in relevant chapters provides insights into both the scholarly debates and consensus of the discipline. Many of the tables in the chapters have been updated with the most recent data available.
Revisions to the 2016 Election Update

- Updated coverage on voter purges in Florida (p. 63).
- Updated voter ID discussion (p. 143).
- Updated Equal Rights Amendment discussion (p. 155).
- Updated same-sex marriage discussion (p. 157).
- Updated discussion of the Congressional Black Caucus (p. 179).
- Updated discussion of minorities in the cabinet (p. 217).
- Updated discussion of clashes between President Obama and Congress (p. 221).
- Updated caseload data (pp. 255–266).
- Updated minority state party chairs (p. 424).
- Updated information on policy enactment and affirmative action (p. 491).
- More citations added to all chapters.
- Updated opening vignette for Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15.
- Post-election updates made to Chapter 15, Campaigns and Elections.
- Updated coverage in Chapter 12, including: Chicano Movement; Asian American Movement; Anti-Nuclear Movement; added material to the last paragraph on page 370 on Tea Party and Black Lives Matter.
- Updates to seventeen tables, three figures, and “Measuring Equality” features.

Organization of This Book

Chapter 1, “American Government and Politics in a Racially Divided World,” introduces the concept of government in its general and various forms. It also shows that the choices the Framers of the Constitution made in structuring the new governments were neither accidental nor unconnected. The structures of these governments had theoretical and philosophical foundations in classical liberalism, republicanism, and a tradition of exclusion.

Chapter 2, “The Constitution: Rights and Race Intertwined,” introduces the basic government documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It addresses the events and problems under the Articles of Confederation that led to the drafting of the 1787 Constitution and focuses on the overt and tacit role that slavery played throughout the constitutional process.

Chapter 3, “Federalism: Balancing Power, Balancing Rights,” explains the concept of federalism—the balance of power between the national government and the states. It also discusses how that power has ebbed and flowed since the founding of the republic.

Chapter 4, “Civil Liberties: Freedom and Government Authority in Tension,” addresses the tension between government authority and the civil liberties afforded citizens under the Bill of Rights. We pay particular attention to how each amendment also offers protections against state governments.
Chapter 5, “Civil Rights: Inequality and Equality,” focuses on the increased legal protection afforded various racial and ethnic minorities and women over time and how the reality of this protection has varied across levels of government. We also discuss the differences in timing of the extensions of these protections to the various groups, including the LGBT community, the elderly, and disabled people.

Chapter 6, “Congress: Representation and Lawmaking,” outlines the general functions of and influences on Congress, as well as the nature of representation in our democratic system.

Chapter 7, “The Presidency: Conventional Wisdom Redefined,” looks at the Office of the President. We outline the roles, powers, and limitations of the president of the United States and the Office of the President, with the purpose of presenting a realistic view of what can and cannot reasonably be expected of presidents. We pay particular attention to the presidential selection process.

Chapter 8, “The Bureaucracy: Career Government Employees, Accountability, and Race,” addresses the important topic of government agencies. We examine and assess the relative size and range of functions of the national bureaucracy, and the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of these bureaucracies.

Chapter 9, “The Judiciary: Blending Law and Politics,” describes the structure, selection processes, and decision-making dynamics of the national courts. The influence of these factors on the operation of these important institutions highlights the differences among various levels of courts.

Chapter 10, “Public Opinion: Divided By Race?” listens to the voice of the people. We explore the complexities of public opinion by examining the views of the many publics that exist in the American political system, including their racial, gender, and regional differences. A second focus is the role public opinion plays in the American political process.

Chapter 11, “The Media: Reinforcing Racial Stereotypes?” focuses on the role of the media in the American political process. We examine the media’s influence on the formation of public opinion, policy agenda setting, and campaigns. We also consider the importance of symbols and symbolism and the “parallel press.”

Chapter 12, “Social Movements: Civil Rights as a Movement Model,” looks at how opinions are mobilized into efforts to address grievances. Preconditions and timing are of key interest. Drawing from illustrations of several populations, we examine why groups coalesce into social movements at certain points in time and not at others when conditions are perhaps even worse.

Chapter 13, “Interest Groups: Good Outcomes with Few Resources,” flows from the discussion of social movements. This chapter distinguishes between social movements and interest groups and examines the ways in which interest groups affect the policy process and influence political outcomes. We note that interest groups are not only those organizations or racial and ethnic minorities and women who have been excluded from the political process, but
also are far more likely to include strong majority-dominated organizations whose influence and access are generally much greater than those of the so-called special interests of disadvantaged groups.

**Chapter 14**, “Political Parties: Linking Voters and Governing Institutions,” provides a history of the development of the national two-party system in the United States. We discuss the pros and cons of a two-party system as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the current Democratic and Republican parties. The history of the experiences of Blacks, Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans is discussed to provide a context for the current placement of these groups within the two political parties.

**Chapter 15**, “Voting and Elections: From Obama to Clinton,” discusses the voting behaviors of the American public. Voting at the national level for the president commands the most attention. We also consider the factors of race and gender in the examination of voting patterns.

**Chapter 16**, “The Making of Domestic and Foreign Policy,” outlines the public policymaking process, summarizing how all institutions and processes converge to help explain what government does and does not do. It focuses on the differences and the relationship between both domestic and foreign policy.

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**Note about Terminology**

Before proceeding, it is important to define the terms used throughout the book. First, the terms *Black* and *African American* are used interchangeably. Recent research suggests that among Americans of African descent, slightly more than 1 percent difference exists in those who prefer to be called Black (48.1 percent) and those who prefer to be called African American (49.2 percent). Our own preference is for the term *Black* because it concisely describes an identity and a status in American society that are based on color. The Black experience in the United States differs markedly from that of White ethnics, and the use of *African American* might convey the impression that Blacks are just another ethnic group similar to Italian Americans, Irish Americans, or Polish Americans.

Similarly, we use *Latino* and *Hispanic* interchangeably as umbrella terms when we cannot distinguish among subgroups of the nation’s Spanish-origin population. Many academics reject the term *Hispanic* because it was devised by the U.S. Census Bureau to classify individuals and is devoid of any connection to the people to which it refers in the United States. The term comes from the Latin word for Spain and is associated with people from the Iberian Peninsula in Europe. It refers to people of Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, and Andorra, and clearly does not technically include individuals of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central and South American descent. We most often use *Latino* in recognition of this distinction because this term refers more exclusively to persons of Mexican and Latin American origin.

Third, we use the term *Indian peoples* or *American Indians* rather than the population term *Native American*. Scholars of American Indian politics dislike
the term *Native American* because it can be applied literally to any person born in the Americas. Although the terms *Indian peoples* and *American Indians* ignore geographical differences and cultural diversity among Indian groupings, they are the preferred terms of scholars working in the area. 3

Fourth, the term *Asian American* is an umbrella term for a number of ethnic origin groups—Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, and East Indians. We use the term when we or the data we use do not allow us to differentiate among these various ethnic origin groups.

At times, we use the term *ethnicity* in a specific sense of the term—generally meaning the groupings of people on the basis of learned characteristics, often associated with national origin. Issues of ethnicity are particularly pertinent in the Latino, Asian, and Indian groups and are becoming more important in the Black population as the number of Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean increases.

We also use the terms *racial minority* or *racial and ethnic minorities* as a shorthand method of identifying Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and American Indians collectively based on their proportion of the population vis-à-vis the majority White population.

We also use the generic term *women* at times, but most often we specify which group of women to which we are referring. Women as a category have been excluded from participation in many segments of American society, but we do not consider the generic category of women as a numerical minority of the population.

Significantly, we use the capitalized form for all of the various racial and ethnic groups—White, Black, Asian American, American Indian, and Latino—as well as for the various ethnic origin groups, such as Mexican American.

Finally, a word about the concept of *equality* that we examine and apply throughout this book. There are many ongoing debates about the kinds of equality and which should be embraced and pursued by governmental policies. Political philosophers pitch “equality of opportunity” against “equality of outcome” and weigh in on their relative benefits. Measures of fairness or justice are overlaid on top of these categories in an attempt to moderate their disparate results. In this book, we look at all these values through the lens of racial and ethnic disparity. Thus, some of the measures and evaluations of equality we suggest apply only to those who have suffered or benefited from racial and ethnic inequality. Other lessons we draw about equality can be applied across the spectrum of public policy—to the poor White woman in Appalachia, the auto worker who just lost his job, the gay person being taunted at work, or the disabled person who cannot go where she wants because there is no wheelchair access. We do not take on these inequalities in as great a depth as we do racial and ethnic inequality, but many of the measures and evaluations of equality we make can be extended to them as well—and we encourage students to read the text with that in mind.