

Cleveland State University
EngagedScholarship@CSU



Political Science Faculty Publications

Political Science Department

8-2000

Culture Wars and Local Politics, by Elaine B. Sharp

David R. Elkins

Cleveland State University, d.elkins@csuohio.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clpolsci_facpub

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Publisher's Statement

Copyright 2000 Cambridge University Press. Available on publisher's site at

http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0022381600000414.

Original Citation

Elkins, David R. 2000. "Culture Wars and Local Politics, by Elaine B. Sharp." *Journal of Politics* 62:923-925.

Repository Citation

Elkins, David R., "Culture Wars and Local Politics, by Elaine B. Sharp" (2000). *Political Science Faculty Publications*. 10.

https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/clpolsci_facpub/10

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science Department at EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact library.es@csuohio.edu.

Most important, perhaps, Nelson and Bridges never lose sight of a primary goal: to use the data from the four cases, “not to retry these cases according to the same legal standards the courts invoked,” but to probe the competing explanations of pay gaps in organizations (116).

Legalizing Gender Inequality makes a powerful argument for more theoretical emphasis on the “organizational dimensions of gender inequality” and for “reopening policy debate on pay equity” (310). The latter, of course, may be quite difficult given the work’s unsparing criticisms of federal judges for too often uncritically accepting employers’ “market defenses” and of plaintiffs and comparable worth advocates for relying on macro “tainted market” (i.e., marred by cultural gender prejudices) arguments. Indeed, the “promarket ideology” that Nelson and Bridges contend informs the “dominant discourse on between-job gender inequality” (359) that the courts have legitimated and reinforced also would appear to shape the views of most policy makers, organizational elites, and economists. Ultimately, the authors can only hold out the hope that the “rise of new theories of organizational pay practices” (362) will point to more promising anti-discrimination strategies.

Karen M. Hult, *Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University*

Culture Wars and Local Politics. Edited by Elaine B. Sharp. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999. Pp. 250. \$35.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

Ever since the publication of Paul E. Peterson’s *City Limits* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), urban scholars have been grappling with the relative influence of community politics in the face of a tax-sensitive and potentially mobile population. In the edited volume reviewed here, Elaine B. Sharp and her contributing authors explore disputes, defined as culture wars, from the perspective that they are motivated more by concerns of morality than by economic self-interest. “Devoted to the task of conceptual clarification,” this book examines the roles local governments adopt when confronting a culture war, and it explores the conditions and circumstances that prompt a particular role’s adoption (7). Ultimately, Sharp argues that culture wars “rightly constitute a fourth arena of local politics, alongside [Peterson’s] allocational, developmental, and redistributive arenas” (237).

Culture wars are “disputes grounded in *moral* concerns [author’s emphasis]. . . that are often passionate and strident” and are likely to be highly salient to a general public (3–4). The activists involved in these disputes are not typically satisfied with “compromise, coalition formation, and other elements of normal politics” (3). What distinguishes culture wars in the urban context is that they are, unlike most local issues, relatively immune from the influences of the urban bureaucracy and are not territorially bound.

Drawing on her earlier work (*Urban Affairs Review* 31: 738–58), Sharp begins by proposing six potential roles that local governments may adopt when dealing with a culture war: evasion, responsive or hyperactive responsive action,

entrepreneurial instigation, repression, and unintentional instigation. In the ensuing chapters, the authors investigate the roles local governments adopt when confronted by anti-abortion protests, demands for gay and lesbian rights, anti-homosexual protests, and needle exchanges. In each of these chapters, the authors explore various cultural and institutional explanations for the role choices made by local governments.

The responses to anti-abortion protests in two South Carolina cities (Columbia and Greenville) are examined by Laura R. Woliver. Woliver finds that in this socially conservative, pro-business state, "Local officials mask repression with evasion by invoking their policymaking powerlessness and directing outraged citizens to state and federal authorities" (32). By contrast, Susan E. Clarke argues that the use of repression was justified by Denver's leaders' definition of "Operation Rescue as negative, outside groups harming all residents of the city" (p. 44). Clarke also chronicles how repression has its political limits when it might later be used to justify repressive actions of more favorable groups.

The majority of this book examines the activities of gay and lesbian rights activists' demands for recognition and civil rights protections. With only 11 states having successfully passed legislation to protect the rights of gays and lesbians, this volume makes a convincing case that these activities have truly become local battles. However, what becomes apparent in these case studies is how similar such culture war disputes are to mainstream political discourse. Though the authors apply Sharp's model appropriately, the successful struggle for these rights appears to hinge on the political might of the group, its level of political incorporation, and the general receptivity of the community.

Rick Musser's chapter about a Baptist preacher's strident anti-homosexual protest actions is the most compelling case study in this volume. In *Fred Phelps v. Topeka*, Musser illustrates the high costs a government may face in its attempts to repress a determined and amply resourced challenger of the status quo. By contrast, David L. Kirp and Ronald Bayer help redefine the dimensions of entrepreneurial instigation in their chapter on needle exchanges.

Paul Schumaker's chapter investigates the moral principles that undergird individual roles adopted by elected representatives when confronting a culture war. Using open-ended interview data of local officials, Schumaker finds the majority of his respondents opposed to the notion of legislating morality. Specifically, Schumaker finds that local officials are reluctant to impose their own religious principles on citizens or force individual citizens to conform to a single notion of community values. And he finds support among his respondents for advocating some civic virtue principles, particularly among school board members, and equality principles "to end discrimination against minorities and gays" (p. 209).

The strength of this book is Sharp's model of local government roles in culture wars. These case studies expand on the initial model by including three new roles: "agenda denial, nonresponsiveness, and symbolic responsiveness" (p. 220). They also help refine the notion of entrepreneurial instigation to include two

different versions: principled and opportunistic. The book, however, is less successful when it comes to expanding the understanding of why certain roles are adopted. Though many explanations are explored, few are overwhelmingly convincing. Indeed, in many of the cities examined here, a city's political economy and its concerns about economic development, particularly its developmental image, loom large in its culture wars.

David R. Elkins, *Cleveland State University*

Mistaken Identity: The Supreme Court and the Politics of Minority Representation. By Keith J. Bybee. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. xi, 194. \$35.00.)

At the core of the politics of state and congressional redistricting is the question of representation, which itself is a central and defining principle in democratic theory about *how* so-called democratic governments are not constituted but make decisions. This view of democratic theory addresses such questions as *who* should participate in decision making, *how much* should each participant's preference count, and finally, *how many* votes are needed to reach a decision. Seen this way, representation is the foundation of shared democratic politics, and at least for the United States, it is about what *e pluribus unum* means. Among the several propositions advanced in this book, Bybee argues that representation is synonymous with political identity because, in proper perspective, "Claims about how representational institutions ought to be designed always hinge on prior perceptions of *who* is to be represented in the first place" (7). Representational debate, he asserts, draws on competing notions of "who the people are" and on questions of "how self government ought to be achieved," which of course, "engenders contests over fundamental political identities and basic governmental aims" (7).

Because most redistricting laws enacted by state legislatures show evidence of varying degrees of boundary manipulation for partisan or factional advantage, they also serve as interesting forums from which to examine the role of the Supreme Court as it engages the politics of minority representation and how it ascertains what the basic structure of political community ought to be. Bybee argues that in its constitutive role, the Court's involvement in the politics of minority representation confronts the Court with an important duty, that of articulating the foundations of its own political authority in the name of the people (8).

A long line of cases in minority representation raises the question of just what is at stake in Supreme Court decisions on this issue. In *Baker v. Carr* in 1962, the Court ruled that federal courts had jurisdiction over lawsuits challenging the apportionment of legislative districts on the grounds that malapportioned districts violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Of course, in so saying in the *Baker* case, the Court was overruling its previous decision in a 1946 case, *Colegrove v. Green*, in which it held that the issue of malapportioned legislative districts was a political question in which relief was best ap-