

The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · <http://www.psqonline.org>

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 117 · Number 1 · Spring 2002

No part of this article may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except:

- one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or
- with prior written permission of The Academy of Political Science.

Political Science Quarterly is published by The Academy of Political Science. Contact the Academy for further permission regarding the use of this work.

Political Science Quarterly
Copyright © 2002 by The Academy of Political Science. All rights reserved.

as far back as 1828 to test her logic, and she shows that mandate claims are more likely either when the president's victory is decisive or when the president's victory is more modest but his party dominates Congress. Finally, she uses archival material to present brief cases studies of three kinds of postelection outcomes.

Unfortunately, crucial parts of the model are hard to measure systematically. Most importantly, how do we know when a mandate has been claimed? Conley gives only vague criteria for when a mandate has been claimed and no criteria at all for gauging how much policy change the mandate claimer actually seeks. The illustrative statements she quotes from mandate claimers are gleaned from extensive reading, but they do not represent any kind of systematic assessment of postelection statements by either winners or the media. To illustrate the potential for confusion, Conley states that "In 1888, when Benjamin Harrison defeated incumbent, Grover Cleveland, his victory was interpreted as a victory for protectionism because Cleveland had been devoted to lowering the tariff" (pp. 43–44). However, Harrison actually lost the popular vote in 1888, and the election of 1888 is not listed as one in which a mandate was claimed.

The 1980 election is relevant here: Ronald Reagan's margin was much larger than expected but was far less decisive than Richard Nixon's victory in 1972. Conley argues that after an election, a common interpretation emerges automatically, as the inside-the-beltway types produce "a collective conventional wisdom" (p. 33) about its meaning. However, at least within political science, there was no consensus as to whether Reagan's victory reflected issue voting for policy change in a conservative direction or retrospective voting in disapproval of the economic and foreign policy failures of the Carter administration. Because he had an issue agenda about which he cared and because he commanded formidable political skills, Reagan was able to claim a mandate and in spite of divided control of Congress, to preside over a major policy departure. In the end, while Conley's model makes an important contribution in clarifying the structural factors that constrain presidential options for claiming a mandate, we should not overlook the significance of the president's character and skills.

KAY LEHMAN SCHLOZMAN
Boston College

John Adams by David McCullough. *New York, Simon & Schuster, 2001.*
751 pp. \$35.00.

For generations, John Adams languished at the shallow end of the gene pool of American heroes. Obstinate, egocentric, irascible, he personified the cramped conservatism of New England federalism. Defeated for a second term by

Thomas Jefferson, he became the first president to boycott his successor's inauguration, a fact that speaks volumes about Adams's sorehead attitude toward life in general and politics in particular. Adams left the presidency in disgrace, his administration pilloried for passage of the odious Alien and Sedition Acts and an equally ill considered last-minute attempt to pack the federal judiciary.

David McCullough, the nation's preeminent popular biographer, attempts to resurrect Adams's reputation, proving that no president is beyond historical redemption. The result is a chatty tale, pursued in such tedious detail that it strains even McCullough's admirable prose, but sheds little insight into the early years of the republic. There is delightful scene setting and costuming, but scarcely any analysis of the issues of the day or the economic and social context in which great events took place. In short, there is less here than meets the eye. McCullough has provided a loving portrait of the man who became the second president, but there is insufficient texture to make it meaningful.

McCullough makes extensive use of the voluminous Adams family papers, and there is commendable attention to getting the quotations right. Fortunately for McCullough, the Adamses wrote well. Drawn to a life of books and scholarship, their correspondence sparkles with wit, clarity, and candor. Yet the letters that passed between Adams and his family, or later with Jefferson, cannot substitute for an author's careful analysis of historic context. The last two chapters of *John Adams* suffer especially from lengthy quotations with minimal textural explication—as if McCullough had become weary of his task.

The question of emphasis nags throughout. McCullough devotes twelve pages to Adams's shipboard experience crossing the Atlantic in 1778, but less than two to the Alien and Sedition Acts. The appearance of Admiral Richard Lord Howe is set forth in exquisite detail, yet the dispute over the Bank of the United States and the subsequent formation of American political parties merits only five lines. A 1786 tour of English gardens by Adams and Jefferson lingers for five pages whereas the Treaty of Paris that established American independence, and which Adams helped negotiate, is dismissed almost cursorily.

How well McCullough understands the history of the founding of the republic is open to question. Take the Treaty of Paris. Great Britain granted United States independence but only in return for repayment of the debts owed by Americans to English creditors and the restitution of British property that had been confiscated. These issues roiled American politics for the next twenty years, delaying British withdrawal from the Northwest Territory and necessitating two additional treaties with Great Britain, to saying nothing of the subsequent supremacy clause of the Constitution making treaties the supreme law of the land. McCullough virtually ignores the issue, though it did as much as anything to topple Adams and the Federalists.

In like manner, the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, drafted by Jefferson and passed in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts, are scarcely alluded to, though they contributed enormously to states rights doctrine that culminated in secession in 1861. Adams's political thought is also shortchanged. McCullough

seems unaware of the link between the Sedition Act and the British common law tradition of seditious libel and prior restraint. Like many American lawyers trained in the common law, Adams failed to recognize that the Bill of Rights went far beyond the legal protections afforded Englishmen. Freedom of speech and of the press, the separation of church and state, prohibitions against double jeopardy and fictitious indictments, the requirement for grand jury and the right to remain silent clothe the individual American with rights unknown at common law. Even Thomas Jefferson, despite his liberal virtues, was unable to comprehend that the Constitution abolished the common law rule of constructive treason and substituted a much narrower test.

This is biography for the coffee tables of America—a book written to be sold and not read. The numbing accumulation of trivia that substitutes for insight and analysis suggests that one should look elsewhere for an understanding of the important role Adams played in history.

JEAN EDWARD SMITH
Marshall University

Tip O’Neill and the Democratic Century by John A. Farrell. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 2001. 784 pp. \$29.95.

Jack Farrell, prize-winning Washington editor of *The Boston Globe*, has written a biography as big as his subject—and Tip O’Neill had to search long and hard to find a size 52 stout mourning coat to wear to Ronald Reagan’s 1981 inauguration.

Farrell traces his subject’s roots back many generations to Ireland through immigration to the United States and socialization into American political culture, and through childhood and young adult experiences that led to a political life. He provides details of Irish life in North Cambridge, distinguishing that experience from those of the Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys across the Charles River in Boston. Farrell’s descriptions are rich and powerful and poignant.

But what truly distinguishes this work is implied in the subtitle. This is not a book just about Tip O’Neill; it is also a book about politics, Democratic politics through the period in which the Democrats dominated the American political scene from the 1930s to the 1980s. For the serious student of American politics, the stories are familiar. However, Farrell collects them in one place and reminds us of the importance of certain events and of certain pivotal figures. For those less familiar with these events, Farrell’s eloquent style captures personalities and events in a way sure to enthrall. His research is exhaustive. Much of his material comes from the O’Neill papers, but he worked with archival materials from most of the other political leaders about whom he writes; and he conducted over 200 interviews, though unfortunately none with O’Neill, who had died before this book was begun. He is also thoroughly familiar with