



Searching for the Spirit of American Democracy

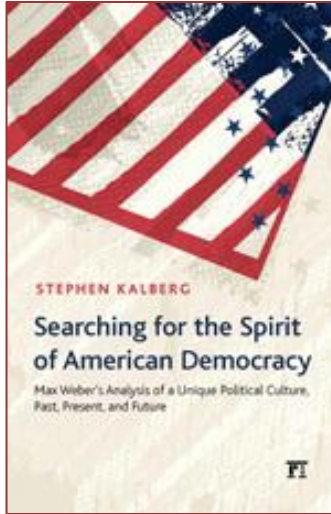
Max Weber's Analysis of a Unique Political Culture, Past, Present, and Future

Stephen Kalberg

"In a gestalt switch from the usual application of Weber's Protestant Ethic to capitalist development, Kalberg shows how it explains American politics. It could well be titled "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Democracy." Ascetic Protestants work out their salvation in America not just in an individual work ethic but by actively participating in a civic sphere of good will, egalitarianism, and public responsibility. Then ensues an historic drama: value-motivated carriers transport the spirit of democracy across the generations, but buffeted by growing forces of self-propelling capitalism and bureaucracy. As the civic sphere is undermined, American individualism turns into private channels of practical and personal concerns. Skeptical that the unique American pathway to the spirit of democracy can be generalized elsewhere in the world, nevertheless Kalberg finds the moral concerns of American politics still alive in recent elections. A book of political-historical sophistication exemplary of the spirit of Weber himself.

—**Randall Collins**, Dorothy Swaine Thomas Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania

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The ongoing "crisis of American democracy" debate is the topic of this new book. By referring to Weber's long-term perspective and rigorous terminology, it provides rich new insights and also offers powerful explanations for the particular contours of today's American political culture.

Kalberg draws upon Weber to reconstruct political culture in ways that define America's unique spirit of democracy. Developing several Weber-inspired models, the author reveals patterns of oscillation in American history. Can these pendulum movements sustain today the symbiotic dualism that earlier invigorated American democracy? Can they do so to such an

extent that the American spirit of democracy is rejuvenated? Kalberg forcefully argues that, if democracies are to endure, supportive political cultures must be in place. He then explores in his concluding chapter whether Weber's explanations and insights can be generalized beyond the American case.

Stephen Kalberg, Associate Professor of Sociology at Boston University, is the author of *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology Today* (Ashgate 2012), the translator of *Max Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Oxford 2011), and the editor of *Max Weber: Readings and Commentary on Modernity* (Wiley Blackwell 2005).

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