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## **The Best-Kept Secret: Women Corporate Lobbyists, Policy, & Power in the United States**

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nations, and a nuclear arms race was only one aspect of a multi-faceted competition.

Caplow is optimistic that these unwritten rules hold now and will hold in the future. "Nuclear weapons, which are only useful if never used, have created a geopolitical world that looks much more dangerous than it is" (p. 97). Allowing that non-state actors in possession of nuclear weapons are less governed by these three rules, Caplow thinks a terrorist attack is unlikely. Moreover, he asserts these three rules continue to apply even as nuclear weapons have spread to South Asia, North Korea, Israel (in all likelihood) and several other candidates around the globe. These are not major powers as understood in the international relations literature—and nuclear weapons do not change this. Had Caplow developed a richer conceptual framework, he might have made a more compelling case that the rules governing the international order are founded on the unique destructiveness of nuclear weapons and that these rules are uniquely resilient. Instead, his account seems specific to the Cold War, with limited applicability to current and future dynamics.

For those seeking an analysis of social processes operating below the surface, this book may prove frustrating. Provided one comes with its limitations in mind, I recommend this book. Caplow provides an informed narrative of events and processes that shaped the Cold War and set the stage for the current global order. In a period which nuclear proliferation is a recurring issue, Caplow's narrative is timely. If the instructor provides a larger conceptual framework (and does not rely on this book for one), the accessibility of Caplow's account would be advantageous in undergraduate and graduate courses focused on war and peace.

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*The Best-Kept Secret: Women Corporate Lobbyists, Policy, & Power in the United States*, by **Denise Benoit**. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 160pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 0813540666.

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Each year in the United States, corporate-government relations officials—better known to

the rest of us as lobbyists—spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to influence and entertain politicians. In the public imagination, the image of the corporate lobbyist wooing Washington's elite is usually male. But, in her new book *The Best-Kept Secret*, Denise Benoit challenges this image, exploring the rise of female corporate lobbyists in the United States. Investigating female lobbyists in the traditionally male domain of tax policy, Benoit exposes how female lobbyists use gender in ways that ultimately further corporate interests.

Benoit's book is grounded in over a decade of research, including surveys and in-depth interviews. Using these data, Benoit is able to document a range of similarities and differences in the characteristics and activities of male and female lobbyists. For example, in chapter 2, Benoit reports that female lobbyists are more likely to interact with legislative staff than their male counterparts. Male lobbyists, on the other hand, more often attend social events with members of Congress.

The jewel of Benoit's study, however, is participant-observation research conducted at an annual retreat of the Tax Alliance (TA), a fictitiously named, but real-life organization of female lobbyists and government officials who work in the area of tax reform. A rare glimpse into elite behavior, the TA retreat provides a rich setting in which Benoit explores how relations between female politicians and lobbyists are gendered. Benoit finds that like male lobbyists, the TA women use gender to forge bonds. The nature of the activities may differ—men play golf together while women get facials—but the process is quite similar. Benoit also documents how the women at the retreat strive to show how they are just like men in their interest and willingness to lobby on the behalf of corporate interests. In short, female lobbyists act *as women* but they do not act *for women*.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of *The Best-Kept Secret* is not that the activities of female lobbyists are gendered, since we expect them to be, or that these gendered activities ultimately benefit corporate interests. It is that Benoit goes one step further to suggest that female lobbyists act in ways that undermine the interests of women as a group. According to Benoit, female corporate-government relations officials, while challenging the all-male power structure by their

presence, actually contribute to persisting gender inequalities.

Benoit develops her argument about the contradictory impact of female corporate lobbying in chapter 3. She redefines tax policy and social security as women's issues, explaining how women are disadvantaged under the current tax regime. And, Benoit shows how recent efforts at reform further undermine women's position, rather than ameliorate disparities. The rewards for selling women out are both material and social: corporate lobbying pays more, and those who lobby for corporate interests are perceived as more credible and are taken more seriously than those lobbying for women.

Although her argument is compelling, Benoit teeters on the edge of essentializing "women's interests." Much of her analysis of U.S. tax policy focuses on how particular groups of women—poor women, married working women, single mothers, and women of color—are disadvantaged under the current system. But these are not the groups represented among female lobbyists. As a group, the lobbyists Benoit studies are educated at elite schools, earn high salaries, and are overwhelmingly white. Of the female lobbyists who are married with families, Benoit also documents how many have the resources to hire outside help to assist with family and household tasks. To what extent, therefore, is a wealthy, married, white woman who lobbies for legislation that undermines the position of a poor, single mother of color, acting against *her own interests* as a woman?

Benoit certainly does not wholly ignore intersectionality. She acknowledges that in some cases, class or race interests may trump women's interests as a gender. Indeed, Benoit argues that because of their varied class locations, "white women have always been in contradictory positions with regard to joining coalitions inimical to their interests" (p. 75). But, throughout the volume, Benoit does not question the idea of "women's interests" as a unified whole. When women work against any group of women, Benoit considers them working against their own interests as women.

Benoit's analyses would benefit from more directly engaging research on intersectionality and literature on women's political representation. Although Benoit's research directly addresses some of the complexities of intersectionality, she does not use the concept or

explicitly draw on intersectionality research. And, Benoit ignores research by scholars of women in politics, who have long grappled with the challenges of defining women's issues and interests and the tensions between women's increasing presence in the political arena (descriptive representation) and ensuring that women's interests are served (substantive representation).

Overall, however, Benoit produces a fascinating and well-written book that should be of interest to a wide range of scholars. Those who study gender, power, politics, family, work, and stratification should all read this book. The book may also be of interest to a more general audience. In recent years, the public watched as the Jack Abramoff scandal unfolded, exposing corrupt lobbying practices and threatening the careers of Washington's powerful. Thus, Benoit's work may spark the interest of many who want greater insight into corporate-government relations. In my assessment, *The Best-Kept Secret* should not remain a secret for long.

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*Agents of the Welfare State: How Caseworkers Respond to Need in the United States, Germany, and Sweden*, by **Christopher J. Jewell**. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 246pp. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 1403984115.

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Most cross-national research on welfare-state regimes is conducted from a height of about 35,000 feet, metaphorically speaking, typically being concerned with the founding principles, programmatic features, and defining institutions of each "system." This body of work has made enduring contributions to the literature, not least the stylized concept of the "three worlds" of welfare capitalism. In large part, no doubt, for practical-cum-methodological reasons, there have been relatively few deeply "grounded" contributions to this comparative literature—bottom-up studies of "street-level bureaucracies," embedded within the intricate administrative specificities of their respective systems. What has been a largely separate tradition of locally embedded, bottom-up studies has instead provided vivid accounts of the front-line realities of the more "local" welfare