



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 38  
Issue 4 December

Article 16

---

2011

**Review of *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present*. Elisabeth Clemens & Doug Guthrie (Eds.). Reviewed by John G. McNutt.**

John G. McNutt  
University of Delaware

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

**Recommended Citation**

McNutt, John G. (2011) "Review of *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present*. Elisabeth Clemens & Doug Guthrie (Eds.). Reviewed by John G. McNutt.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 38 : Iss. 4 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol38/iss4/16>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

and sexual violence.

The editors, as well as some of the contributors, are open in their recognition of the social change limitations of the restorative justice movement at the present time. Fundamental cultural change might be an aspiration for some in this movement, based on a revolution of social values and relations starting within local communities, but the challenge for restorative justice proponents and, of course, for social workers is whether they will also play a role in social movements that challenge structures of inequality and oppression. With this understanding, the editors of this text have provided practitioners and scholars alike with a text that should be as accessible and valuable to the uninitiated as it is to those who have years of restorative justice practice experience.

*Robert McAndrews, School of Social Work  
Salem State University*

Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie , Eds. (2010). *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, \$55.00 (hardcover), \$19 (paperback).

The relationship between the nonprofit and governmental sectors is often a difficult one, with many competing views about the proper role of each sector. In the current political climate, this connection is becoming more and more contentious. These differences are reflected in the scholarly conversation in research about lobbying, advocacy, privatization and devolution. Much of this literature tends to oversimplify the nature of the relationship and concentrate on the problems involved in purchase of services-contracting to the exclusion of other important considerations. Nonprofits are important actors in the political systems, and this is sometimes ignored. Fortunately, Elisabeth Clemens and Doug Guthrie and their colleagues have produced a book that asks provocative and creative questions about this important set of issues, raising theoretical issues and reviewing different aspects of the government-nonprofit relationship.

*Politics and Partnerships* consists of eleven chapters organized in three parts with an introductory chapter that lays the groundwork for the rest of the book by providing an overview of the interaction between nonprofits and government. The first part of the book deals with government-nonprofit relationships in historical context. Jonathan Neem discusses the interaction between nonprofit organizations and the emerging United States prior to the Civil War. He stresses the importance of the nonprofit sector in developing our national identity. Mark Hendrickson looks at the role of nonprofit labor research organizations in shaping the development of industrial society and takes the discussion into new areas. Chapter four, by Elisabeth Clemens, is probably the strongest contribution in the book. It is a very well-developed, insightful and comprehensive review of the American experience in government-nonprofit relations around the time of the great depression and provides a fascinating introduction to a major juncture in the creation of social welfare.

The following three chapters look at nonprofits in a world of markets. Alice O'Conner examines the role of nonprofits in creating the conservative movement of the past few decades, showing how philanthropy contributed the growth of the movement and providing concepts that are useful for analyzing what is happening today. James Evans discusses the development of nonprofit think tanks in the area of science and innovation, arguing that rather than becoming corporate appendages, nonprofit research centers became "universities without students." He provides compelling statistical data to support his assertions. In the next chapter, Doug Guthrie scrutinizes corporate philanthropy, using a large data set and statistical models to illuminate corporate giving agendas. The findings from this process are intriguing.

The third part of the book, four chapters of case studies with larger implications, examine boundary spanning activity of nonprofits. Chapters by Nicole Marwell and Michael McQuarrie report on nonprofits engaged in local politics, demonstrating that nonprofits are potent political actors that are engaged in public-private partnerships. These excellent case studies provide strong discussions of contemporary theory.

Marwell's discussion of electoral politics is especially vivid and helpful. On the other hand, Omri Elisha's chapter about evangelical mega-churches was somewhat limited, given the role of religion in both nonprofits and politics today. Though well written and interesting, this analysis of the faith-based dimension of government-nonprofit relations could be more fully explored. The final chapter was a little gem. Alyshia Galvez demonstrates how nonprofit organizations change and adapt with the winds of political and cultural change. She presents a New York organization serving immigrants before and after 9-11 and explains the changes that were made essential by the new environment.

*Politics and Partnerships* has a great deal to offer those with an interest in nonprofit organizations, social change, social welfare policy and community organization. The chapters are well written and well developed, theoretically rich and insightful. The book holds together remarkably well for an edited volume. A lot of effort and careful editing obviously went into making these essays work together and the result is impressive.

An important strength of this book is the range of nonprofit organizations discussed. Some of the government-nonprofit literature appears to deal almost exclusively with large government agencies contracting with large health and social service nonprofits, ignoring the diversity and richness of the nonprofit sector and the importance of citizens in their governance. This book illustrates a number of settings that are often forgotten in mainstream literature. The scholarship is very strong and the passion that the authors feel for their topics is evident.

This is an excellent book and it is an important contribution to the literature. It offers a superb introduction to the interaction between government and the nonprofit sector. It is full of provocative ideas and interesting research. Anyone who deals with advocacy, public policy, nonprofit organizations and similar fields will want it in their library and will refer to it frequently.

*John G. McNutt, School of Public Policy and Administration,  
University of Delaware*