

acted and positioned themselves differently over time” (374). Consistent with the shift from civic republicanism to liberal pluralism, the Court went from portraying itself as a neutral arbiter among competing factions, to a body that would side with groups excluded from the democratic process.

Although Engel avoids an implausible argument that reduces the Court to a dependent variable, one can question his treatment of the significance of the justices’ efforts to defend their place in American politics. Engel acknowledges that public respect for the Court is grounded in a presumption of judicial neutrality that developed early in the nation’s history and which the Court has worked to reinforce. But he appears to believe that the result of the Court’s efforts has been largely to establish the constraints within which the politics of anti-judicial hostilities take place. Engel must explain fully why politicians alone regard the Court more as a group of individuals to be manipulated than a unique institution that deserves respect. In short, while defenders of a strong notion of judicial supremacy may overstate their case, Engel may underestimate the degree to which the Court has functioned as an independent variable.

Having said this, Stephen Engel has written a book that is essential reading for students and scholars of law, society, and politics. Any person who would explain the relationship between politicians and the Court must contend with the force of his provocative and well-researched argument.

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The Paradox of Relevance: Ethnography and Citizenship in the United States. By Carol J. Greenhouse. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 328 pp. \$59.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Jan Hoffman French, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Richmond

In *The Paradox of Relevance*, Carol Greenhouse offers an important analysis of the discursive politics of the 1990s. That decade, which marks the end of the Cold War, stands as a critical transition in federal policy from a New Deal to a neoliberal approach to the inequities in U.S. society that many Americans considered to have been resolved through judicial and legislative initiatives of earlier

decades. By the time the Soviet Union imploded at the end of the 1980s, the global shift toward neoliberal policies was already underway. Beginning with the presidential veto of the Civil Rights Act of 1990, the political pluralization of neoliberalism in the United States gained momentum and became the legislative status quo. In this book, Greenhouse shines a light on that process by successfully placing in dialogue U.S.-based ethnographic community studies, fiction, and sociolegal studies published (or republished) in the 1990s.

In the first half of the book, Greenhouse sets out the interlocking themes of the book and provides a guide for her close textual analysis of the exemplars in each genre that follow. The first chapter grapples with a debate that, although most explicitly addressed in anthropology, also roiled other academic fields—how best to respond to the elision of race and class that was deemed necessary by lawmakers as they put policies in place advocating personal over governmental responsibility for the wellbeing of people living in the United States. Often expressed as a question of relevance, with scholars divided between “Foucauldian theories of subjectivity . . . and Marxian theories of class,” Greenhouse explains that U.S. ethnographies of the 1990s bridged that divide in an effort to address “minority identities emergent from new local/translocal relations” (41). In her view, therefore, construing the debate as solely epistemological (i.e., how writers of ethnographies represent themselves in relation to those whose lives serve as the basis for their writing) “tended to conceal the extent to which they were political battles in the more usual sense of the term” (44). One solution to the false conundrum of relevance was the production of “artful experiments in U.S. ethnography” that reflected “a deep ambivalence over the power of law to create social change” (44).

The second chapter then argues that a “discourse of solutions” became an implicit template for writing about how the “new political mainstream made identity central to market-based social reform” while denying equality of access to the law (70). To further her argument, Greenhouse structures Chapter 3 around quotes from Congressional hearings surrounding key legislative acts on discrimination, welfare, and immigration reform. She creatively reads this legislative history as evidence of “neoliberalism’s mainstreaming” (105). With this history in mind, Chapter 4 then lays out a structure of analysis that Greenhouse will use to show how textual and political analyses are intertwined. By revealing how ethnographers shift registers in their use of first-person singular in the prologue, main text, and epilogue or envoi of their books, Greenhouse argues that the “narrative code” of ethnographic community studies of the 1990s is best read as allegorical, employing fictional

qualities suited for each “author’s sensibility as to the limits of actual political and legal institutions” (111).

The centerpiece of the book consists of two especially engaging chapters (5 and 6) that first focus on how texts are structured by a discourse of solutions, defined as “the promise and limits of aligning social description with the discourse of federal political debate” (142), and then explores the use of first-person testimony as exemplifying “federal subjectivity” as it “circulates across sociolegal studies, fiction, and ethnography” (176). Chapter 5 uses as its frame Ralph Ellison’s response (written 50 years earlier, but published in 1994) to Myrdal’s assessment of “the Negro problem,” in which Ellison uses his own fiction to deconstruct the then-prevalent disempowering view of African Americans. This provides Greenhouse with the opportunity to argue for “art as the critical alternative to the discourse of solutions” (147) and leads to her trenchant comparison of two urban minority communities thirty years apart—Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner*, reissued a few years after the appearance of Bourgois’s *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Both are caught in the unavoidable tension between two framings: one of individual identities interpreted by the people themselves, and the other of a discourse of solutions. Although the solutions proposed are distinct (empowerment for Liebow and stigma for Bourgois), “community remains ambivalent at the end of each of these works” (173), foreshadowing the book’s conclusion. Chapter 6 contrasts two sociolegal studies on legal consciousness and narrative with works of fiction by and about African Americans that depict the failure of law to provide templates for self-representation. Greenhouse concludes that no matter how much ethnography may borrow from fiction-based sensibilities, in ethnography more than in fiction, “the generality of condition reinforces a federal subjectivity attuned to the promise of citizenship” (197). In the two remaining chapters, we see direct borrowing among genres—fictional ethnographies and cross-pollination between fiction and social science renderings of the “market for citizenship.”

Greenhouse ends the book with her own envoi—a “sending off” for the reader—that allows us to define relevance and its paradoxes for ourselves. A masterful reflection on the relationship between agency and citizenship, this chapter conceptualizes “empirical citizenship” as about “belonging or not belonging in one’s own life,” and as such, reveals the centrality of citizenship “to living one’s chosen ties to others,” and to the ability of each person “to call on citizenship for more collective purposes” (265). Challenging the nature of individualism so dear to the heart of the neoliberal project, Greenhouse concludes that a “desire for membership” is actually “a form of agency not necessarily enabled by the law’s sheltering walls” (266). People live in today’s America in the “con-

tradictory gap” at the “center of citizenship,” seen as a medium of “social action and active social connection” (265). We live with the “fundamental ambiguity of federalism” (267), on which the United States was founded and which is still at the crux of political conflicts in the second decade of our new century.

Each chapter of *The Paradox of Relevance* is a jewel—multifaceted and carefully wrought. This book, which can be read as a bridge to twenty-first-century American legal and political practice, is an important addition to the literature on democracy and citizenship. It fills the need for a critical, cross-disciplinary analysis of a crucial decade in which the terms of engagement between people living in the United States and the government meant to serve them were changed in ways that are still being felt every day.

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Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore. By Jothie Rajah. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012. 352 pp. \$29.99 paper.

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Despite its status as one of the most dynamic global economies that is buttressed by a sizeable educated middle class, Singapore has remained a one-party-dominant authoritarian state governed by the People’s Action Party (PAP) since 1959. The city-state’s authoritarian longevity stands in stark contrast to other comparable developmental states in East Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, whose democratic trajectories have conformed to the modernization theory of political development. Not surprisingly, the city-state has become a popular destination for senior state functionaries from authoritarian regimes in China, Vietnam, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe eager to emulate the institutional and ideational components of the Singaporean political and economic model.

Instructively, many critical scholarly works that have interrogated the Singapore governance model have been written and published beyond its borders. In this mold, Jothie Rajah’s *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*