

Finally, Burgess details how notions of family—through an extensive discussion of *Leave it to Beaver*, *thirtysomething*, and *The Americans*—have followed similar patterns of traditional definition, contestation, and radical transformation that correspond with and explain how acceptance of same-sex marriage and family forms has changed with such speed as family itself is increasingly presented as a precarious social construct. Our popular culture—even when it does not cover LGBT rights issues or provide representation—fosters reflection on our common norms and opens the doors to political possibility.

Although Burgess uses “pop culture to better understand political transformation” (p. 21), she accomplishes much more. She brings insights from queer theory and critical race studies— notions of nonlinear time and of pop culture as both sources of challenge and tools of status quo reinforcement—to bear on key concepts of American political development, including political time and cyclical patterns of political change. She highlights how pop cultural products and the ideas they promote into the national discourse can be a source of agency, contestation, and friction and thereby serve as catalysts of change when much political development scholarship focuses on institutions that would otherwise foster stability and stasis.

Nevertheless, from the vantage point of the summer of 2023, amidst much backlash evident in state-level anti-transgender legislation and anti-drag panic, it is jarring to read Burgess’s assessment of the most recent Bond films: “It turns out that gay sexuality and gender aberration were not the threat they were once thought to be. Toxic masculinity lies at the root of the problem all along, threatening both the state and the family” (p. 85). In our political time, Republican presidential contenders such as Ron DeSantis consider transgender inclusion to be a national threat; he lays all the ills at the feet of drag performers entertaining at brunches or reading to children in local libraries. Or, consider the toxic masculinity on full display on January 6, 2021. Burgess does identify how “fear and a will to power have been particularly legible in US politics at least since the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016” and that this has been made manifest in a “failed attempt to restore him and his brand of straight white male masculinity to power” (p. 190). Yet, at times, her assessment of rights recognition seems more triumphalist than our most recent politics and Supreme Court decisions would support.

In reflecting on how privacy, masculinity, and family remain contested in ways that mostly support LGBT inclusion but are still vulnerable to backlash, Burgess concludes with a provocative meditation on the creative possibilities of imagined violence. Drawing on queer theorist Jack Halberstam’s notion of fantastical violence as a tool to imagine responses to sexist, homophobic, and racist acts in our contemporary politics, Burgess provides a hopeful understanding of political founding—critiquing *Hamilton* in the process—that may counter an

increasingly institutionalized and entrenched conservative backlash against individual autonomy (see the Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs* decision) or against LGBT inclusion in our political economy (see the Supreme Court’s 2023 *303 Creative* decision). In a captivating analysis of the Netflix series *Sense8*, Burgess ultimately contends that pop culture is a repository of emancipatory and aspirational political ideas and that life can indeed imitate inclusive art if we have the courage to fight for it.

Closed for Democracy: How Mass School Closure Undermines the Citizenship of Black Americans. By

Sally A. Nuamah. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

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Social and political scientists have long regarded the US public school system as the primary institution through which students and parents develop the civic skills and social values to become good, productive, and informed citizens. Schools also provide critical services to citizens, including meals, family planning resources, health care, and counseling. Yet, for more than two decades, policy makers across the United States have closed public schools at historic rates, which they contend improves school quality and student performance. How do mass public school closures affect the democratic participation of citizens most affected by these policies? Who do these affected citizens hold responsible for school closures in their neighborhoods? Do school closures have consequences for affected citizens’ belief in American democracy? These are the central questions that animate Sally A. Nuamah’s new book, *Closed for Democracy*.

With roughly 1,000 public schools shuttered annually, affecting more than 200,000 students, Nuamah argues that the increase in public-school closures across the United States over the past two decades reflects a “new era of mass school closure.” Unlike the first wave of closures that primarily affected rural schools during the early twentieth century, the current wave of closures is greater in scale, is principally centralized in urban areas, and disproportionately affects low-income and Black communities. Nuamah further argues that closures have proceeded despite strong objections from these communities, finding that even when citizens successfully fight to keep schools open, their engagement with the closure process ultimately undermines their faith and participation in American democracy.

The current era of mass public-school closure was precipitated by federal education reform policies like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Race to the Top in 2009. These laws established new academic standards,

imposing severe penalties on schools in which students failed to achieve those standards. Advocates and policy makers supporting school closure contend that population loss and underenrollment, poor academic performance, and cost savings accrued through school privatization and competition with charter schools justify these harsh policies. Yet, researchers have found no compelling evidence that closures lead to either cost savings or improvements in student performance (p. 8).

Closed for Democracy uses a mixed-methods approach to examine the effect that school closures have on the political beliefs and civic participation of citizens in two US cities: Chicago and Philadelphia. These two case studies were selected because of their large Black populations (32% in Chicago and 43% in Philadelphia): they reflect the racial residential segregation characteristic of much of urban America. In 2013, both cities experienced the highest number of school closures in their recent histories: 49 in Chicago and 23 in Philadelphia. Despite accounting for roughly 50% of total public-school enrollment in these cities, 80–90% of students attending these shuttered schools were Black (p. 16). Still, the education policy process differs between the two cities: Chicago's is governed by mayoral appointees, whereas Philadelphia's public schools are controlled by gubernatorial appointees.

Closed for Democracy principally relies on an original nationwide dataset developed by Nuamah that combines the locations of all public-school closures in the United States between 1994 and 2014 with data from surveys administered to citizens of Chicago and Philadelphia that focus on education and politics. Together, these data are used to illuminate the relationship between race, proximity to public-school closures, and political participation. Additionally, Nuamah draws on more than 100 interviews, including ethnographic observations between 2012 and 2017, to interrogate educational attitudes and provide deeper insights about the political consequences of school closures. Nuamah's methodology places the targets of school closure—Black low-income citizens, particularly women—at the center of analysis and examines how closure policies affect their political beliefs and actions.

Nuamah's study yields important insights regarding public attitudes toward school closures. In Chicago, for example, Blacks and Latinos expressed high levels of opposition to school closure compared to Whites, who strongly supported closure policies. Differences in racial attitudes toward school closure policies are rooted in communities' direct experiences with past closures. For Blacks and Latinos who experienced the brunt of school closures in Chicago, they framed closure policies as racist, whereas Whites justified them as fair responses to a real public-school crisis.

During the closure process, districts are required to hold community meetings to inform the public about proposed

school closures and allow citizens to comment on the proposals. Through her analysis of community meetings in Chicago and Philadelphia, Nuamah reveals how citizens affected by school closures translated their negative beliefs about these policies into blame or approval of school officials and political leaders. In Chicago, she finds that Black citizens affected by closures and who attended community meetings were the most likely group to blame then-Mayor Rahm Emmanuel—not Chicago's school board—for the wave of closures that swept the city in 2013.

Although targets of school closure policy tend to be low income and less educated and therefore likely lack "formal political knowledge," they gained understanding about the policy process and political power through their participation in community meetings. Nuamah describes this "political learning experience" in Philadelphia, where the policy context and process differed from Chicago's. Given that authority over Philadelphia's public school system was transferred to the governor's office after a state takeover in 2001, affected citizens overwhelmingly blamed Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett instead of Mayor Michael Nutter.

This book not only demonstrates which officials were blamed for school closures but importantly also highlights how citizens translated that blame into formal political action. Using survey data, the author shows how the process of school closure stimulated the political participation of affected Blacks, at least in the short term. For instance, in Chicago, Blacks living in closure areas were highly unlikely to attend political meetings before the announcement of school closures during the 2013–14 school year. However, after 2014, these citizens became the most likely group to attend political meetings, which Nuamah uses as a measure of political participation.

In the long run, however, the policy process fostered deep distrust, fatigue, and disillusionment among citizens who participated in the closure process. Even when they successfully mobilized to keep schools open, their experience with an unfair policy process led to reduced interest in future political participation. Nuamah refers to this lack of interest in future participation as "collective participatory debt—a type of mobilization fatigue that transpires when citizens who are engaged in the policy process are met with a lack of democratic transparency and responsiveness, despite high levels of repeated participation" (p. 110).

Policy feedback scholars will find *Closed for Democracy* useful because the book demonstrates how racialized education policies have broader import for both non-electoral and electoral participation, widening the scope of political outcomes of interest beyond the voting booth. Scholars of racial and ethnic politics (REP) and urban studies, too, will find significant value in Nuamah's book. For example, by showing how Black "citizens use relevant and recent policy experiences to form opinions"

(p. 40) about school closures, Nuamah's work expands theories of group consciousness and linked fate, which explain Black political attitudes solely as a function of the historical experiences of the racial group. Overall, Nuamah's book is sure to spark debate among REP scholars and stimulate broader discussions regarding the contemporary state of Black citizenship.

The Gun Dilemma: How History Is Against Expanded Gun Rights. By Robert J. Spitzer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 200p. \$32.99 cloth.

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Scholars of gun policy have long grappled with paradoxes. These include the lack of a strong national gun control movement, despite strong public support for regulating firearms (Kristin Goss, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America*, 2006), and the tendency for gun policy organizations to emphasize forms of gun violence such as mass shootings that account for only a small fraction of annual gun fatalities (Melissa K. Merry, *Warped Narratives: Distortion in the Framing of Gun Policy*, 2020). In *The Gun Dilemma*, Robert J. Spitzer draws our attention to another puzzle: the widening gap between public support for existing and proposed gun regulations and the conservative counterreaction to gun laws within the federal courts. This gap between opinion and policy is well established (Steven V. Miller, "What Americans Think about Gun Control: Evidence from the General Social Survey, 1972–2016," *Social Science Quarterly* 100 [1], 2019), and the nuances of gun policy attitudes have been extensively studied (see Mark R. Joslyn, *The Gun Gap: The Influence of Gun Ownership on Political Behavior and Attitudes*, 2020). Avoiding these well-worn paths, Spitzer focuses instead on recent judicial efforts to upend, or "throw into gear-grinding reverse" (p. 6), existing gun regulations.

He starts in chapter 1 by offering the reader a brief but useful review of how we arrived at the "gun policy fork in the road," highlighting originalism, the Federalist Society, and the conservative legal movement's successful, decades-long campaign to fill judicial ranks with its adherents. After resoundingly rejecting originalism as nonsensical, impractical, and disingenuous—hiding political goals behind a cloak of "neutrality"—Spitzer takes on the originalist challenge by using history as a guide to navigating modern gun policy and politics. At a moment when federal courts are poised to expand gun rights, Spitzer argues, "It is essential that we get our gun past right" (p. 22).

The rest of the book examines a series of emergent gun policy controversies, using a two-part methodology. First, Spitzer systematically reviews federal and state gun laws to

trace how gun policy problems were understood and regulated throughout our nation's history. Second, recognizing that history matters but should not be the sole justification for gun policy decisions, Spitzer explores the contemporary context, drawing from the extensive literature on the relationship between gun regulations (or lack thereof) and their impact on society.

The cases Spitzer highlights—the debates over assault weapons and large-capacity magazines (chapter 2), gun silencers (chapter 3), public arms carrying (chapter 4), and Second Amendment sanctuary resolutions (chapter 5)—touch on issues that have previously received little scholarly attention. Each case also represents an "outer edge" of the contemporary policy debate, a region where gun rights advocates seek to define Second Amendment rights as existing "whenever a human hand comes in contact with a gun—or even a gun accessory" (p. 23).

Spitzer's thorough analysis reveals that "while gun ownership is as old as the country, so are gun laws" (p. 26). More specifically, as technological changes, such as the invention of the silencer in the early 1900s, created new threats to public safety—for example, the use of silencers to conceal crimes—the federal government and states imposed new restrictions. This finding refutes a widely held belief, perpetuated by gun rights activists and apparent in some federal judicial opinions, that gun regulations are a product of the modern era. Further, as Spitzer notes, some contemporary arguments in favor of expanding gun rights are based on false information and deliberately misleading accounts.

In the case of silencers, for instance, gun rights advocates have falsely claimed that silencers were *not* associated with crime when Congress enacted the 1934 National Firearms Act. However, the dangers posed by silencers were covered in the national media and reflected in the widespread references to the term "Maxim silencer" in popular culture (p. 61). The notion that silencers are essential for hearing protection—one of the most common arguments in circulation today—represents a deceptive reframing of the issue that not only fails to acknowledge the earlier debate but also makes little sense (given that ear plugs or earmuffs offer inexpensive yet effective hearing protection; p. 65).

By engaging in this deep historical dive, Spitzer offers a more nuanced context for understanding the present moment of political polarization. Although the contemporary debate is framed in zero-sum terms between gun rights and gun control, Spitzer keenly points out that this portrayal is inaccurate—that gun rights and gun laws have long coexisted. He also draws out an underappreciated and frightening facet of the policy debate: the prominent role of blatant fallacies in some conservative judicial opinions. For instance, in striking down California's 10-round magazine limit in *Duncan v. Becerra* (2019), federal district court judge Robert Benitez falsely