



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): David B. Mock

Reviewed work(s):

Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking by Frank R. Baumgartner

Source: *The Public Historian*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer, 1990), pp. 155-156

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3378216>

Accessed: 17/09/2008 19:12

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucal>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Public Historian*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

implications. If Mumford would agree to the label at all, it would be on the simplest of terms: a desire to use historical events and knowledge to reach a diverse readership and to cast instructive light on contemporary events. His genius and prodigious output allowed him to be an independent thinker free of the concerns of professional status that most of us must confront daily. Nevertheless, his unique life contains some down-to-earth lessons for today's public historians. Don't simply seek a niche among professional historians. Define your work more broadly—with the public, not the academy, in mind.

DANIEL SCHAFFER

Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee

Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking by FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989; xiv + 290 pp., tables, figures, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index; clothbound, \$34.95.

In *Conflict and Rhetoric in French Policymaking*, Frank Baumgartner, a political scientist, examines thirty cases of French educational policy that were debated from 1983 to 1984. His study attempts to endorse earlier studies of heresthetics, "the efforts of strategic policymakers to redefine a situation to their advantage" (p. 15). Baumgartner interviewed thirty-two officials in the French Ministry of National Education and asked each official to identify the single case that best represented his or her work. Each official then identified one person to provide additional information about the development and nature of the issue. Subsequent interviews, questionnaires, and a review of relevant articles published in *Le Monde* are used in this study.

Baumgartner finds that those individuals whose policies are successfully adopted attempted to restrict the number of participants in the policy process. On the other hand, those whose policies have failed attempt to reverse this situation by expanding the number of persons interested in a given policy. The expansion or contraction of the number of participants was accomplished in various ways. Policymakers may, for example, have portrayed an issue in highly technical, complex terms whenever they wished to control the issue and restrict the number of policymakers. Bureaucrats, therefore, usually attempted to contract issues, as this allowed them to pose as policy experts and to maintain control over policy. Decisionmakers who were unsuccessful in achieving their policy goals, however, redefined the issue in terms that would appeal to a broader number of potential allies. Baumgartner also suggests that intense conflict and jurisdictions that overlap between ministries often resulted in increased participation and the intervention of senior government officials.

Increased conflict also encouraged the interest of the press, which, understandably, expanded public awareness and the number of participants. The author notes that the more actors there are the less impact policy specialists, especially senior civil servants, have on shaping a given policy. Baumgartner's study shows that in twenty of the thirty cases studied, an attempt was made to redefine an issue and appeal to a wider policy community. Of these, only half were successfully expanded.

In one chapter Baumgartner expands his study beyond French educational policy by generalizing about nuclear power policy in France and the United States and educational policy in the United States. In doing so the author expectedly suggests that his findings will apply to other policy areas as well.

Historians, including public historians, will be largely dissatisfied with Baumgartner's study. First, he makes no effort to examine the historical context surrounding the development of French educational policy. In addition, although the author claims to have examined "extensive documentary evidence" (p. 6) in his study, there is no indication that this occurred. Baumgartner's "complete content analysis" (p. 6) of educational articles published in *Le Monde* is apparently limited to measuring the number of "column centimeters" of coverage on the issues. While this measure is perhaps indicative of the interest of the French press, it is far removed from a rigorous content analysis. Moreover, Baumgartner gives no explanation of the background of the issues that are being investigated. Neither does the author offer a significant discussion of the thirty cases under review. Although the cases are briefly discussed in an appendix, few of them gain more than passing reference in the text. The three cases he describes that involved policy conflict at the highest level in France, medical school reform, university reform, and the use of public funds to support private schools, were discussed briefly, but far less than warranted. In concentrating on the expansion and contraction of the number of participants, the author fails to discuss the nature of the policies themselves or the impact that policy debates have had on the number of participants. Finally, there seems to be an inherent weakness in a study where the central actors, the thirty-two French education officials, are asked to select the issues to be examined and then to nominate the individuals to be interviewed.

Although this book offers some interesting views of the role of conflict and rhetoric in expanding the policymaking process, it falls far short of providing a comprehensive understanding of contemporary French educational policy. This study could have been significantly strengthened if the author had taken a more historical approach in examining the context of the development and evolution of policy and the impact of the mass media upon heresthetics. The author's promised careful examination of relevant documentation and content analysis, typical contributions of public historians, would have significantly strengthened this work. Without this research, however, Baumgartner's work is of limited usefulness.

DAVID B. MOCK

Edison Community College
Fort Myers, Florida