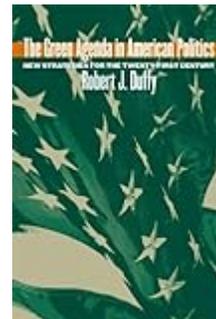




Robert J. Duffy. *The Green Agenda on American Politics: New Strategies for the Twenty-First Century.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. ix + 260 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1277-2; \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7006-1278-9.



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Environmentalism Adapted

“My aim,” author Robert J. Duffy explains at the outset of this book, “is to provide an overview of environmental group activity in American politics” (p. 4). This is an ambitious goal for a relatively short text but one that Duffy completes admirably. He does not delve into significant detail about the specific tactics of every individual organization but takes a broader perspective, documenting the manner in which the environmental lobby as a whole adapted to changing circumstances. Today one might argue that American environmentalism has failed and is on the defense, reeling from defeat after defeat. For the most part Duffy disagrees. While acknowledging that the results of new tactics and strategies remain in doubt, Duffy leaves the reader who is concerned about the environment more hopeful than pessimistic.

To the extent that environmental advocacy has suffered, Duffy argues, the changing nature of interest group lobbying in general is as much to blame as the environmental organizations themselves. Duffy devotes one long chapter to environmental politics from the 1960s to the early 1990s, an era when many national organizations became established actors in Washington’s politi-

cal scene, enjoying ongoing relationships with key policymakers. As bipartisanship faded, deficits grew, and campaign laws changed, however, environmental groups could not match the fund-raising prowess and lobbying efforts of their opponents. They struggled in balancing the competing goals of being effective players in Washington with the idealism necessary to motivate their funding base. They had grown sophisticated but recognized their limits.

With policymaking venues more open, crowded, and conflictual, environmental groups altered their electoral and lobbying strategies. Just as with other interest groups in the new reality, environmental organizations devoted unprecedented resources and energy to framing issues and perceptions of candidates. Issue definition was not new, Duffy points out, but the emphasis upon it was. Public education campaigns reached much larger audiences in an effort to force environmental issues onto the political and electoral agenda. Environmental organizations, Duffy writes, “now lobby everyone—their own members, other interest groups, the general public, and the media—instead of just the usual suspects in the legis-

lature, the executive branch, and in the courts” (p. 14).

Grassroots efforts now included a degree of sophistication with the Internet recruiting new members, selling new products, and raising funds. The groups more professionally managed their messages, field-testing ideas and marketing them accordingly. They stressed local angles with more emotional appeals and visual images. For the first time, they formed strong coalitions and maintained a constant communication that was unimaginable before. “Forming coalitions is important,” Duffy concludes, “because it allows groups to take advantage of the different skills of coalition parties” (p. 113). The groups launched strong media attacks against unfriendly policymakers, further blurring the distinction between politics and policy. The use of foundations increased and the new level of sophistication spread to organizations at the state and local level.

Duffy does not explore the role of litigation, acknowledging it as an important part of group activity but beyond the scope of a single text. Likewise, he avoids discussion of the more confrontational strategies of the smaller, more radical groups, essentially dismissing them as ineffectual. These omissions aside, the writing is clear, although there is a degree of redundancy, and the argument is well supported. Overall, this is a solid book, important for political science or environmental policy classes but less so for environmental history. In the end, Duffy acknowledges that environmental organizations will never match the fundraising of their opponents and, with regards to the present George W. Bush administration at least, must “rededicate themselves to playing defense in an overtly hostile political environment” (p. 209). Nevertheless, if the environmental community continues with their new tactics and intensity, there is hope for the twenty-first century.

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