



Ambition in America: Political Power and the Collapse of Citizenship

Jeffrey A. Becker

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Most Americans admire the determination and drive of artists, athletes, and CEOs, but they seem to despise similar ambition in their elected officials. The structure of political representation and the separation of powers detailed in the United States Constitution were intended to restrain self-interested ambition. Because not all citizens have a desire to rule, republican democracies must choose leaders from pools of ambitious candidates while trying to prevent those same people from exploiting public power to dominate the less ambitious.

Ambition in America: Political Power and the Collapse of Citizenship is an engaging examination of this rarely studied yet significant phenomenon. Author Jeffrey A. Becker explores how American political institutions have sought to guide, inspire, and constrain citizens' ambitions to power. Detailing the Puritans' government by "moral community," the Founders' attempts to curtail ambition, the influence of Jacksonian populism, and twentieth-century party politics, Becker presents an unfolding drama that culminates in a spirited discussion of the deficiencies in the current political system. This groundbreaking work reassesses the value and role of ambition in politics in order to identify the beliefs and practices that threaten self-government, as well as those that can strengthen democratic politics.

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