Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

5. Assess how major policy responsibilities vary among different state and local governments, to include economics, immigration, and civil liberties.
   5.1 Explain the evolution of segregation and desegregation in American history, including the roles of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas.
   5.2 Explain the influence of minorities on the political process and the impact of affirmative action.

Reading Assignment

Chapter 13: Community Power, Land use, and the Environment

Chapter 15: Politics and Civil Rights

In order to access the resource below, you must first log into the myCSU Student Portal and access the Academic Search Complete database within the CSU Online Library.


Unit Lesson

Why does one town grow and another die? What makes you want to live here and not there? Every state within the United States has at least one, and usually more than one, ghost town. Ghost towns are those towns that at one time had businesses and growing populations along with a post office. If you look at these towns now, there might be a building or two falling down along with the outlines of roads once traveled by busy people.

Locations also affect politics. Dye and MacManus (2015) state, “All local governments operate within specific geographical boundaries. How land is used within those boundaries greatly affects the economic and personal well-being of the citizens who live there and the finances and politics of the local governments that serve them” (p. 378). Various studies have been done showing the impacts of the elite and pluralist models of community power. In the elite model, a few individuals with little input from the people hold power. On the other hand, the pluralist model is one in which different leaders hold power in different areas.

The goal of the community elite is that of growth. The elite model operates under the assumption that everyone will benefit from the economic growth, “Not only must a community compete for new investments, but it must also endeavor to prevent relocation of investments it already has” (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 380). These same “elites” will often turn into “no-growthers” or NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) once they have their own home and job that does not rely on new growth. Why do you think this happens?

There are many ways to restrict growth, but once it is done, there are consequences. Inflation in the prices of housing is one consequence that leads to population limitation due to the inability to pay the higher prices. Dye and MacManus (2015) also point out that this can increase the wealth gap between those
who can and cannot afford houses in that area. This will limit who is able to relocate into this area and/or remain living there.

These no-growth and NIMBY movements can also affect city planning. All cities have planners. For the most part, these planners are individuals who have gone to college and majored in this area. They help communities plan how they are going to grow responsibly. They give recommendations to city councils on how the land should be zoned and used, as well as where streets and other facilities should be located. In the end, it is the responsibility of the city or town to approve or disapprove these plans (Dye & MacManus, 2015). To get around land use regulations, many areas have begun using various techniques. These have included planned urban development, exaction and impact fees, and developer agreements.

In order to build highways, streets, and public buildings, as well as other public facilities, “eminent domain” is sometimes used when the owners of the land do not wish to give it up. In order to use eminent domain “A city or state must go to court and show that the land is needed for a legitimate public purpose; the court will then establish a fair price based on testimony from the owner, the city or state, and impartial appraisers” (Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 389). In recent years, some towns have tried to use eminent domain to take land and give it over to private businesses that will redevelop it and make a profit. While the U.S. Supreme Court said that this was practice was allowable, citizens became irate and many states changed their constitutions to make it illegal.

Our country has a great history of revolting against taxes, but in order to keep the government running, taxes must be paid. While the federal government gets most of its money from the income tax, states know that their citizens will not stand for more money to be taken from them in that way and look instead to the general sales tax to generate income. That leaves local communities to tax your property for the majority of their income. Both the federal government and the state governments tax gasoline (this money is earmarked to be used on roads).

Many local governments, as well as some states and even the federal government, have shown themselves to be fiscally irresponsible. While the U.S. Constitution does not mandate a balanced budget, many state constitutions and community charters do mandate this. “Fiscal stress refers to a financial condition so unfavorable as to impair borrowing ability, require reduction of services, pose a threat to public health and safety, and thus diminish the quality and satisfaction of life” (Dye & MacManus, 2012, p. 480). When fiscal stress happens, there are many avenues that can be taken in the hopes of averting bankruptcy for a state or local community and a takeover by the federal government. Most of these include reducing services, laying off of workers, and freezing spending.

Segregation was used in many parts of the United States until the Supreme Court forced desegregation with its landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954. This case said that separate was not equal and must desist. Since this case, minorities and women have made great strides in education as well as the workplace. Just because the courts stepped in does not mean that there was not going to be a long and hard battle fought for these groups to gain equality. One tool used by the Supreme Court is that of “affirmative action.”

Affirmative action consists of different government programs that are intended to assist minority groups and women in the workplace as well as other venues. These programs can grant preferential treatment to those who struggled to be treated equally. However, affirmative action is not without its controversy. In the attempt to hash out affirmative action, many cases have made their way to the Supreme Court to include: Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978), United Steelworkers of America v. Weber (1979), United States v. Paradise (1987), Firefighters Local Union v. Stotts (1984), Richmond v. Cressen (1989) and Gratz v. Bollinger (2003). Within these and even more recent cases, such as Fisher v. University of Texas, we see eligible whites being denied entrance to a school or program or even promotion within a job due to affirmative action programs that will take or promote unqualified or less qualified candidates to meet a quota. The Supreme Court has in recent years been moving away from backing affirmative action as aggressively as they once did.

This is an ongoing fight with many more cases that do not even make it all the way to the Supreme Court. In recent years, reverse discrimination has become its own issue as well. One way that some states have come up with to remove affirmative action is to create constitutional amendments restricting affirmative action. For example, Proposition 209, approved in 1996, bans “granting preferential treatment to, any
individual or group in the operation of the State’s system of public employment, public education or public contracting” (as cited in Dye & MacManus, 2015, p. 439).

States and communities have many balls that they must juggle to keep things running. They must have money to take care of business. They must create a balance of responsible growth so that their communities can continue to be viable and not become ghost towns that one day have nothing but a few boards and outlines of roads to show to the world. In creating jobs, federal, state, and local governments must make sure that there is a balance in the racial makeup of its workers so that it reflects the community it cares for, as well as the millions of other issues that come up each and every day from abortion issues to the privacy rights of citizens and the legality of same-sex marriage. It is a never-ending juggle, and those in charge just hope that the balls do not hit them in the head if they fall.

Reference


Suggested Reading

If you would like to learn more information about how politics affects taxes, please read the following chapter of your course textbook:

Chapter 14:
The Politics of Taxation and Finance

If you would like additional information regarding the textbook readings, consider reviewing the below Chapter Presentations:

- Click here to access the Chapter 13 PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Chapter: 13: Community Power, Land use, and the Environment.” Click here for the PDF version.
- Click here to access the Chapter 14 PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Chapter: 14: The Politics of Taxation and Finance.” Click here for the PDF version.
- Click here to access the Chapter 15 PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Chapter 15: Politics and Civil Rights.” Click here for the PDF version.

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

To learn more about the politics of taxation, take a look at the IRS web page listed below:


This site has activities, tutorials, simulations, and assessments on the “why” and “how” questions in regard to taxes at the federal, state, and local levels. Review the different resources available to gain a better understanding of how politics impacts taxation.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.