Preface

This anthology brings together historical essays about the discipline of political science in the United States. The contributors include prominent political scientists from the past, current leaders of the discipline, and contemporary disciplinary historians. Written at different times and for different purposes, the essays collectively present a panorama of views about the discipline from the late nineteenth century to the present. Taken together, they reveal the methodological, theoretical, and political diversity that has amply characterized political science over the course of its history. The essays also suggest that the identity of the discipline has been and continues to be constituted not by agreements over fundamental principles but by long-standing debates over the meaning of politics, the methods of science, the theories of behavioralism or the state, and the responsibilities of public professionals and civic educators. Political science is, as it were, the history of its debates, and the state of the discipline at any one time is the state of its debates, in light of their history.

Several edited volumes on “the state of the discipline” have been published in recent years, providing more or less detailed accounts of the theories and methods that presently dominate the various subfields of political science. These have been of considerable interest and assistance to political scientists both for the purpose of teaching and reflection. This anthology shares some common concerns with these other volumes. However, it takes a decidedly more historical perspective on the discipline as a whole, with somewhat special emphasis on the subfields of American politics and political theory. There are twenty-three essays from or about four different periods in the development of the discipline. Thus the present anthology not only includes earlier and contemporary essays, but each is in part about the history of political science. Whatever their format and ostensible end—a public lecture inaugurating a chair of political science, a presidential address to the American Political Science Association, a critical review of methodological tendencies, a plea for a new research agenda, or an interpretative recovery of previously held theories—these essays reveal the necessity and inevitability of historical interpretation and reinterpretation. This is obvious not only when political scientists try to remember their discipline’s past but also when they try to understand its present and chart its future.
We are indebted to several colleagues and friends for guidance and criticism in helping us to complete this volume. John Gunnell, David Easton, Terence Ball, and Theodore Lowi were particularly generous in their various efforts on our behalf. Conversations with Mary Dietz, John Dryzek, Edwin Fogelman, and Stephen Leonard contributed to the volume’s present shape, whether they were fully aware of it or not. Colin Day, director of The University of Michigan Press, was helpful and encouraging at every turn. We would also like to thank Julia Smedley for helpful historical research and keen editorial sleuthing. The American Political Science Association, through the kind offices of Jean Walen, was very expeditious in contacting the authors of essays originally published in the American Political Science Review, as well as extremely generous in waiving its permission fees. Similar generosity was extended to us by the Johns Hopkins University Press, the University of Texas Press, and Sage Publications. We thank them and all individual authors for reducing the fiscal burdens of this project.

Three essays were written expressly for inclusion in this volume, and thanks (by one or both editors) are due to their authors—Terence Ball, Raymond Seidelman, and Helene Silverberg. Essays by Francis Lieber, John W. Burgess, Woodrow Wilson, W. W. Willoughby, and Charles A. Beard are now part of the public domain. We are grateful to the presses—and the authors where applicable—for permission to reprint the remaining essays in a slightly edited form. Essays were edited, where necessary, with an eye on the volume’s overall length. Acknowledgments are provided at the foot of each essay’s opening page.

Finally, each of the editors would like to thank the other for the friendly collaboration.