I wonder how many authors should admit that, "this is not the book I set out to write." Certainly such is the case here. When, a few years ago, after almost a decade of laboring in the increasingly muddied fields of mass belief systems research, I decided to take up the study of another facet of American political behavior, I initially wanted to do a more general analysis of changes in ordinary citizens’ basic political orientations since the halcyon days of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Two factors dissuaded me from that effort. The first was the appearance of several studies with a similar thrust: Paul Abramson’s *Political Attitudes in America* (1983), David Hill and Norman Luttbeg’s *Trends in American Electoral Behavior* (1983), and especially Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider’s *The Confidence Gap* (1983). Not only did these books plow some of the same ground I had wanted to till, they had probably borne a richer harvest than the work I had in mind.

The second factor was more personal. At about the same time I was doing background work for the original work, a young lady who was in her late teens uttered two wonderful lines. First, she admitted she had no idea of what Skylab was. It was about to fall out of the sky. Later, she asked: “Who’s Ted Kennedy, anyway?” At the time the senior senator from Massachusetts was a possible contender for his party’s nomination to the highest elective office in the land.

The young lady in question was then a very bright, outgoing college undergraduate who was doing well in her classes. (She has since graduated and gone on to a professional career.) Her remarks started me to thinking about why some people pay more, and some less, and a few, none at all, attention to government and public affairs.
From that beginning, the present effort has evolved. I wonder if she remembers how she indirectly caused me finally to write a book.

It is said that scholarship is a lonely enterprise, and work on this book has been no exception. Nonetheless, I find that in the process I have acquired a substantial number of debts, acknowledgement of which cannot begin to repay. To the following, then, my heartfelt thanks. Roger Stuebing, of the University of Cincinnati’s Institute for Policy Research. He gave much counsel on statistical analysis techniques which I have haltingly tried to follow. Professor Seymour Martin Lipset of Stanford University. He critiqued an article which became the basis of this work. At the time I did not accept all his suggestions, but later I came to see he was probably right. Samuel Long, editor of *Micropolitics*, who published that paper, and encouraged me to expand it. Professor Abraham H. Miller, my colleague in the Political Science Department at the University of Cincinnati. He stepped in at a critical moment with very good advice. Ms. Heike Fenton, publisher of Transnational Publishers, Inc. She encouraged me to set a deadline which, lo and behold, I beat, . . . barely. Ms. Donna Scheeler, assistant editor at Transnational, who gave encouragement.

Finally, I come to the one person without whom I literally could not have done this book: my wife, Professor Linda L. M. Bennett of Wittenberg University’s Political Science Department. “She who must be obeyed!” She is at once my best friend, confidant, coauthor, and . . . well, . . . you know. Without her sometimes gentle, sometimes not so gentle, prodding, I could not have done it. Thanks, “Emma.”

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