The symbolic importance of Barack Obama’s election is without question. However, beyond symbolism, does the election of African-American politicians matter? Christian R. Grose argues that it does and presents a unified theory of representation. Electing African-American legislators yields more federal dollars and congressional attention directed toward African-American voters. However, race and affirmative action gerrymandering have no impact on public policy passed in Congress. Grose is the first to examine a natural experiment and exceptional moment in history in which black legislators – especially in the U.S. South – represented districts with a majority of white constituents. This is the first systematic examination of the effect of a legislator’s race above and beyond the effect of constituency racial characteristics. Grose offers policy prescriptions, including the suggestion that voting rights advocates, the courts, and redistricters draw “black-decisive districts,” electorally competitive districts that are likely to elect African Americans.

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To Robert and Jacqueline Grose
Congress in Black and White

Race and Representation in Washington and at Home

CHRISTIAN R. GROSE
University of Southern California
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Acknowledgments

This book is about the role of race in an American political institution. Scholars of American political institutions often ignore race, while scholars of race and ethnicity infrequently tread into the realm of political institutions. While these scholarly streams of research may not always cross, many of those working within both traditions have been instrumental to this book.

Many read this manuscript or earlier portions of it, gave feedback informally or formally as conference discussants, suggested avenues for new inquiry as I revised, provided support and encouragement as I wrote and finished the manuscript, or provided assistance in some other way. I thank Ted Anagnoson, Stephen Ansolabehere, David Becker, Ken Bickers, Glen Browder, John Clark, Kevin Clarke, Christopher Edley, Jeremiah Garretson, Stephen Gent, Suzanne Globetti, Lani Guinier, Ana Henderson, Bill Hixon, Jason Husser, Cindy Kam, Poonam Kumar, Frances Lee, David Lublin, Michaela Mattes, Seth McKee, Michael Minta, Larry Rothenberg, Mitch Sanders, Curt Signorino, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, Dena Skran, Katherine Tate, Neal Tate, Shawn Treier, Jennifer Vagle, Kenny Whitby, and Sonya Winton. I would also like to thank those who provided feedback at talks that I gave at the University of Wisconsin Law School and the Carl Albert Center at the University of Oklahoma, and at conferences sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Rochester.

There are a few people that deserve more specific mention for their help and assistance. From idea to manuscript, and then to revisions and completion, I have them to thank in particular. Mentors and colleagues I first met in graduate school provided me with guidance, criticism, support,
xii

Acknowledgments

and advice beyond what is normally expected. Harold Stanley introduced me to the fields of voting rights and southern politics. He also provided many incisive comments on this book, helping me craft it into a more precise piece of social science research. Dick Niemi also deserves substantial credit for improvements to this book. His suggestions helped tighten up the manuscript, making it more readable and accessible. Both Harold and Dick have assisted me in many ways on this book and otherwise, helping shape my judgment professionally and personally. Dick Fenno also read earlier versions of the book, assisting particularly in helping me conceptualize the research design for Chapters 4 and 5. While in graduate school, I always enjoyed my conversations with Dick about his research travels, and these conversations have contributed greatly to this book.

In addition, three colleagues and friends I met at Rochester provided useful feedback and comments and provided important encouragement as I worked on the book. Gail McElroy provided cutting criticisms and suggestions from a comparativist’s perspective, and the book is much stronger as a result of my discussions with her. Similarly, Stephen Gent, an international relations scholar, gave suggestions that helped tighten up the theoretical foundations of the book and helped me determine how to write the book in a way that would be interesting to a wider audience. Antoine Yoshinaka, a frequent co-author of mine, read most chapters of this book in multiple draft stages. His insights and interests in American politics, legislatures, and representation have shaped this work and my research as a whole.

I thank the political science departments where I have been employed for providing research time and resources for the completion of this book: Lawrence University, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Southern California. The book began in earnest at Vanderbilt, and I particularly thank my American politics colleagues that I met while there. John Geer and David Lewis encouraged me to aim high when writing and revising this book manuscript, and I benefited from their advice and guidance. Stefanie Lindquist has been a proponent of my work on voting rights since I met her at a conference at the University of Georgia, and she always encouraged me in this research area. Marc Hetherington read portions of the manuscript, and his advice to take the time to write the book well was a good one. Marc was also a mentor for other career goals as I worked on this manuscript, and I am lucky to have been the recipient of his sage advice. Pam Corley deserves extensive thanks for providing feedback on this work, for offering suggestions on how to get the book accepted for publication, and for being a good friend as we learned the
ropes of being junior faculty together. Carol Swain was always a proponent of this book, and I thank her for reading the manuscript extensively and giving me feedback. As she is the author of the seminal work in this area of research, I was lucky to have her as a colleague. A presentation she asked me to give to her law school class was particularly useful toward reshaping some of the arguments in the book. Bruce Oppenheimer is perhaps as familiar with this book as I am, having read a much older version of it and subsequent drafts. Bruce was a great colleague while I wrote this book, always encouraging me to do the best that I could with the material. Not only did Bruce read this book and provide feedback, but he read every working paper I ever asked him to – and he did so quickly. His mentorship combined with his keen expertise in legislative studies strengthened this book and my professional career.

My colleagues at the University of Southern California deserve thanks for their efforts as I worked on the final revisions to the book. A talk I gave to the department yielded incisive and difficult questions that caused me to better shape the book’s argument. In particular, comments raised by my colleagues at USC led me to better specify the policy prescriptions that I offer in Chapter 7. Especially those scholars of race and politics, American politics, and political institutions at USC (Jeb Barnes, Tony Bertelli, Ann Crigler, Howard Gillman, Ange-Marie Hancock, Jane Junn, Mat McCubbins, Ricardo Ramirez, Jeff Sellers, Nick Weller, Janelle Wong, and others) have been extremely welcoming and supportive of this book or welcoming to me in general. Tony Bertelli, in particular, both before my arrival at USC and once I arrived, encouraged me to transition this project from draft manuscript to book. Also in Los Angeles, I want to thank the hotel lounge at Casa del Mar in Santa Monica for allowing me to sit for hours drinking coffee while making the final revisions.

The editors and staff at Cambridge University Press deserve thanks. It has been wonderful – and downright easy – to work with Lew Bateman and Anne Lovering Rounds. The copyediting staff provided by Cambridge has done an excellent job. I am lucky to work with such a capable and professional staff at Cambridge.

Maurice Mangum, Chris Martin, Keesha Middlemass, and Noushin Jahanian all assisted me in some way with the interviews conducted for the book. Maurice and Chris, in particular, participated in three different interview visits at congressional district offices during a “research road trip” and the qualitative data gathered via these interviews was strengthened as a result (and contributed to some of the evidence presented in Chapter 5). Keesha and Noushin were instrumental in helping
Acknowledgments

I conducted a few exploratory interviews with congressional staff in Washington that did not make it into this book, but that were useful for structuring the district interviews that followed. I am of course grateful to the members of Congress and their staff who opened their district offices to me. I would also like to thank the National Science Foundation for providing funds for the travel involved in conducting some of the interviews used in this book (Grant 0001808).

My most profuse thanks go to my wife, Sarah Ramage. As the smartest person I know, Sarah's contributions to this book are substantial (editor, colleague, critic, cheerleader), and her contributions to me personally are literally innumerable. Nothing delighted me more than when she read a draft chapter of this book and exclaimed “Unlike other things you've written, this is actually interesting!” I took this comment as a compliment and a meta-critique of the often opaque style of political science writing. Especially during my year on research leave in which I completed the revisions to the book manuscript, Sarah deserves thanks. Even though I did not have to teach or go into the office, she was always supportive of the days in which the creativity and productivity flowed late into the night or on those days in which I would wake up early in the morning to get a head start on writing. In general, her support throughout the book publication process has been amazing. I cannot bear to think what my years would have been like had I not met her, nor can I even begin to detail the love and affection I have for her. I thank her for simply being there.

Finally, I thank my family: my parents, Robert and Jacqueline Grose, and my brother, Aaron. I very much appreciate my family's constant encouragement as I have written this book and as I have pursued a career as a professor. Many phone calls home were crucial to keeping me grounded as I wrote and completed this book. I enjoyed talking about the book and the writing process with them, and I cannot thank them enough for everything they have done for me in my life. I hope they are as proud of me as I am grateful to them.