gorithms that he considers most important or interesting. His examples range from forming a cabinet coalition or dividing ministerial positions within an existing coalition to international disputes. The procedures vary from a simple “I cut, you choose” to complex schemes where, like in Adjusted Winner, parties assign points to allocated objects. Brams argues that while different algorithms necessarily imply trade-offs between conflicting values, especially equity and efficiency, certain procedures have sufficiently appealing properties to single them out in specific contexts.

Since the math is elementary and the problems familiar, the book can be read both by political scientists not allergic to formal reasoning and by amateurs of mathematics interested in politics. Voting practitioners and designers will be delighted to find thorough discussions of less-known methods. All of them will find the book an interesting introduction to the fascinating subfield of mathematically oriented political science that analyzes and invents constructive institutional solutions to social dilemmas.

MAREK KAMINSKI
University of California, Irvine


It was during the administration of Ronald Reagan that political scientists became convinced of the growing importance of presidential speeches and other public appearances. Samuel Kernell wrote then about “going public,” while Jeffrey Tulis described “the rhetorical presidency,” and in their wake, research on the public presidency has proliferated. Elvin Lim’s brief yet superb new book is the equal of Kernell’s and Tulis’s widely cited studies in innovativeness and insight. Even better, it propels the debate over the public presidency in a fresh direction. Taking aim at the prevailing view, Lim argues that “the problem of presidential rhetoric in our time resides not in its quantity, but in its quality.... Our problem is the anti-intellectual presidency, not the rhetorical presidency” (p. x).

Employing the Flesch Readability measurement scale to calculate the complexity of presidential speeches, Lim finds a trend toward rhetorical simplification, especially over the past few decades. State of the Union addresses, for example, were pitched at a college reading level through the nineteenth century, but are now designed for an eighth-grade reading level. The trend is bipartisan, with Bill Clinton and George W. Bush outdoing all of their predecessors in dumbed-down verbiage.

As presidential prose has become more simplistic, it has grown less substantive. Lim demonstrates “the decline of logos” (p. 54) and the concomitant rise of platitudes, partisan clichés, and emotional bathos. Today, presidential
speeches are full of applause lines in place of arguments, pandering to audiences rather than educating them. Even a highly intelligent and articulate president, Lim argues, no longer tries to say much of substance. His case in point is Bill Clinton—“glib but unmemorable probably because he was a smooth-operating anti-intellectual rhetorician” (p. 67).

Aiding and abetting the anti-intellectualism of the contemporary presidency are the speechwriters. Lim interviewed 42 presidential wordsmiths, going back to the administration of Harry S. Truman, and these interviews supply much of the book’s originality and force. Prior to President Richard Nixon, most presidential speechwriters had policy responsibilities (Clark Clifford and Theodore Sorensen are prime examples), but with Nixon came the institutionalization of speechwriting as a specialized role. Divorced from the realm of policy, speechwriters, now recruited primarily from the field of journalism, came to prioritize style over substance. Ironically, in the face of pressures for simplifying the readability of presidential texts, it would not even be the style that they preferred when they wrote in their own voices.

Lim’s book could have been titled the “degradation of presidential rhetoric.” Since presidents are the most influential speakers in American public life, when their discourse becomes banal, democracy is diminished. One of the most appealing features of this book is that it is rigorously empirical without shying away from normative judgments. Those judgments are often stinging: “The cult of simplicity endorsed by presidents and speechwriters is anti-intellectualism with a demagogic smile; it is a justification of anti-intellectualism that has blinded us to the gradual rot of our public deliberative sphere” (p. 48).

There are other forms of anti-intellectualism that Lim does not consider—for example, disparaging intellectuals as an elitist class to curry favor among “ordinary” citizens. Unlike the bipartisan dumbing-down of speech, that form of anti-intellectualism has been more common among Republican presidents (Nixon, Reagan, and the younger Bush come to mind) than Democratic ones. Nonetheless, Lim has made anti-intellectualism an inescapable topic for future discussions of the public presidency. This creative and eye-opening book should be read not only by those who study the rhetoric of the contemporary presidency, but by anyone who cares about the health of America’s public discourse.

Bruce Miroff
State University of New York, Albany


A characteristic of public education policy in English-speaking nations that puzzles our colleagues in other post-industrial societies is the way we keep changing the structures by which schools are controlled, as though if we could