What is political history? The answer may seem obvious. In everyday language, “politics” in a democratic nation like the United States is the subject of who gets elected to office and what they do with the powers granted to them by voters, laws, and constitutions. It is an endless contest of speech making, lawmaking, fund-raising, and negotiating in which ambitious actors spend their lives struggling to come out on top. This definition may seem like common sense, but it does not capture what most political historians actually do. Many authors who engage in the serious study of past politics try to understand the larger forces that propel changes in governments, laws, and campaigns. The most influential historians, in particular, have always framed the narrative of legislative give and take and winning and losing office within a context of grand historical themes and developments. In the 1890s, Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the frontier experience shaped American democracy. For him, regional identities and cultures drove political development. Early in the twentieth century, Charles and Mary Beard contended that the clash of economic interests was at the root of every turning point in U.S. history—from the drafting of the Constitution to the Civil War. At mid-century, Richard Hofstadter used the psychological concept of “status anxiety” to explain the fervor of both Populist and Progressive reformers. In recent decades, leading scholars have sought to illuminate evolving tensions within the body politic by focusing on intersecting differences of religion and cultural taste, race and ethnicity, gender and class.