



W. Scheuerman, *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time*

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W. Scheuerman, *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, 312 p.

The pace of American society has quickened exponentially since the Founding Fathers first mapped the constitution. Information travels at the speed of light ; so does money. We can hop from one side of the country to the other in a matter of hours, contact our elected officials instantaneously, and share our views with thousands of people at the touch of a button.

Both academia and the popular media have grappled with the consequences of this acceleration on every aspect of contemporary life. Most pressing, however, may be its impact on political life. In *Liberal Democracy and the Social Acceleration of Time*, William Scheuerman offers a sophisticated assessment of the implications of social and technological celerity in the operation of liberal democracies. Specifically, he asks what is acceleration's main impact on the traditional liberal democratic model of the separation of powers ?

According to Scheuerman, high speed has created an imbalance. The executive branch was intended to react with dispatch ; by contrast, legislatures and the courts were designed to be more deliberate and thoughtful. While this system of checks and balances was effective in the age of horse and buggy, Scheuerman argues that the very features that were these institutions' strengths may now be a liability. Throughout this book, Scheuerman offers a constructive critique which articulates ways in which « liberal democracy might be recalibrated in accordance with the tempo of modern society. »

- **William E. Scheuerman** is Professor of Political Science and Western European Studies at Indiana University.