

**American Political Science Association
Law and Courts Section
Citation to Accompany the C. Herman Pritchett Award**

PAUL M. COLLINS, JR.

***FRIENDS OF THE SUPREME COURT:
INTEREST GROUPS AND JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING***

The 2009 selection committee for the C. Herman Pritchett Award has unanimously chosen Paul M. Collins, Jr., author of *Friends of the Supreme Court: Interest Groups and Judicial Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), as this year's recipient of the C. Herman Pritchett Award.

Friends of the Supreme Court revisits an important topic: the impact of amicus curiae briefs on Supreme Court decision making. In so doing, it challenges conventional wisdom. In a comprehensive and methodologically rich analysis of the topic, Professor Collins explains why and how interest groups use amicus briefs, and he develops a theoretical framework to explain how amicus briefs influence the outcomes of Court decisions. While not denying that justices' policy preferences shape their decision making, his analysis adds a level of nuance, arguing that while judges do pursue policy goals, they are also concerned with making good law. This, he says, leads to a "bottom-up" model of judicial decision making, one in which justices carefully review all the available evidence and argumentation in order to reach a sound legal decision.

Collins conducts a series of systematic empirical analyses, first to determine *if* amicus briefs influence judicial decision making, and then to determine *how* they influence judicial decision making. Rather than focusing on only a few groups or issue areas, as previous studies have done, Collins looks broadly at amicus activity in cases decided by the Court during the 1946 through 2001 terms. His findings challenge assumptions that previous studies took for granted. For example, his analysis suggests that the assumption that amicus briefs have little measurable influence on justices' decision making is wrong. Instead, his results show that amicus briefs do, indeed, influence judicial decision making. Moreover -- contrary to widely-held beliefs about motivated reasoning -- ideology does not act as a mediating variable in the overwhelming majority of cases; instead, the informational content in amicus briefs operates directly on the justices' decisions. His findings thus complexify standard assumptions about Supreme Court decision making, by suggesting that the process is more than simply a function of the justices' attitudes and values.

Collins notes that this book is part of an effort to put "jurisprudence" back into Shapiro's notion of "political jurisprudence" as an organizing principle for the study of judicial decision making. He pursues this goal by engaging in the type of rigorous scientific inquiry that would make C. Herman Pritchett proud. *Friends of the Supreme Court* is an important contribution to our field. It is altogether fitting for its author, Paul Collins, to receive the 2009 Pritchett Award.