
In the April 1994-issue of *American Historical Review*, Leo Ribuffo asked the question 'Why Is There So Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything About It?'. Since then a number of books have attempted to fill the information gap. The best contribution so far comes from British historian and journalist Godfrey Hodgson, a keen observer of American politics, whose previous production includes the popular *America in Our Time* (New York: Random House, 1976). Hodgson traces the evolution of conservatism from its status as a discredited political philosophy in the early postwar years to its ascendancy and apparent triumph in the Reagan years. Eventually, however, he questions the notion of a 'Reagan Revolution,' and in the light of the current impasse under the banners of Newt Gingrich, he attempts to explain why conservative dreams of political hegemony have so far ended in disappointment.

Apart from a number of interviews with leading conservative figures, the book is solely based on secondary sources. For readers who are familiar with books such as George H. Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York, 1976), Martin Anderson's *Revolution* (New York, 1988), and Thomas & Mary Edsall's *Chain Reaction; The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, 1992), Hodgson's book may hold only a few surprises, but it is a compelling and extremely well-written synthesis of the existing literature. In separate chapters, Hodgson attempts to trace the many streams flowing into the conservative delta. On the way he serves up amusing anecdotes, brief but precise biographical sketches of key conservative players, as well as a few largely unknown episodes. One is the story of how forty democratic members of Congress in the Christmas holidays of 1972-1973 seriously contemplated an informal Republican invitation to join the GOP. This near-realignment, which Hodgson calls 'one of the great untold tales of American politics,' became a non-event when the Watergate scandal suddenly hit the front pages.

Among the myths that Hodgson attempts to eradicate is the notion that the new religious Right was first of all triggered by *Roe v. Wade* and the issue of abortion. What really started their involvement in politics, Hodgson argues, was the Internal Revenue Service's denial of tax exemption to Christian schools on the grounds that they were *de facto* segregated, and thus violated the Fourteenth Amendment. This clash with the regulatory powers of the Federal government allegedly made many fundamentalists realize that they could not continue to isolate themselves from the nation's political life, and they accordingly joined the anti-statist chorus of the conservative movement.

Regardless of all its many qualities, Hodgson's book does have its weaknesses. The
author describes it as 'the story of how many indigenous conservative traditions came together as a united political movement,' but does not attempt to define in what sense these different strains constitute a movement, and in the second half of the book he clearly loses interest in conservatism as both an intellectual and a political movement. There are only passing references to the continuing discussions among the various intellectual strains of conservatism, and the struggles within the Republican Party are largely ignored. Hodgson claims that Nixon's opening to China was welcomed by conservatives: 'It was better still [for conservatives] to see an American president in China, always dear to conservative hearts as the place where there would one day be the most souls to save and the most business to be done.' In fact, Nixon's trip to China made part of the Republican Right revolt and support the nomination of Congressman John Ashbrook as a conservative challenger to the president – a significant event in the history of the conservative movement, yet something that Hodgson doesn't mention at all.

In a sense, the real subject of Hodgson's book is not the conservative movement, but the collapse of liberalism. It is not the story of a triumphant movement which in time would win over large segments of the American public, but rather an account of a series of developments which since the great upheaval of the 1960s have altered public attitudes towards social and religious issues, and towards the respective roles of government and business. According to the book, race has been at the center of this process since the early days of the civil rights movement. Southern politics have become nationalized, and the Democratic Party's near-monopoly in that region has ended, but in return national politics have also become 'Southernized,' and race-related issues have been allowed to dominate the political agenda, albeit often disguised as 'cultural' issues.

While a good part of the book is devoted to the issue of how racial tensions have helped the conservative ascendancy, another part of the book concerns the consequences of the so-called Reagan Revolution. Hodgson obviously has affection for Reagan, both as president and as a private person, but contends that 'Reaganomics' with its blend of monetarism and supply-side economics was a disaster which made the United States the most indebted nation on earth and caused a rapid growth in social and economic inequality. In the process, conservatives brought back something many thought long dead: the politics of class. Reagan's optimism, charisma and unabashed nationalism sugar-coated the conservative pill, while the inclusion of the religious right not only further shifted the focus of the political debate away from the politics of rich and poor, but also provided a link between the fiscal conservatism of the elites and the populism of the excluded. The formula worked fine for a while, Hodgson argues, but it never fulfilled conservative dreams of a new Golden Age. The notion of a decisive blow to the welfare state was quickly abandoned, and as for the evangelicals, they were simply taken to the cleaners.

Since the Reagan years, Hodgson argues, the conservative movement has declined because it has allowed itself to become the mere defender of suburban economic privilege. Its vision has eventually proven to be too narrow and non-inclusive. One is tempted to add here that although the conservative movement may have reached an impasse, conservative ideas are still doing fine. Now they are not merely being forwarded by self-proclaimed conservatives, but also by people who have kept up the appearance of being liberals.

Regardless of some minor objections, I am truly impressed by The World Turned Right
Side Up. With its broad scope it is highly recommendable, not just to people with an interest in American conservatism, but to anyone with an interest in American politics. It will also make an excellent addition to the syllabus of anyone teaching U.S. history since 1945.

Niels Bjerre-Poulsen


One might perhaps have thought, in this day and age of post-consensus squabbles and post-modernist fragmentation, that the writing of a national American literary history would no longer be possible. And not surprisingly, the General Editor of The Cambridge History of American Literature, Sacvan Bercovitch, in his Introduction to the second volume of the projected eight-volume series, Prose Writing 1820-1865, starts off by probleminatizing the nature of both 'history,' 'American,' and 'literature.' Fortunately for the reader, however, he decides to take the cacophony of competing and opposing voices that have defined literary criticism in the United States in recent years as a challenge rather than as a barrier to the construction of another narrative of American writing. And we are reminded how few such comprehensive narratives there have been in the history of American literature. Since the pioneering Cambridge History of American Literature, published during World War One, we have only had Robert Spiller's seminal Literary History of the United States from 1947, before the Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988; General Editor Emory Elliott) – and now the new Cambridge malte an attempt to define our perception of the American literary terrain, old and new, at the end of the twentieth century.

The editorial strategies of these two new works, as well as their scope, differ greatly. The Columbia is a one-volume, 1200-page collection that tries to capture the multifariousness of our current critical climate through the contributions of some seventy sub-editors and contributors, while retaining a fairly conventional structure in terms of sub-divisions by periods, genres, and individual authors or groups of authors. The result is predictably uneven and fragmented, full of stimulating insights but without any overarching sense of national narrative or dialogic coherence.

The scope of the Cambridge is much wider in terms of pages, since Sacvan Bercovitch and his crew have eight volumes in which to accomplish what Emory Elliott et al. had to do in one. But an even more important difference lies in the decision of the Cambridge editors to limit their major chapter divisions and corresponding contributors to a handful. In the second volume, under review here, there are only four 'master narratives' that make up the almost 800 pages of text. Michael Davitt Bell writes about the 'Conditions of Literary Vocation,' Eric J. Sundquist is responsible for 'The Literature of Expansion and Race,' while Barbara L. Paclter taltles on 'The Transcendentalists,' and Jonathan Arac provides a formalist perspective in his chapter on 'Narrative Forms.' This way a deliberate attempt is made to develop a fourfold perspective on the period in question: social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic, with each narrative related to the others through