

The empirical part rests on a thoughtful analysis of the nature and contents of the Finland-Swedish ethnicity. Österlund-Pötzsch identifies several elements that seem to play an important role as ethnic building blocks, such as the use of and fascination for the language, membership in churches and organizations, participation in celebrations and festivals, the eating of certain foods, and an interest in learning more about and traveling to Finland. The reasons given for engaging in these activities can range from friendship and family associations, ways of affirming a personal identity, to a sense of pride in the ethnic group and its heritage. The urge to find out more about one's background through genealogy and through traveling to Finland to visit particular persons or places, seems particularly important, and is something that would be well worth exploring further, perhaps in a comparative context.

Both studies make important contributions by showing how ethnicity continues to play a role among Scandinavian Americans today. The results suggest that the Swedish Americans in Lindsborg and the Americans of Finland Swedish background may be exhibiting what Herbert Gans has called "symbolic ethnicity," and that they may indeed be far down the road of Gans' straight-line assimilation. Still, the two books also argue that the ethnicities under consideration have taken on a role that goes beyond Gans' symbolic ethnicity. At least to those persons who are active as planners and participants in Lindsborg's Svensk Hyllningfest or those who participate in Finland-Swedish historical organizations and travel to Finland to trace their genealogical background, ethnicity can still be a powerful factor in the fashioning of both private and public identities. The two books under review thus remind us of the need to be mindful of the malleability of ethnicity in American life.

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John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*. New York, The Penguin Press, 2004. 400 pp.; ISBN 1-59420-020-3; \$17.65 hardcover.

The Right Nation is a survey and evaluation of the conservative movement from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. This is, of course, hardly virgin territory. Indeed, anyone seeking to collect the published literature on the history and evolution of contemporary American conservatism would quickly fill a modestly-sized house.

Some of this literature has concentrated upon the conservative "revolution" of the 1980s and 1990s. Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein's appraisal of the right, *Storming the Gates: Protest Politics and the Republican Revival* (Little, Brown and Company, 1996), was one of a number to concentrate on the rise of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the *Contract with America*, and the Republicans' Congressional election victories in November 1994. Other accounts have surveyed the longer-term history of the movement. In *Right Face* (Museum Tusulanum Press University of Copenhagen, 2002), my colleague Niels Bjerre-Poulsen looked at the broad structural shifts in the

character of the American right – and the tensions between the different strains of conservative thought – during the period between the McCarthy era and Barry Goldwater's electoral humiliation in 1964. An epilogue briefly considered the subsequent evolution of the movement.

Balz, Brownstein and Bjerre-Poulsen are not alone. Even the most hastily produced list of studies would also have to include Gillian Peele's *Revival and Reaction* (Clarendon Press, 1984), Sidney Blumenthal's *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* (Times Books, 1986), Michael Lind's *Up from Conservatism* (The Free Press, 1996), Sara Diamond's *Roads to Dominion* (Guilford Press, 1995), E.J. Dionne's *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon and Schuster, 1991), David Frum's *Dead Right* (Basic-Books, 1994), and Paul Gottfried's *The Conservative Movement* (Twayne Publishers, 1988).

So what does *The Right Nation* add to the existing literature? An initial answer, if one was to be churlish, might be "not that much." Part I of the book tells the now familiar story of modern conservatism. It tracks the Goldwater revolt, the "Dixiefication" of Republicanism as white southerners defected from the Democrats and eventually acquired the levers of political power within the Republican Party, the emergence of "neoconservatism," the successes and the long-term legacy of Reaganism and the hubris of Republican "overstretch" during the 1990s. Part II also considers events and developments that have been outlined and examined elsewhere. It surveys at the interlocking network of individuals, groups, and thinktanks that collectively comprises – in Hillary Rodham Clinton's celebrated phrase – a "vast right-wing conspiracy." Another section of the book – Part IV – incorporates an elegant restatement (but a restatement nonetheless) of Seymour Martin Lipset's *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

So, why bother? Why add to already overburdened bookshelves? The answer comes down partly to style. John Micklethwait is the US editor for *The Economist* and Adrian Wooldridge is its Washington correspondent. Their book shares the weekly magazine's carefully crafted prose as well as its informed and insightful fluency. *The Right Nation* is – at one and the same time – authoritative and accessible. The book moves from the particular to the general and back to the particular almost seamlessly. There is also some alluring imagery. In surveying the ideological and electoral politics of today, the book draws upon familiar notions of a "50-50" or "red-blue" nation and points to the cleavage between the largely metropolitan regions around the rim of the US – which lean towards cultural liberalism – and the hinterland or "heartland" which is significantly more conservative in character. Micklethwait and Wooldridge point out that the divide is not as even or balanced as the term '50-50' seems to suggest. American politics, they assert, can be understood in terms of an "unevenly balanced" seesaw occupied by the Speaker of the House of Representatives (who, it should be added, is a very large figure) and the more diminutive House Minority Leader:

Imagine Dennis Hastert at one end of the seesaw and Nancy Pelosi on the other end, and you have some idea about which party is sitting with its legs dangling in the air. In the war between the two Americas, Hastertland has been winning. (379-80)

The Right Nation has another strength. Micklethwait and Wooldridge offer a much more balanced and sober picture than many other studies. The “religious right” – which has been the subject of exhaustive appraisal over the past two decades and often described in hyperbolic terms – is rightly put in its proper place. Organizations such as the Christian Coalition are considered alongside the other strands of the conservative movement, but the authors also stress their structural weaknesses as well as their undoubted influence within Republican circles.

However, these considerations aside, there is a far more substantial reason why this is a book that should be read. Many – although not all – published studies of contemporary American conservatism have become trapped within a relatively narrow paradigm of organizational history as they describe the processes of both factional cooperation and internecine warfare that have, between them, defined the internal history of the American conservative movement. Most studies – particularly those considering the 1980s and 1990s – have not ventured beyond this. The principal strength of *The Right Nation* is that it boldly goes where others have been markedly reluctant to venture. In short, although the interrelationships between the book’s component parts are not always readily evident, it places the study of conservatism within the context of contemporary political culture. Although this has been tackled at a micro-level – through Lisa McGurr’s *Suburban Warriors* (Princeton University Press, 2001), a study of grassroots conservatism in Orange County, *The Right Nation* seeks to offer a macro-political perspective.

All of this becomes progressively clearer as the book proceeds. Part III surveys the prospects for long-term Republican electoral dominance. It incorporates the conclusions drawn in some recent studies such as John Judis and Ruy Teixeira’s 2002 book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, which asserts that the growing numbers of both Latinos and young professionals (particularly professional women) are pushing the country away from the Republicans. Micklethwait and Wooldridge take issue with this, pointing out that many of these professionals may shift rightwards as they move into middle age. Furthermore, they note, while acknowledging that the Republicans could still lose out if the party is seen as too abrasive or doctrinaire, economic shifts – such as the growth of share ownership – may ensure continuing Republican hegemony.

Part IV moves out further onto the cultural terrain by considering the extent to which the US is – at heart – a conservative nation. In doing this, the book asks a very familiar question – is America exceptional? However, instead of looking towards the nature of the American national mission or the absence of a socialist or collectivist tradition, Micklethwait and Wooldridge pose the question in terms of conservative ideological hegemony. In other words, does the US differ – because of its inherent conservatism – from other comparable countries? Is its “default position” – to use the

authors' words – to the right of the “default positions” of other nations? The authors hesitate before giving a firm answer. There are significant cultural and political differences within the US and generalizations about the country are often misleading. There are also some signs of long-term convergence between the US and Europe. However, notwithstanding these qualifications, the US is – the authors conclude – exceptional. Its approach to foreign policy issues has, they assert in an echo of other recent accounts, been characterized by unilateralism long before George W. Bush took office. In the domestic policy sphere, its seeming harshness in confronting offenders, its faith in economic inequality and commitment to self-reliance, its religiosity, the conservatism of contemporary liberalism, and the conservative subtext to the American revolution. Furthermore, although the US is exceptional in its conservatism, it conservatism is also exceptional. Micklethwait and Wooldridge point to the political and cultural gulf between the American and European right. The US has not produced – Patrick J. Buchanan's electoral campaigns aside – hard right populist or, in some eyes, quasi-fascist organizations comparable with the Front National (France), the *Freiheitls-Partei* (Austria), or the *Lega Nord* (Italy). In contrast with Europe, mainstream American conservatism is not only rooted in a party but based upon a movement that is structured around interlocking clusters of groups and networks. The thinking of the American right is also tinged – a much greater degree than European forms of conservatism – with a faith in “democratic millenarianism,” a Promethean belief in change, and libertarian individualism. It is infused with notions of certainty and righteousness.

There are, however, frustrations. The book is scrupulously balanced – through the presentation of competing and contrary claims – in a way that not only provokes occasional irritation but sometimes makes it hard to discern the overall argument. More significantly, *The Right Nation* simply fails to go far enough. As the book's endnotes make clear, it is over-dependent on a relatively small number of secondary sources. It explores political culture without drawing to any degree upon the wealth of polling data that is, in many instances, freely available. *The Right Nation* has many strengths but there will not be enough here to satisfy the *aficionados* of American conservatism who have followed the movement's twists and turns over the past few decades. *The Right Nation* lacks the depth, substance and originality that they will require. But, and this is as fair a way as any of evaluating a book's worth, it is a very good read.

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Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*. Boston: Little Brown, 2003. 838 pp. + 32 pp. of black and white photographs; ISBN: 0-316-17238-3; \$ 30, cloth.

It has become impossible to write about the life of John F. Kennedy without dealing with the popular adulation of the man. The public fantasy of Kennedy as the embodiment of youth, glamour, and progress was already well established before the presi-