

ing expression of authenticity in American speech”, which is absent from political rallies and mainstream corporate media. It is no wonder that H. Bruce Franklin enthusiastically endorses *American Political Fictions* from the back cover with the remark that “the chapter on rap alone is worth the price of admission”.

Coming last, Chapter 5 delivers perhaps the strongest message. Although Swirski acknowledges the impact of *The West Wing* on American political life as the “civics and history classroom”, he criticizes the award-winning show for reinforcing the stale myths of American democracy—the sanctity of the presidency and the representational system of government among them. In an alternative to the current American political establishment, like de Tocqueville Swirski initiates a debate about the nature of democracy in America, which he defines as “power to the people”. He not only pinpoints the illusions of people’s power instilled by mechanisms like presidential campaigns, but also analyzes Swiss, Californian, and European Union’s practices of initiative and referendum, and sheds the light on the premises of direct democracy: open access to information and education.

In a nutshell, Peter Swirski is a great storyteller. His brilliant stories about artists and con-artists, fictions and facts surrounding American politics are written with wit and humor that make his arguments compelling and a pleasure to read.

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Lily Geismer, *Don’t Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 392 pages. ISBN 978-0-691-15723-8.

The suburbanization of the United States in the decades following the end of the Second World War marked a profound economic, political, and cultural shift in American history. Though achieved through Eisenhower’s acceptance of the New Deal consensus and the government’s broad role in society, the change has historically been understood as a part of the growing political strength of conservatism. In *Don’t Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*, Lily Geismer complicates this partial understanding of suburban politics.

Since the publication of Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*¹ in 1996, and the recognition of the importance of space in the political, the increasing focus on the relationship of urban and political has contributed to an improved understanding of political history. Lisa McGirr captured conservative suburban grassroots organizing in *Suburban Warriors*, Elizabeth Shermer illustrated the role of capitalism in the growth of conservatism in *Sunbelt Capitalism*, Kevin Kruse discussed the intersection of race and suburbanization in *White Flight*, and Matthew Lassiter merged electoral politics and the growth of the suburbs in *The Silent Majority*, to name but a few of the many important books on the intersection of modern conservatism and the suburban.² Geismer turns the tables and explores suburban America in relation not to conservatism but to liberalism. Functioning as a great companion to the aforementioned works, *Don't Blame Us* illustrates the wider importance of suburban America in postwar politics, and fills a significant gap in the scholarship of modern American political history.

By focusing on Massachusetts, Geismer positions her research on what has been perceived as the bastion of liberalism in postwar United States. In fact, the title alludes to bumper stickers on cars in Massachusetts following the unraveling of the Watergate scandal, alluding to the Bay State being the only state won by the liberal Democratic candidate George McGovern in 1972, when the rest of the country re-elected Richard Nixon in a landslide. Yet, this is not only local history, Geismer convincingly argues for the national importance of Massachusetts liberalism. From the success of George McGovern in the Boston suburbs to the nomination of Michael Dukakis in 1988 and John Kerry in 2004, the local influences the national. By the end of the century the suburban liberalism embodied in the Massachusetts communities had transformed the Democratic Party in its image.

Through the issues of residential and educational integration, environmentalism, anti-war organizing, taxation, and feminism, Geismer shows how the liberalism of affluent suburban areas over the decades since the

1 Thomas Sugrue (1996), *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2 Lisa McGirr (2001). *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (2013); *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Kevin Kruse (2005), *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Matthew Lassiter (2006), *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

1950s profoundly changed the Democratic Party. The main focus of Geismer's study is on five communities, Brookline, Concord, Lexington, Lincoln, and Newton, around Route 128 just outside of Boston. The communities along Route 128, also known as America's Technology Highway, consisted of exceptionally well-educated people, employed in the knowledge sector. The liberal organizing in these areas was premised on the high education level, economic affluence, and spatial comfort. Yet, the political climate was not *a priori* liberal; all of the issues Geismer looks at were deeply divisive. Instead, it was the organizing of liberal forces that succeeded in carving out a niche for them in the political debate and then transform the Democratic Party. The affluence of the communities was central to this organizing, women outside of the workforce played a key role for example, but also limited the broader success of the efforts. As Geismer explains, the economic prosperity of the communities stimulated the interest in questions of racial justice, environmentalism and peace, in ways not likely in communities facing harder economic conditions. Facing accusations of the costs of liberal programs, like educational exchanges with inner city Boston neighborhoods, for the taxpayers, the liberal organizers had to find ways to push their agenda without impacting local taxes. The result was perennially endangered programs with voluntary, state, or federal funding.

Don't Blame Us is a riveting book; Geismer skillfully weaves a historical narrative from the local and compellingly positions this in relation to the national. Based on extensive local archival work, the main actors in the book are the often unmentioned individuals behind grassroots organizations. Without losing sight of the broader implications, Geismer is able to show not only how liberal politics influenced a wide variety of divisive issues in post-war America, but also the importance of the organizing power in the suburbs. The relationship between technology industries, defense contractors, and research institutions in the area, on the one hand, and state and national politicians on the other hand are crucial for the impact of the suburban liberals. Thus, *Don't Blame Us*, the first book by Geismer, is a critical extension to the current scholarship on both the historiography of liberalism and the Democratic Party, and the work within the fields of urban/suburban political history.