



Contemporary **Sociology**

A JOURNAL OF **REVIEWS**

**A Symposium on U.S.
Electoral Politics:
Featuring essays by
Norval D. Glenn,
Patrick D. Nolan,
Fred Block, and
Katherine Newman**

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Contemporary Sociology's editorial offices are moving: the new editor will be Alan Sica, beginning officially with the January 2009 issue (Vol. 38, no.1). After August 1, 2008, please send all books, reviews, and correspondence to the new editor, Alan Sica, to the following address:

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EDITORS' NOTE: U.S. ELECTORAL POLITICS

The current U.S. Presidential election cycle has already made history in various ways: the Democrats had the longest contested primary season ever, that party's final two candidates for the nominee were a woman (Hillary Clinton) and an African American man (with Barack Obama emerging as the first presumptive black nominee), and John McCain is set to be the oldest nominee of a major party to seek the highest office in the land. Furthermore, some see the 2008 election, with its backdrop of economic recession and protracted war, as a possible watershed in which there could be a major political realignment. It's not surprising that the coming election has generated unprecedented attention in the media and we may see record voter registration and turnout.

In anticipation of this election cycle, the *Contemporary Sociology* editorial team began to organize a symposium designed to highlight sociological insight into contemporary U.S. electoral politics during fall 2007. We selected two new and controversial books by sociologists: Todd Gitlin's *The Bulldozer and the Big Tent: Blind Republicans, Lame Democrats, and the Recovery of American Ideals* and D. Michael Lindsay's *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*. We asked essayists to discuss one of these two volumes and at least one book written by the then leading presidential candidates (and we provided a list of titles by six Republicans and six Democrats). All the invited commentators are sociologists—but to be “fair and balanced” we tried to take their political leanings into account, so the symposium would contain voices from both the left and the right. The result is the symposium featured in this issue of *CS*. Most of the essays that follow were completed before the primary outcome was certain.

Norval Glenn chose to discuss the Gitlin volume and Barack Obama's *The Audacity of Hope*. While he sees Gitlin as “a very well-informed and erudite observer of American politics,” Glenn argues that his book is too partisan and ideological to be considered soci-

ology, even though it uses social science evidence. Glenn sees Gitlin as coming from the “hard left” and claims he makes an “intemperate, vitriolic attack on the Bush administration.” But the main thesis of the book is that leftists must compromise their principles for a more inclusive Democratic Party – and one that is unified and disciplined in the way Republicans have been for some time. Glenn believes that Gitlin may be too optimistic about the possibility of a strong resurgent Democratic Party, in part, because age and cohort conflicts are not considered in his book. He sees Obama's book as an eloquent attempt to use the big tent strategy to attract moderates by inclusiveness and openness to diverging points of view, but is skeptical that a viable center-left Democratic coalition can coalesce in November.

Patrick Nolan approaches his essay as an unabashed political conservative and active Republican. He also chose the Gitlin book, but finds it completely unpersuasive, excessive and repetitive, and difficult to wade through. On the other hand, Nolan praises Joe Biden's *Promises to Keep: On Life and Politics* and Mitt Romney's *Turnaround: Crisis, Leadership, and the Olympic Games* for their “ring of authenticity.” This essayist is comforted that in politics everyone can be an expert and no one really seems to know how the process works.

Fred Block comes from a very different perspective. He sees the potential for the 2008 election to reverse a three decade rightward shift in U.S. politics. Since it seems that the mobilization of evangelical Christians was a driving force in the rise of George W. Bush's brand of conservative Republicanism, Block is particularly intrigued about “faith in the halls of power” and discusses Lindsay's book. The author interviewed 360 evangelicals who achieved success in politics or other social spheres—and found a growing divide between “populist” and “cosmopolitan” evangelism. For Block, this suggests two opposite implications: on the one hand, the new elite evangelicals could be in a position to magnify

the power of the religious right; on the other hand, the growing split between them and the grassroots evangelicals could be a mechanism for its demise. Block argues that Mike Huckabee's *From Hope to Higher Ground* seems to be intended to expand the evangelical political agenda to include protecting the environment, improving schools, and helping the poor. Interestingly, Huckabee was forced to take a more "hard right" stance in the primaries to compete for conservative Republican votes. Block sees an erosion of the political power for the religious right, with serious ramifications for the current Republican coalition. He is hopeful that there will be a "re-emergence of broad-based, left social movements that make possible a new reform epoch in American politics." Block believes that Barack Obama addresses the "children of the sixties" in his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, using the voice of a community organizer while also appealing for the return of "good government" and the end of partisan gridlock in Washington. Block is heartened by both Obama's rhetoric of social movement building for change and the way that the campaign dynamics forced Hillary Clinton to appeal to populism. While taking care not to be too optimistic, Block thinks a new era of progressive reform might be possible.

The final essay in the electoral politics symposium takes on both sociological volumes, plus campaign books from the Clinton, Edwards, Huckabee, and Obama camps. Katherine Newman sees an analysis of contemporary U.S. electoral politics as a wonderful opportunity to highlight the value of public sociology. She praises Gitlin's account of the paralysis of today's politics as "engaging," but says the main storyline is a familiar one. Newman finds Lindsay's examination of evangelical influence in society an "eye-opening" exposé of an important, but not well understood, phenomena (pointing, for instance, to the role evangelicals had in Hollywood as producers of TV shows like "Mission Impossible" and "Charlie's Angels," or as editors of *Newsweek* and *Fortune* magazines). But she points out that a range of political ideologies also draw on religion, and emphasizes the degree to which Obama's story in his book is about the evolution of his Christian faith. Clinton and Edwards also related their religious faith to their commitment to public service and Huckabee describes feeling "God's call to

leave the pulpit and take [his] message into the public arena." Despite the ubiquitous nature of candidates' stated Christian convictions, their politics are quite varied. In the end, Newman claims that we need to return our focus to "the sociological analysis of power" and of money, organized interest groups, and social movements. She believes Gitlin's analysis is on target here—and she cautiously shares Block's hope that "a new day is dawning."

Sociologists also study topics like democracy in the abstract. Charles Tilly, who recently passed away, was arguably the master of the sociological analysis of big questions about important topics. One of his final books is titled, simply, *Democracy*. Dietrich Rueschemeyer's essay addresses this book, paired with one on why welfare states persist by Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza. On a similar theme, Michael Shalev discusses two books on the performance of comparative welfare states (including one co-edited by Rueschemeyer). Tilly was also one of the leading proponents of historical sociology. Two essays in this issue address how the United States and U.S. sociology have changed over the past century. Charles Hirschman writes an appreciative essay on *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last Hundred Years* by Claude Fischer and Michael Hout; Neil McLaughlin lauds the impressive "intellectual firepower" assembled in *Sociology in America: A History* edited by Craig Calhoun. Dawne Moore contributes an essay discussing two books concerning Christian evangelicals and the ex-gay movement. And in her essay, Liz Grauerholz, the editor of *Teaching Sociology*, recommends *The Contexts Reader* (repackaged from the journal) for introductory class use.

Finally, this issue includes three contributions to our innovative "toolkit" series. John Skvoretz and Phillip Bonacich both write about new developments in social networks analysis; Tim Berard's essay discusses the *Handbook of Constructionist Research* edited by James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium.

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A SYMPOSIUM ON U.S. ELECTORAL POLITICS

How Big Can the Democratic Party Tent Be?

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The American Democratic Party is at an important juncture. After decades of being the weaker party, becoming dominant for an extended period seems within its reach, *if* it can attract and hold a substantial proportion of political moderates. The book by Todd Gitlin, a journalism professor at Columbia University and former student activist, deals directly and extensively with that topic, and the one by Barack Obama displays a big-tent approach in the race to become President.

Gitlin has a Ph.D. in sociology and a courtesy appointment in sociology at Columbia, and thus I, having just written a chapter about good and bad public sociology, approached the Gitlin book asking if it is good public sociology. I soon realized that question was inappropriate. The book is not sociology of any kind, being overtly partisan and ideological, largely devoid of social scientific concepts, theory, and the tight logic and systematic examination of empirical evidence expected of social scientific work. It uses social science evidence, but only as any good journalist would. Its intended audience is not academic and apparently is only for persons on the left one-third of the political spectrum. This characterization of the book is not a criticism, because having a Ph.D. in sociology should not exclude a person from partisan political discourse. For its apparent main purpose (advising progressive political activists), it is more useful than any academic tome would be.

A major thesis of the book is that persons on the hard left must compromise their ideological purity for the sake of inclusiveness so that the Democratic Party, the only party they have to further their interests, can gain power. Gitlin makes that point convincingly, pointing out that there are not enough true progressives (my paraphrasing) to form the base for

The Bulldozer and the Big Tent: Blind Republicans, Lame Democrats, and the Recovery of American Ideals, by **Todd Gitlin**. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007. 336pp. \$25.95 cloth. ISBN: 978471748533.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream, by **Barack Obama**. New York, NY: Random House, 2006. 384pp. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780307237699.

a winning political party and that the American political system is biased against Democrats. This is especially true in the Senate, where large urban and largely Democratic states have the same representation as small rural and largely Republican states, and it is true to a lesser extent in the Electoral College and the House of Representatives. It follows that the only way that the Democratic Party can overcome the Republican advantage is through a big-tent approach—by including in its base some very disparate and sometimes conflicting factions. A winning Democratic Party must be based on a center-left coalition that includes persons who do not support all major progressive causes.

This advice comes from a member of the hard left—and a rather odd proponent of the big-tent approach. Gitlin's faith in the correctness of his views seems as strong and unwavering as that of movement conservatives, and his advocacy of inclusiveness is based more in pragmatism than in respect and tolerance for those who disagree with him. He appropriately criticizes movement conservatives for demonizing their opponents, but he engages in considerable demonizing himself. His book contains several gratuitous slams against some of those he would include in the big tent, such as Westerners and one-time, but now disillu-

sioned, Republican supporters of the Bush administration (he accuses the latter of defecting only because it became popular to do so). He attributes impure motives on the basis of little or no evidence, as when he accuses Lyndon Johnson of having political motives for calling his Texas Hill Country property a ranch rather than a plantation. (Johnson called his property a ranch because all nearby properties are called that. There were never any plantations in the Texas Hill Country.) Fully half of the book is an intemperate, vitriolic attack on the Bush administration, an emphasis that seems superfluous given the apparent intended leftist audience.

In spite of these flaws, this is an important book by a very well-informed and erudite observer of American politics and progressive activism. Arguably, it gives the clearest and most incisive existing treatment of differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties during the past few decades, describing in detail how movement conservatives captured the Republican Party and made it their own while the potential base for the Democratic Party remained uncoordinated, undisciplined, often suspicious of party politics, and unwilling or unable to build a strong party organization. This difference has only recently begun to change, as many Republicans have become disillusioned with the Bush administration, and a common loathing for that administration has tended to unite the different factions in the potential Democratic base. However, as the Bush administration fades into history, the continuation of the trend toward Democratic unity is not inevitable, and Gitlin's goal is to make it continue.

According to Gitlin, Democratic unifiers should emphasize a few key goals—including universal health care, energy conservation, environmental sustainability, and factory jobs—while being willing to jettison other progressive goals, such as gun control, for the sake of enlarging the big tent. He would not jettison a woman's right to choose abortion but would not demonize pro-lifers. On some issues, he would strive to include proponents of opposing points of view, for instance, fair traders and free traders and both advocates and opponents of guest worker programs.

Gitlin may be too sanguine about getting others to accept his priorities or arrive at any consensus about which goals are indispensable. As he points out, progressive activists

tend to focus on single issues, and thus persuading them to abandon or subordinate their goals in order to build Democratic Party strength will be difficult. Furthermore, some issues seem more complex than Gitlin thinks they are, abortion being an example. He says that a majority of Americans are pro-choice, but a large majority is either pro-life or pro-choice with major qualifications. For instance, many (including myself) who do not oppose abortion on religious grounds see no bright line between a woman's right to choose to abort a third trimester fetus that can think and feel and a right to choose to kill the baby after birth. Combine this fact with the use of the "slippery slope" argument by many pro-choice activists to oppose virtually any restrictions on abortion, and one can see that the abortion issue poses major obstacles for a big-tent strategy. This would be true even if recruiting pro-lifers such as Catholic defectors (from the Democratic Party) and young evangelicals were not part of the strategy.

In discussing the diversity of the potential Democratic base, Gitlin deals at length with class and similar divisions, but neither "age," nor "cohort" appears in the index, even though conflicts of interest and differences in values by age and cohort are great enough to be seriously divisive. There are more points of likely conflict and disagreement than I can discuss here—ranging from social security to same-sex marriage—so I will concentrate on the environment, which I think should be at the top of the Democratic agenda. The extent to which persons in the politically powerful baby boom cohort—including those in the potential Democratic base—can be motivated voluntarily to sacrifice for environmental benefits they will not live to experience may be rather limited. This is a cohort with relatively weak bonds to younger generations, because of low fertility and a high prevalence of divorce, and it came of age when traditional virtues such as sacrifice, devotion to duty, and deferment (or renunciation) of gratification were being de-emphasized in favor of a "live for today" ethic. Given that rejection of traditional virtues was especially pronounced among progressives and that some adherence to those virtues is requisite for the making of pro-environmentalist decisions, I am not sure that the liberal members of the cohort are going to be much more reliably environmen-

talist in their voting than the conservative ones.

Another age-related complication is the changing and complex composition of political moderates, especially among young adults. Major attitudinal realignments are taking place whereby attitudes that used to be largely mutually exclusive are now occurring together more frequently—strong belief in marital permanence linked with egalitarian gender role attitudes, high sexual permissiveness for unmarried persons linked with high restrictiveness for married ones, strong belief in the importance for children of stable two-parent families linked with the view that it does not matter if the parents are same-sex. These examples are family related, because that is the evidence I know best, but there are also examples in other realms—conservative religious beliefs linked with high environmental concern, for instance. These realignments could benefit the Democratic Party, but only if middle-aged party leaders are sensitive to them and can devise effective means for dealing with them.

Among the several other obstacles to the formation of a center-left base for the Democratic Party, I will mention only what I perceive to be a tendency for progressives to devote an inordinate amount of effort to grandstanding for one another, and, in doing so, taking special delight in savaging moderates—not a good way to bring the latter into the big tent. I doubt that Gitlin or anyone else can persuade the grandstanders and posturers to abandon this easy path to gratification.

The book by Obama illustrates the use of a big-tent strategy—an attempt to attract moderates without alienating the far left. Every chapter reflects a studied attempt to come across as temperate, reasonable, and willing to examine polarizing issues from all points of view. There is no demonizing of opponents, only respectful disagreement. Perhaps the strongest zeal displayed in the book is for bringing unity where there has been division. Obama seems to agree with Gitlin that it is more important to attract support from the center than to avoid irritating ideological purists on the left, and perhaps he thinks his liberal voting record is sufficient to attract the left wing.

Obama does not avoid the hot-button issues on which he obviously cannot please everyone he and Gitlin would like to have in

the big tent. For instance, he reveals his pro-choice voting record but shows tolerance and respect for pro-life activists who do not use extreme methods, saying in effect that he does not consider them irrational ogres. He also hints that he opposes late-term abortion when he refers (incorrectly, it seems to me) to the “willingness of even the most ardent pro-choice advocates to accept some restrictions on late-term abortion” (p. 222). He devotes a full chapter to family issues, eschewing the overly sanguine views of recent family changes espoused by some liberals and the use of liberal clichés about “celebrating family diversity” and “supporting all kinds of families.” He speaks approvingly of marriage education, and thus it seems unlikely that he would want to dismantle the governmental healthy marriage initiatives simply because they are associated with the Bush administration. There are similar moderate-friendly treatments of topics such as religion and social policy, foreign affairs, and economic issues.

Obama seems an effective big-tent strategist, but of course that may not matter very much. Factors other than the skills of the 2008 Presidential nominee may largely determine whether a stable center-left Democratic base can be formed. As Gitlin argues, that outcome depends heavily on the ability of progressives of various stripes to arrive at a common vision for the country and then cooperate to bring moderates into the coalition. That would require compromise, discipline, and sustained efforts to build the party organization from the local level up—qualities and behaviors that have been rather scarce among Democrats. Furthermore, even a modest reformation of the Republican Party in the direction of a more competent, principled, and future-oriented leadership that does not believe that the end justifies the means would make attracting moderates into the Democratic fold more difficult.

Whatever the outcome of the daunting quest for a Democratic majority may be, it, and the Republican resistance to it, will provide extremely interesting subject matter for political sociologists, social psychologists, and students of social movements and social change, among other social scientists. Get out your theories, concepts, and analytic tools and learn from the action as it unfolds.

The Best-laid Schemes of Mice and Men

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How do you summarize three very different books comprising more than a thousand pages, one written by a former president of the Students for a Democratic Society, and two by would-be Presidents of the United States? I resisted the obvious temptation to go for humor: Did you hear the one about the professor, the Catholic, and the Mormon? Or the one about the radical, the politician, and the businessman? Better, I thought, to stay closer to the books themselves.

But first, in the interests of full disclosure (perhaps reminiscent of the *de rigueur* disclaimers in writings of the 1970s following the then-celebrated death of “value-fee” sociology or an introduction at a meeting of a 12-step program), I should state/confess that I am politically conservative. It was not always so. I grew up in an Irish-Italian working-class neighborhood on the west side of Chicago; both of my parents were members of unions, and my first votes were cast for Hubert Humphrey, Richard J. (not Richard M.) Daley, and my Democratic Ward Committeeman. (As my precinct captain explained to me, it was good to vote for “Hizzoner, daMare,” and ok for president, but it was *crucial* to vote for Ward Committeeman; he controlled the patronage.) But, as the old saw would have it, I came to conservatism by the conventional route; I was mugged in graduate school, late at night, on my way to buy cigarettes, in the “Nicetown” section of Philadelphia. That disclaimer out of the way, on to the books themselves.

In *The Bulldozer and the Big Tent*, Gitlin offers his analysis and appraisal of the rise of Republican-conservatives to power, and the possibility of Democratic-progressives replacing them in the near future. Gitlin characterizes the Republican-conservative party-movement as a bulldozer, steamroller, or juggernaut, that with religiously rooted moral certitude seeks power with “demonological fervor, and absolutist pretensions” (p. 17), and sees itself as “the good in a war against evil, not just against the unjust or the practical against the impractical, but the righteous

The Bulldozer and the Big Tent: Blind Republicans, Lame Democrats, and the Recovery of American Ideals, by **Todd Gitlin**. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007. 336pp. \$25.95 cloth. ISBN: 978471748533.

Promises to Keep: On Life and Politics, by **Joe Biden**. New York, NY: Random House, 2007. 365pp. \$25.95 cloth. ISBN: 978140065363.

Turnaround: Crisis, Leadership, and the Olympic Games, by **Mitt Romney** with **Timothy Robinson**. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004. 396pp. \$27.95 cloth. ISBN: 0895260840.

against the unclean, the normal against the unnatural” (p. 36). Demanding fealty and discipline, they, and the movement, are ruthless about winning and implementing their bumper-sticker ideology. Its avatar, George Bush, is variously depicted as: lazy, and simple-minded (p. 61); self-important (p. 62); resentful (p. 79); self-deceiving (p. 80); dangerous (p. 68, 179); a strategic, not simply a tactical, liar (p. 81); ignorant (p. 97); inattentive, and vacation-hungry (p. 247); a failed oilman, and military shirker (p. 260), whose 2000 election was secured through vote suppression, an electoral apparatus appointed by his “governor brother, and the intervention of a court majority appointed by his party” (p. 173), and whose 2004 election was aided by Osama bin Laden’s eleventh-hour, self-conscious, and self-interested, intervention to keep Kerry out of, and Bush in, office (p. 204, 235).

The major lesson Gitlin draws from this recent history is that if the Democratic-progressives are to be successful, activists and politicians, as well as the different interest groups within the Democratic Party, must put aside their differences and unite into a disciplined, no-nonsense party-movement (big tent) organized around the principle and rhetoric of the *common good*. Only by this means can the Democratic-progressive move-

ment soundly defeat the Republican-conservatives. Granting that this will not be easy, and that its success is not assured, Gitlin sees the 2004 presidential election, although a loss, as the watershed in organizing and strategy that provided the foundation for the 2006 congressional victories, and presages future more profound triumphs for the movement. While the specific characteristics of a successful presidential candidate, or of an avatar for this movement, are elusive, Gitlin does identify some key requisites. Since, “collectively, we are lost souls,” we crave someone with “the appearance of authenticity” who sees farther than we do, and will lead us (pp. 258–259), someone who, although able to appeal to, and resonate with, a wide variety of people and constituencies, must also “*seem* sharply defined” (p. 261, italics in the original).

For reasons noted above, I don’t have much empathy with Gitlin’s book or its objectives, but more importantly, I can only wonder who its intended readers are. He certainly is not trying to appeal to, or change, the minds of any conservatives or Republicans, for I can’t imagine a conservative who hasn’t strongly committed in advance to finish it (and like a very unnerving MRI I had some years back, would not willingly do again), actually reading more than a few sentences or paragraphs of it. And although his advice in the latter part of the book on how Democrats might regain the Presidency is more pragmatic, appropriately cynical, measured, and reasonable, I wonder why, or if, a liberal or a Democrat would actually spend his or her time and hard-earned money on a book when much of it merely rehearses the tired left-wing-blog clichés and canards about Bush, Cheney, and the Republican party that are widely available on the internet for free.

Stepping back, the even larger point that strikes me is how in politics, issues are still, or now, almost exclusively framed in Manichean terms of “us” (the forces of light) *vs.* “them” (the forces of darkness). Maybe it has always been this way, or maybe it comes and goes in natural cycles like global warming and cooling, but each side of the political spectrum seems increasingly shrill and willing to demonize and dehumanize the “other.” Then when yelling at, cursing, and calling the other, or the other’s candidate, insulting names, doesn’t change the other side’s, or the middle’s think-

ing, the yelling, cursing, and name-calling simply get *louder*.

Numerous examples could be cited from either side of the political divide, but when some Americans were outraged and disgusted by the behavior of a Democrat President with an intern in the White House, and increasingly came to see that others weren’t, or weren’t as much, the outraged progressively yelled the same, or worse things, only louder. If the purpose was to persuade, it was less than ineffective. No minds were changed, and it increasingly looked like one side was being calm and reasonable, while the other was growing more hysterical.

Gitlin’s political rhetoric has similar effects (at least on me). Rather than persuade, its excesses and repetitiveness made it more noise than argument—*yada yada yada*—or *so’s your old man*. While Gitlin unmercifully pounded away on issues with his heaviest rhetorical artillery (as if trying to soften up island fortifications for a beach landing) page-after-page with little effect, I found a few more measured comments by Biden, on the same issue, actually provoked more critical thought and reflection in me. If you are a glutton for punishment, or just want to test your own ideological toughness, you might want to try a simple experiment (be sure to obtain your own informed-consent first). If you are left-of-center, try listening, for one week, exclusively to conservative talk radio, or watching Fox news; if you are right-of-center, try listening, for one week, exclusively to Air America, or watching MSNBC; then switch to the other. I have done it sporadically (never being able to last for a full week), and it is quite eye-opening.

On the other hand, the most striking thing about the two books by and about the would-be Presidents is their ring of authenticity. Sure, they are each unabashedly giving their side of the story, but they really sound like *their* stories. Both said they were motivated to public service to make government work and improve people’s lives, but they have very different ideas about how to do that, and they are very different men.

I’ve never met Joe Biden, but *Promises to Keep* sounds like him, or at least the him I have inferred from watching him on TV, and his family stories and lore resonated with the echoes of Irish heritage in my life. Most notably, the culturally-defensive, but from my

experience, central and utterly sincere, tenet that no one, regardless of station, wealth, or race (religion is a more complicated matter) is “better” than anyone else, and that one has an obligation to fight injustice and stand up for, and with, anyone treated as less worthy by another. Over the years this may have fostered a certain hypersensitivity to social slights in some, and bloodied many a nose on a school playground, but it has also produced generations of politicians, and a growing throng of lifelong Cubs fans.

As with any self-consciously produced document, the truth is to be found largely between the written lines. I learned a great deal about what drives and feeds Biden’s ambitions, as well as how and why he has, at different times, been tagged as either being smart, serious, and hardworking, or obtuse, unserious, and lazy. I also gained a new appreciation of his closeness to his brother and sister, as well as the severity of his physical ordeals with brain aneurisms and their corrective surgeries, and the emotional devastation of the loss of his first wife and a child in a car accident. He also sounds to me like a terrific dad. On the lighter side, I was amazed by his comfort with, and tolerance for, personal financial risk and precarious finances—buying houses often with little more than the *hope* of being able to rent or afford them, and then, because he had done so, sometimes having to move family members into and out of houses like chess pieces. I cannot imagine doing that—my Irish heritage stressed to me that you always worry about money, with the emphasis clearly placed on *worry* and *always*.

A bit more than halfway through the book, I thought an apt *Cliff Notes* description might be: Joe Biden, he used to be very young, bought a lot of houses, and kept Robert Bork off the Supreme Court. I remember the Bork hearings, and Biden’s role in them, very well. If there is such a thing as “sincere disingenuousness,” I think it describes Biden’s approach and tactics in the matter very well. The book filled in some of the gaps for me. Before the hearings started, Biden had decided that, given the danger that he thought Bork posed to the country and its jurisprudence, he was going to do whatever he could to keep him off the Court. Finding historical precedent for critically examining judicial philosophy (ideology) rather than, or in addition to, professional qualifications and judicial temperament,

he openly revealed his non *ad hominem* strategy for opposing and defeating the confirmation. As in the old westerns, they’d have a fair trial and *then* hang him. It worked, and he is proud of it.

Granting that Bork’s views were in many ways difficult to parse or fully understand, at least for a layman such as me, I cannot help but wonder that, in this television age, if Bork had not had that hair and beard, he might have survived the confirmation hearing. For, to me, and probably many others, Judge Bork’s restrictive interpretation of the ninth amendment, and his argument that the Constitution should be read and interpreted as “a contract to be narrowly construed,” appear less threatening to our liberties and rights than Biden’s argument that the Constitution must be seen as having a “spirit” which is “a reflection of the hopes and aspirations of the American people” (p. 177). Does such a view countenance, or require, judicial review by séance or divination?

Until it became more cumbersome to order them at a bulk rate, I used to distribute a pocket Constitution to every student who took a course with me. Not being above resorting to gimmicks to make a point, and possibly generate some humor, especially in my large lecture-hall classes, on the appointed day I would carry them into class in the box they were shipped in. Dead-panning I would ask the class if they saw any holes or vents in the box. When they answered “no,” I would pause for dramatic effect and then, with a *faux* puzzled look on my face, ask them how they were able to survive the trip.

I have met Mitt Romney, and *Turnaround*, which documents Romney’s strategy for, experiences with, and lessons learned from, “turning around” the potentially doomed 2002 Winter Olympics, accurately portrays the man I have met and talked with. Putting aside the engaging stories about, and insights into, the staging of the Olympics, it reads like a management text, complete with bullet points and lesson reviews at the end of many chapters. But that is who he is, or who he appeared to be, to me. Because I am married to a county party chair, I had the opportunity to see, briefly talk with, and hear him (and other family members) at large public events and smaller more intimate fund-raisers, lunches, and dinners.

The first thing that strikes you when you meet him in person, is that he, his wife, his sons, and their wives and children are all just drop-dead handsome or gorgeous. While in many ways this is politically advantageous, in others I think it is a handicap. Looking as if he/they were sent right out of central casting, and knowing that he is rich and successful, the alarm bells go off and your defenses go up. He/they just look, and seem, to be too good to be true, and unfortunately, for many people, evidence to the contrary may be powerless to fully overcome this image/impression.

The second thing that hits you is the central theme of the book: the importance of having and executing a good plan. I don't think Romney does *anything* without first having a plan and identifying and garnering the resources necessary to implement it. Unfortunately for his presidential aspirations, *this* plan to win the Republican nomination in 2008, despite its compelling logic and attention to detail, didn't work. Some of this undoubtedly had to do with his being a Mormon. Surprisingly, as he notes in the book, his Mormon faith had even been an issue in the run-up to the 2002 Winter Olympics in *Salt Lake City*,

Utah! Although living in South Carolina and being active in both primaries, I never personally heard or saw any of the much-publicized scurrilous attacks on John McCain in 2000, but on numerous occasions in the more recent campaign, I did hear people openly raise concerns about Romney's religion. Biases, especially religious ones, can be ugly and stubborn things.

Looking beyond their seriousness, the comforting thing about politics is that everyone can be an expert, no one really seems to know how they really work, and other than for the candidates and their constituencies, there is apparently little penalty for being unsuccessful at, or wrong about, them. It is instructive in this regard to consider all the cycled and recycled campaign experts and pundits now on TV commenting about the presidential primaries and election. Maybe it's just the news shows I watch, but most of the people I see gained their credentials and expertise by running or advising (sometimes spectacularly) losing campaigns; and one, the architect or genius of the 2000 and 2004 presidential, was, just a few years later, the goat of the 2006 congressional elections.

Two Hopes, One Faith, and the Future of American Politics

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By the time it is over in November, the U.S. Presidential campaign will have spanned more than 22 months from the time that the first candidates entered the race in January 2007. But this election cycle promises to be remembered for more than its inordinate length. This is the first completely "open" election in 80 years since neither party is running an incumbent President or Vice-President at the top of the ticket. Moreover, the primary process—on the Democratic side—has generated unprecedented levels of voter participation and excitement.

But the central question about this election is whether it will halt or reverse the rightward shift of U.S. politics that began with Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. I am inclined to think that the answer does not so much depend on the personal qualities of the individuals running for office, but rather on social

From Hope to Higher Ground: 12 STOPS to Restoring America's Greatness, by **Mike Huckabee**. New York, NY: Center Street, 2007. 208pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN: 9781599957043.

Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite, by **D. Michael Lindsay**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007. 352pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780195326666.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream, by **Barack Obama**. New York, NY: Random House, 2006. 384pp. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780307237699.

movement mobilizations that have been the mainspring of political shifts in the U.S. through most of our history (Piven 2006).

Since the 1970s, it has been right-wing movements, most particularly the grassroots mobilization of evangelical Christians, that have driven the rightward trajectory of the Republican Party and the country. One shouldn't ignore the huge material contribution of the other key Republican coalition partner—business conservatives. But neither their money nor their expensive think tanks and media operations would have sufficed to elect George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004 without the tireless efforts of thousands of activists of the religious right.

But the recent media narrative argues that the religious right is now in decline because of widespread disillusionment with the Bush administration, generational change, and the rise of new evangelical leaders who emphasize the Biblical imperatives to protect the environment and fight poverty at home and abroad. In this election cycle, the religious right also failed to unify behind one candidate in the Republican primaries and the selection of John McCain as the Republican candidate also signals their declining clout. While McCain campaigned hard to appease religious conservatives, he is still deeply resented by many movement activists for a range of sins including his role in unraveling the corrupt network that linked convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff to leaders of the religious right.

But Bill Clinton's narrow victory in 1992 was also interpreted as a sign that the religious right's time had passed. Then the Republican comeback in the 1994 midterm elections proved that reports of the movement's demise had been greatly exaggerated. How do we know that the religious right is not just going through another temporary lull before it comes roaring back in the 2010 election cycle?

I turned to D. Michael Lindsay's *Faith in the Halls of Power* in the hope that his study would cast some light on this question. Lindsay, who teaches sociology at Rice University, interviewed with 360 evangelicals who have achieved success in politics, higher education, entertainment, business, and assumed the leadership of church groups. He used a snowball sample to locate respondents who combined a deep commitment to their evangelical faith with considerable success in their chosen occupations. In earlier generations, upwardly

mobile evangelicals tended to shift to the mainline Protestant churches that were favored by their affluent neighbors. But over the last few decades, the growing assertiveness of evangelical churches—and the continuing decline of mainline churches—have created an expanding population of affluent evangelicals.

Lindsay's sample is inevitably a mix between militant conservatives and more moderate evangelicals who question the religious right's obsessive focus on abortion and gay marriage. Some of his respondents are government officials and organizational leaders who rose to their current positions through movement politics. Others, however, are following the classic trajectory of upwardly mobile members of religious minorities who hold on to their faith, but try to smooth down the rough edges to minimize conflicts with their new peers.

Some of Lindsay's respondents are eloquent in their efforts to reconcile their material success with their religious beliefs, but the mixed and nonrandom sample ultimately gives us little insight into the future of evangelical conservatism. Lindsay concludes by stressing the tensions between the "cosmopolitan" evangelicism of many of his respondents and the "populist evangelicism" at the grassroots. While he hints that this divide is growing, his findings could still support two completely opposite hypotheses. The first is that the evangelical community now has such a wealthy and well-networked elite cadre that any future grassroots resurgence will be powerfully magnified by those elite resources. The second is that the growing divide between cosmopolitans and populists will further erode the political power of the religious right.

I turned to Mike Huckabee's campaign book, *From Hope to Higher Ground*, as another possible source of data on the same question. Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas who won the Republican contest in Iowa, is a cosmopolitan who has held on to a populist style and rhetoric. The volume is framed as a political self-help book, but Huckabee works hard to expand the evangelical political agenda beyond the culture wars to encompass protecting the environment, improving public schools, and giving out a helping hand to the poor. But the irony of Republican Party politics is that Huckabee's

opponents were running so hard to the right in Iowa that he had to abandon some of the moderate positions that he takes in the book for fear of losing votes among the most militant conservatives. Particularly on immigration and taxation, Huckabee's positions on the campaign trail were much tougher than what he argues in the book.

Huckabee is clearly a gifted politician so his problems in calibrating his political position are indicative of the profound tensions that now run through the Republican coalition. After almost 30 years of Republican dominance, their base is increasingly fractured on a wide range of issues. In fact, John McCain did not really win the Republican nomination; he was just the last person standing as neither Huckabee, nor Romney, nor Giuliani, nor Thompson were able to articulate a set of positions and policies that excited Republican voters. Obviously, one important part of this problem is that many voters who were swept up by the cultural themes of the religious right are increasingly worried about pocketbook issues. But Huckabee's initial attempts to respond to those concerns left him open to harsh attack from the upholders of market fundamentalist orthodoxy.

These signs of aging and decay within the Republican coalition do not augur well for the future influence of the religious right. The Reaganite coalition created the ideal political opportunity for grassroots mobilization by cultural and religious conservatives, and it seems likely that whatever course correction the Republicans decide on will diminish the clout of the religious activists. Nevertheless, it is still too early to write off the religious right as a movement. If the President elected in 2008 is unable to reverse both the growing economic hardship for the broad middle class and the sense that the United States is on the decline globally, there will be ample opportunities for right-wing mobilization that combines militarism, religious absolutism, and a further escalation of the culture wars.

But what of the other possibility? What are the chances that after almost forty years of continuous political defeat, there will be a re-emergence of broad-based, left social movements that make possible a new reform epoch in American politics? According to the cyclical theory of American politics propounded by both Arthur Schlesinger Sr. and his late son, we are more than a decade overdue for

another reform epoch on the scale of the 1930s and the 1960s. After the orgy of greed and acquisitiveness by the very rich that threatens to make the Gilded Age look like a picnic, it would seem time for a "new progressivism" that brings finance capitalism and CEO compensation under control, organizes a "green" economic transition, and provides both the middle class and the poor with improved employment opportunities, health care, and more affordable education from preschool through college.

Because the 1960s were the last reform era and the last period of broad left mobilization, it is hardly coincidental that Barack Obama's campaign speeches this year include powerful echoes of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy whose assassinations in 1968 also effectively killed the dreams of that period. As he indicates in his books, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama has studied the history of the 1960s with great care and insight. Just as George W. Bush sometimes uses a special vocabulary to send messages to religious right voters, Obama seems periodically to whistle at a pitch that can only be heard by those who, like myself, were participants in the movements of the sixties.

Fortunately, however, Obama has crafted his central message to appeal to a much broader audience. His surprising campaign for the Democratic nomination has been clever in combining two basically incompatible political appeals. The first is his use of the rhetoric of a community organizer who invites his listeners to stop sitting around, get active, and build a movement that will get him elected and make real change possible in society. This language of extra-parliamentary mobilization insists that the established political system is weighted in favor of existing elites and that only continuing mobilization can win real reforms. The second is a classical "good government" critique of partisan bickering and "business as usual" in Washington. The proposed solution is to move beyond partisanship and work with those whom we disagree to hammer out new policies. The incompatibility, of course, is that one approach increases polarization while the other seeks to diminish it.

But Obama has effectively obscured this tension by highlighting what the two positions share in common—a deep distrust of conventional politics. This is the same vein that the

“outsider” campaigns of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush also mined by railing against the “powers that be” in the nation’s capital. When he has been most effective, Obama has used this rhetoric to win votes from both the most progressive and the most conservative wings of the Democratic Party.

This dualism in Obama’s political appeal helps explain the puzzling results of the Democratic primaries where the returns do not align with the normal left-center conflicts in the party. So, for example, Obama was able to beat Hillary Clinton by 20 points in traditionally moderate or conservative Virginia while she was able to win comfortably in more traditionally liberal California. Most remarkably, by the time the campaign got to Ohio, Hillary Clinton had decided that her best strategy was to adopt John Edwards’s insistent populism and counter Obama’s dualist appeal by depicting him as a centrist post-partisan who would be unwilling to reopen the North American Free Trade Agreement to renegotiation.

That the dynamics of the campaign forced Hillary Clinton to move significantly leftward from the centrist positions that she and Bill had carefully carved out in the 1980s and 1990s is itself an extremely important piece of data. It suggests that there is a groundswell of populist anger even in historically moderate states. It seems doubtful that either would shift back towards the center on issues of economic and social policy. John McCain is highly vulnerable to a populist attack because of his support for George W. Bush’s domestic policies, especially as the economy contracts as a consequence of the subprime mortgage meltdown. For this reason, it seems very likely that a full-throated economic populism will be a central part of the Democratic campaign in the fall.

Moreover, as the heated Presidential race unfolds, state and local governments across the country will be forced to unleash new waves of budget austerity as recession and falling home prices drive down public sector revenues. Voters will likely be faced with new rounds of fee increases for public services, including higher education, as well as layoffs across the public sector workforce. Moreover, as of mid-February 2008, there were already an estimated 8.8 million homeowners who owed more on their mortgages than their houses were worth

(Andrews and Uchitelle 2008), and that number is likely to rise despite the modest economic stimulus package that the President and the Congress agreed to in January.

Recession and a housing crisis combined with record high prices for gasoline could provide an extraordinary incubator for protest activities that could mobilize people on both sides of the historic divides that usually separate young and old, whites and minorities, and the poor from the middle class. Remarkably, Obama seems to have anticipated the gravity of the moment: “The last time we faced an economic transformation as disruptive as the one we face today, FDR led the nation to a new social compact—a bargain between government, business, and workers that resulted in widespread prosperity and economic security for more than fifty years” (pp. 176–77). “The task for now is to recast ‘FDR’s social compact to meet the needs of a new century’” (p. 180).

Let’s put it this way. Ever since George McGovern was humiliated in the 1972 Presidential election, it has required a substantial level of inebriation before even progressive sociologists could entertain a story line in which the U.S. was ripe for widespread popular protests and a new era of reform. And, of course, even today, it requires no stimulants at all to imagine scenarios in which some combination of terrorism and intensified global conflicts brings us not “summer’s bloom,” but Weber’s “polar night of icy darkness and hardness.” Nevertheless, I would suggest that with just one strong drink, we can now tell each other somewhat persuasive stories about how just as in the 1930s and the 1960s, a Democratic President elected in 2008 will be forced by social movement pressures—and the fear of cracking down on his or her own political base—to drive through reforms that have been unthinkable for decades. Cheers!

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 Are We There Yet? Reflections on the 2008 Political Scene

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Public sociologists have hit the campaign trail this year in blogs, op-eds, essays, and books designed to shine an analytic light on what feels—for better or worse—like the longest running presidential campaign in history. Candidates have been no less prolific, providing the public more than one best-selling biography and assorted “campaign books” designed to lay out their political philosophies and the personal experiences that have led them to their convictions.

Political sociologists work at the intersection of inequality and political participation (see Jeff Manza and Chris Uggen on felony disenfranchisement), or politics and social movements (from the classic works by Doug McAdam to the more contemporary analyses of Kenneth Andrews). Their books are largely directed at a professional audience or the policy crowd that frequents the *American Prospect* or the recent addition to the pantheon, *Pathways*.

Public sociology aimed at understanding the *culture* of modern politics is a different animal. It is more likely to trade on an insider’s vantage point, its authority deriving partly from the biography of the author or from extraordinary access seldom granted to the garden variety fieldworker. Todd Gitlin’s engaging account of the forms of paralysis affecting both Republicans and Democrats, owes a great deal to his own history as an activist and political commentator. It rarely invokes sociology as an analytic framework, but it rests comfortably on the shoulders of organizational studies and social movements literature in ways that are recognizable to the disciplinary specialist. Its contribution lies in the clarity with which it points to contradictions in political ideology, particularly among Republicans, although the Democrats come in for their fair share of critique. Gitlin is not aiming to reframe the way sociologists look at the modern political parties but, instead, to lead readers on a tour of the upheavals at the intersection of Clintonian “third way” politics and the radical right turn of the Bush administration.

The Bulldozer and the Big Tent: Blind Republicans, Lame Democrats, and the Recovery of American Ideals, by **Todd Gitlin**. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2007. 336pp. \$25.95 cloth. ISBN: 978471748533.

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Character Makes a Difference: Where I’m From, Where I’ve Been, and What I Believe, by **Mike Huckabee**. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007. 227pp. \$11.99 paper. ISBN: 978080544677.

The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream, by **Barack Obama**. New York, NY: Random House, 2006. 384pp. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780307237699.

Michael Lindsay’s eye-opening description of the rise of evangelical influence in government, business, the academy, and the entertainment industry derives from the classic tradition of qualitative sociology, but it’s unlikely that he would have been able to assemble the extraordinary database of interviews had he not already worked for years in the Gallup organization, specializing in the study of religion and public opinion. The main contribution of his work is to make clear just how widespread evangelical activism has become in all forms of American life; how organized, deliberate, well-financed, and successful evan-

gical efforts to gain authority and power in the public sphere have been. If one important genre of sociology is the “critique of received wisdom,” which tends to be more theoretical, surely the other is a more descriptive account of “the undiscovered phenomenon,” of which Lindsay’s book is a fine example. Three hundred and sixty interviews of leaders in government, business and culture, including two former presidents, many members of their cabinets, CEOs of some of the nation’s largest firms, teach us a great deal about this modern, but poorly understood, force.

Why, then, place these two books together under the general rubric of the cultural sociology of American politics? And in what ways do they illuminate the revelations contained in the biographical, truly insider, accounts of politicians like Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton, John Edwards or Mike Huckabee? If we treat the political biography as data, to what extent do the insights in books like *The Bulldozer and the Big Tent* or *Faith in the Halls of Power* provide tools for their deconstruction?

Both Gitlin and Lindsay are concerned with the internal belief structures of political movements, the boundary devices they erect to underline their superior positions with respect to the competition, and the complexities of dealing with violations in practice of moral or political precepts that are regarded as sacred. Gitlin seeks to explain what he sees as a bizarre aberration in American political history, in which a regime steamrolled over basic constitutional rights, destroyed alliances fifty years in the making, launched a costly war “without coherent purpose,” and continued it despite resounding public rejection. Merely pointing to facts and statistics that make a mockery of Bush administration claims to credibility is insufficient to explain the triumph of conservative power in this decade. Instead, Gitlin finds the answer in the symbolic coherence and cultural unity that subordinates actual political differences within the movement. The “entitlement to rule” was projected effectively through a compliant media, fearful of providing evidence of liberal tendencies, and hence bent over backwards not to challenge official policy or even to ask hard questions about weapons of mass destruction, the pitfalls of poor planning in the immediate aftermath of the assault on Baghdad, Abu Graib, Guantanamo, and the like.

Lindsay focuses on the moral imperatives of evangelical leadership, which are less strictly theological and more committed to pressing a righteous agenda into secular settings like universities, business firms, Hollywood films, or the corridors of the White House. The emphasis here has to be on the “religious self” because evangelical sentiments turn out to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate liberals like Jimmy Carter, who expressed his moral convictions by putting muscle into international human rights, and arch conservatives like Dick Cheney for whom the crusade to bring democracy to the Islamic world is as zealous as the actual Crusades of the Middle Ages. Any faith that is flexible enough to count both of these men is a “big tent” indeed.

But it would be a mistake to assume that cultural affinities are the whole story behind a conservative or religious ascent. Both books point as well to an underlying structure of organized power that would not dare to leave the fate of the movement to the vagaries of belief and sentiment. Instead, as Lindsay demonstrates with overwhelming evidence, the rise of religious conservatives is a carefully orchestrated, well-financed, and systematic effort to inject evangelicals into the center of American society. Gitlin echoes this point in noting the extraordinary role of conservative think tanks, foundations, cable television stations, and funders prepared to bankroll right wing candidates (and prosecute Democrats) in order to strengthen the far right.

Gitlin’s observations are sobering, but perhaps already well known. Lindsay’s are revelatory for those outside the evangelical fold. In the past evangelicals shunned secular institutions and worldly concerns. Today, they are heading for the center of each and every one of them. Having realized that universities confer cultural legitimacy, evangelicals have insured that fellowships are available for exceptionally talented and fervently religious students destined for the most selective graduate schools (the Mustard Seed Foundation). They endow academic chairs, institutes and centers devoted to the study of religion. Feeling themselves embattled within the ivy walls, they have sought every avenue to reverse their marginality.

Understanding that popular culture is central to the social order, evangelicals gained entry to the film, television and music indus-

try. Who among us realizes that “That 70s Show,” “Mission Impossible,” or the scantily clad “Charlie’s Angels” were produced by Hollywood moguls of an evangelical persuasion? How many readers knew that Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, captains of the aerospace industry, or editors of *Newsweek* and *Fortune* magazine are committed evangelicals? Workers in their firms know because their leaders are creating prayer hours in the middle of the business day, set up industry-based evangelical networks, or insist on distributing Scripture on every meal tray delivered to customers flying Alaska Airlines.

Secular humanists, often the target of conservative or evangelical ire, may feel they have much to fear from this development. Yet the range of political ideologies embraced by those who derive their politics from faith (whether or not they would be defined as evangelical) is so striking that the consequences range from benign to mixed this season, at least where social policy is concerned. Barack Obama’s manifesto, *The Audacity of Hope*, traces his own evolution as a Christian from the unlikely source of his mother, who was deeply skeptical of her fundamentalist neighbors in Kansas. She became an anthropologist devoted to cross-cultural research and exposed Barack to the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Greek and Norse myths (p. 203). She took him to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. From her, Obama gained an appreciation for the role of religion, but not the disposition of a believer. Instead, it was his experience as an organizer on Chicago’s south side, where advocates for the poor and minority communities were found in the church that drew Obama to the faith he now defines as a wellspring of his own politics.

Hilary Clinton was raised a Methodist and took from the teachings of John Wesley, a commitment to good works. She has never wavered from “the push of duty, the pull of grace” (p. 428) as she made her way from Yale Law School to Marion Wright Edelman’s Children’s Defense Fund, to the McGovern campaign, and to the ill-fated attempt to create some form of universal health care. John Edwards, who equates the concept of home with “church on Sunday, church on Sunday night, and church on Wednesdays too” (p. xi) was similarly steeped in a religious tradition, but one which meant little to him until his

eldest son died in a car accident, pushing the Edwards family into a deep depression that lifted with the help of their religious faith and a renewed commitment to public service.

For these Democrats, a religious upbringing or awakening in adulthood has had only the mildest of consequences for their politics. Their biographies make it clear that a desire to serve and address the needs of the disenfranchised, in short, a commitment to the principals of progressive liberal politics, derives from some bedrock moral convictions rooted in faith. This does not mean that these common beliefs produced identical policy preferences or political strategies. Edwards’s is far to the left, emphasizing the evils of corporate power, the necessity of fighting for the little guy, and the signal importance of rebuilding the union movement. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama outlines progressive commitments, but seeks common ground with his opponents, looking for lines of compromise. This appears to be more than just campaign rhetoric as critics of his health care plan would argue. The legacy of the first Clinton administration, which brought us welfare reform and NAFTA, bears little resemblance to the populist message of the Edwards campaign.

Even more striking is the divergent political direction taken by Mike Huckabee, whose manifesto *Character Makes a Difference*, seeks (and finds) no daylight between his evangelical faith and his role as a public servant. While the Democrats promote religious values, but stick to a fairly rigid vision of church/state separation, Huckabee looks to the state as an instrument of faith. He opens the book by lamenting what he sees as the moral decline of the nation and then tells his readers that they need not despair because they can “support candidates that share their Christian standards.” A pastor by profession, Huckabee pursued public office when he “felt God’s call to leave the pulpit and take [his] message into the political arena” (p. ii). His “God-centered world view” permitted Huckabee, a Republican, to triumph in Arkansas, a largely Democratic state. The purpose of politics, for Huckabee, is to “support and uplift fellow Christians as we work together to build God’s kingdom” (p. iii). You can’t “set your own moral thermostat,” he admonishes readers (p. 99). It is up to God to set a single moral standard, and the purpose of government is to enforce it.

Yet that single standard seems to mean very different things in practice, even in the Republican Party. For John McCain, it means cutting taxes and stripping the government down to its bare bones. For Huckabee, at least during his tenure in Arkansas, it meant creating a state child health care system and putting more money into public education. Perhaps liberals have less to fear from devoted evangelicals than we might have thought. Well, yes, unless their uniform opposition to abortion, gay marriage, affirmative action, or school integration happens to push your buttons.

Even so, the more general point to be derived from crossing the sociological diagnoses of American politics and the personal perspectives of these politicians is that religious conviction is ubiquitous, but that does not take us very far in assessing the political consequences. The “constant” of Christian faith cannot explain the highly variable political commitments described in the biographies and campaign manifestos of this season. Instead, we must turn to Gitlin’s expose on the exercise of unbridled power, unchecked by law, by public protest, or by the dismay of international allies over the hubris that comes with wielding that big stick. In short, the soci-

ological analysis of power, of organized interest groups, of our sorry system of campaign finance, is needed to understand the political landscape we have lived through since Nixon.

Gitlin is cautiously optimistic that the conservative regime is nearly done, but the caution comes from his understanding of the fractious nature of the Democratic Party. The anti-war movement Gitlin and others threw at the Democratic Party broke it apart, and what those conflicts did not destroy, the splintering consequences of identity politics further undermined in the decades thereafter (1993). Without the unifying ideology and organized social movement that helped modern conservatism to triumph, it is not clear to Gitlin that the Democrats can rally around any figure with the degree of consensus it will take to defeat the machine he unmasks in *The Bulldozer and the Big Tent*. Even with a decided fund raising advantage, the Democrats seem unable to crawl under that big tent and stay there long enough to put a leader in the White House. We shall see, all too soon, whether his concerns were warranted, or a new day is dawning.

Reference

Gitlin, Todd. 1993. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books.