



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Review

Author(s): Claire Potter

Review by: Claire Potter

Source: *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (Jun., 1999), pp. 324-325

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2567553>

Accessed: 20-04-2016 01:35 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Organization of American Historians, Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American History*

Throughout, Nelson does a wonderful job re-creating the atmosphere of briefing rooms, describing the court politics faced by press secretaries in each White House, and explaining the competing cultures and demands of the press and the politicians.

At the President's Side is an unusually even collection of papers by prominent academics, journalists, and one former holder of the office (Dan Quayle). The book is skillfully edited by Timothy Walch, the director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. From the early days of the Republic until the mid-twentieth century, vice presidents were chosen to balance the presidential ticket, but with little thought to their ability. The vice presidency was considered political oblivion. Republican bosses selected Theodore Roosevelt to run with incumbent President McKinley in order to move the crusading New York governor where he could do no harm. The Democrats similarly condemned another Progressive governor, Indiana's Thomas Marshall, who became Woodrow Wilson's vice president. Though vice presidents of the first half of the twentieth century were often men of great talent, they were chosen by party leaders rather than presidents; thus presidents rarely respected or made use of them.

Vice presidents were often frustrated by their lack of importance but had no illusions about it. On taking the office, Theodore Roosevelt decided to use his newfound free time to return to the study of law. Thomas Marshall told his bodyguard to relax since "nobody was ever crazy enough to shoot at a vice president." Most famously, Franklin Roosevelt's first vice president, John Nance Garner, compared the office unfavorably to "a pitcher of warm piss."

From such humble beginnings, a growing presidency led to a growing vice presidency. The unexpected ascension of an uninformed Harry S. Truman during World War II led Congress to place vice presidents on the National Security Council. Aided by the advent of jet travel, Nixon further enlarged the vice presidential role in foreign affairs with global sojourns. Nixon also became a political attack dog for the "hidden-hand" Eisenhower, a role President Nixon gave his own vice president, the hapless Spiro Agnew. Lyndon Johnson added NASA (National Aeronautical and Space

Administration) to the vice presidential portfolio but was still frustrated by his impotence compared to his glory days as Senate leader. Johnson marginalized his own vice president, Hubert Humphrey, particularly after Humphrey dared question United States involvement in Vietnam.

It was up to President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale to establish the modern vice presidency. Mondale had an office in the West Wing of the White House, access to all of the president's meetings, and influence over political appointments. His successors, George Bush, Quayle, and Gore, have enjoyed similar power. Since presidents have found a strong vice presidency useful and four of the past ten vice presidents have gone on to become president, vice presidential power seems likely to endure.

Robert Maranto
Federal Executive Institute
Charlottesville, Virginia

The Lineaments of Wrath: Race, Violent Crime, and American Culture. By James W. Clarke. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998. xviii, 339 pp. \$39.95, ISBN 1-56000-358-8.)

James W. Clarke proposes "to describe . . . the reasons for a shocking pattern of nearly four centuries of violence between whites and blacks" and "its consequences, which are most vividly observed in the peculiar self-destructive quality of black-on-black violence that has grown to crisis proportions in American inner cities." The title, from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), refers to Thomas Jefferson's speculation that slavery corrupted master and servant alike and permanently altered the character of each. Like the slave-owning president, Clarke, in *The Lineaments of Wrath*, argues that the significance of violent racism has been primarily cultural and moral—the creation of a black underclass that is inherently violent, irresponsible, and psychologically unsuited to modern life.

Needless to say, this is a difficult argument to engage, particularly since the text reveals such selective engagement with the critical work available. Clarke is largely influenced by scholarship that originally sought historical

explanations for the apparently pervasive social violence of the 1960s and even earlier work that linked violence to an exceptional "American" identity. Without drawing on many of the strengths of that school of thought, *Lineaments of Wrath* is built around its greatest weakness: assuming the self-evidence of the phenomenon at hand (in this case, black social pathology). While Clarke shows systematic white violence as constitutive of black poverty, documentation of institutional racism disappears in the final chapters, as the "black underclass" loses its capacity for self-control or rational choice. Clarke sees that as evidence of a permanently altered culture (or subculture—he misuses those terms interchangeably), which is based on an unconscious, largely self-destructive impulse. In fact, much of the book relies on such odd pronouncements, many made in concluding paragraphs or chapters. For example, Clarke's unsupported statement, "Without families there can be no social order," explains the point of equally thin assertions throughout that black family structure has been in collapse for centuries.

The problem with critiquing such a book is the incoherence of its very premises and the intuitive leaps between argument and evidence that reading it requires. Much of the text is organized into four sections that outline African American history but ignore or mischaracterize many interpretive shifts in the field that demonstrate agency and decision making among the poor. Clarke also fails to engage scholars who have explored alternative economies among poor people, or those who take nonnuclear family and extended kin groups seriously as stable social units.

This book is full of value judgments. Connected to that problem are insensitive and offensive language choices, specifically those that evoke racial devolution, animality, and the primitive. "Like mistreated dogs that have turned mean," Clarke writes, "some black males had become unpredictable and dangerous predators." At another point, he contrasts "the more familiar and conjugal patterns of Europeans and white Americans" with those of the black poor, which emerge perhaps from "a different cultural tradition that can be traced back to roots in sub-Saharan Africa." Those flaws only add insult to injury, but it is

more than a shame to see historical methods used to forward arguments that are essentially ideological, both in content and in purpose.

Claire Potter
Wesleyan University
Middletown, Connecticut

Abundance and Anxiety: America, 1945–1960. By Gary A. Donaldson. (Westport: Praeger, 1997. xiv, 191 pp. \$55.00, ISBN 0-275-95773- X.)

Blues for America: A Critique, a Lament, and Some Memories. By Doug Dowd. (New York: Monthly Review, 1997. xii, 377 pp. Cloth, \$38.00, ISBN 0-85345-981-9. Paper, \$18.00, ISBN 0-85345-982-7.)

For historians, the opportunity to write about aspects of twentieth-century American history has proven virtually limitless. From Theodore Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, from the New Deal to the Great Society, the century has witnessed countless individuals and events of historical significance. The result has been a wealth of fine analytical accounts describing those events and personalities from many perspectives. Gary A. Donaldson's *Abundance and Anxiety* and Doug Dowd's *Blues for America* offer two additions to the already voluminous literature on the subject.

The theme of Donaldson's book is that during the decade and a half following the end of World War II, the American people exhibited an extraordinarily high level of confidence in their ability to accomplish virtually any task they wanted: "stop communism, bring an end to poverty, send rockets into space, end racism, build a house." Their success in achieving, or at least in beginning to reach, those goals boosted that confidence to even loftier heights. Along with success, the postwar era brought problems. The victory of the United States over Germany and Japan did not produce a world free from the threat of aggression or totalitarianism, nor did it produce a home front free from economic and social inequities. The era therefore combined, as the book's title states, abundance and anxiety.

The book is a straightforward narrative synopsis of the main domestic and foreign