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promises: "Not only the byzantine conundrums of procedural debate . . . but also wars, adulteries, revolutions, personal vendettas, secret societies (and parties to oppose them), government repressions, good humor, and bad taste—all the candy we have come to expect in our politics" (p. 19). It is a great treat indeed. Dion has raised the bar for creative integration of formal models with historical research; few are likely to reach it.


David J. Lanoue, Texas Tech University

Maybe it's not just the economy, stupid. That is the theme of E. D. Dover's comprehensive study of the 1996 presidential race between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole. In a previous book, Dover argued that the results of modern presidential elections are largely influenced by two factors: the strength and political skills of the incumbent or "surrogate incumbent" (e.g., a sitting vice president running for the top job) and the interpretation of the incumbent's performance by the mass media, particularly television. These two factors ultimately determine whether the election will feature a "strong incumbent" or a "weak incumbent." Strong incumbents are characterized by a high level of public approval, positive press coverage, and easy paths to (re)nomination. Weak incumbents have low numbers in the polls, are treated harshly by the media, and generally face significant challenges in their party's primary elections. The result is predictable well before November: Strong incumbents win (Ronald Reagan in 1984), and weak incumbents lose (Jimmy Carter in 1980).

Dover takes us through Bill Clinton's first term, from his failed early initiatives, to the Republican capture of Congress in 1994, to the president's rehabilitation and triumphant re-election campaign two years later. According to Dover, it was not at all clear early in his term whether Clinton would reach 1996 as a strong or weak incumbent. Indeed, the early signs were not at all promising. But there were, the author argues, two political battles in late 1995 that allowed Clinton to outfox his GOP adversaries (including eventual Republican nominee Bob Dole, then Senate majority leader) and to regain positive coverage by the major television news outlets. These were the battle over Medicare in September and the struggle over the budget (leading to a government shutdown) in November. These transformational events allowed the president to enter 1996 as a strong incumbent, avoid intraparty challenges during the primaries, and sail to a rather easy victory over Dole.

Dover argues that Clinton's successful campaign in 1996 was not a foregone conclusion. Had Clinton mishandled the Medicare debate or the government shutdown, it is possible that the negative press coverage that followed the 1994 health care reform debacle might have spilled over into the election year. If that had happened, Dover suggests, the president would probably have faced a divisive primary election struggle against a serious challenger (Dover names Congressman Richard Gephardt), thus weakening him and causing the media to treat "Clinton as a loser and Dole as a qualified successor" (p. 180). Under this alternative scenario, Clinton could have been sent back to Arkansas the same way George Bush was banished to Houston four years earlier.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first sets out Dover's theory of mediated presidential elections and details the argument that he set out in his earlier work. The second chapter provides an account of Clinton's two-year rise from weak to strong incumbent, emphasizing the two partisan battles fought in late 1995. Chapter 3 covers the 1996 Republican campaign, highlighting Dole's struggle for the nomination and the media's difficulty in choosing a major adversary (Gramm? Forbes? Buchanan?). The penultimate chapter deals with the period between March (when both parties' nominees were clearly known) and November. This chapter emphasizes Dover's contention that, because of Clinton's perceived status as a strong incumbent, the general election campaign was essentially already over before it started. Finally, in chapter 5, Dover briefly sets out his conclusions about what was learned from the 1996 campaign.

To be sure, most of the theoretical ground here has already been covered by, among others, Richard Neustadt (on the president's ability to use rhetorical powers for political gain), Martin Wattenberg (on the candidate-centered nature of politics in the television era), and Shanto Iyengar (on the critical mediating role played by the network news organizations). In addition, Dover gives fairly short shrift to the fact that, Medicare and budget battles notwithstanding, Clinton entered the 1996 campaign riding a wave of peace and prosperity. This begs an important question, especially given Clinton's continued high popularity ratings in face of scandal and impeachment (this is written in February 1999). Is it possible that once the public became convinced that the economy was strong and growing, Clinton's reelection was already assured, and everything else was just a sideshow? Dover shows poll numbers indicating that the president's margin over Dole rose noticeably after the government shutdown. But Dover does not (indeed, cannot) demonstrate conclusively that this "rally" in Clinton's popularity would have been sustained for another year without the underlying theme of economic prosperity (consider, for example, Bush's fall from grace after climbing to stratospheric levels of popularity after the Gulf War in 1991, just one year before the start of his reelection campaign).

Despite these concerns, this is a serious, well-written book, worthy of attention from students of the presidency and presidential elections. Dover has provided an exhaustive body of evidence in favor of his thesis, and he illustrates his points skillfully with excerpts from media coverage of the race. This book is a fascinating and very detailed assessment of the 1996 presidential campaign and of Clinton's first term. It clearly contributes to the debate on the role of the mass media in structuring voters' opinions about their political leaders.


Clyde P. Weed, Southern Connecticut State University

John Gerring has produced a work of sustained value here. His book is an important attempt to reconfigure electoral periodization as it has developed since V.O. Key's work ("A Theory of Critical Elections," Journal of Politics 17 [1955]: 3–18). The study is centered on the belief patterns of party elites, with only occasional forays into the extensively considered subject of mass electoral behavior. Gerring's innovative work restores the primacy of ideas to the study of party conflict. It is the best example I have seen of the careful integration of historical material into a research design. In addition, the careful consideration of Whig-Republican ideological doctrine helps address the consistent inattention received by the pre-1964 GOP.

The sheer range and scope of the work is bound to generate
discussion and addenda, which is to the advantage of political scientists who work with nonquantitative, historically based material. All researchers concerned with models of historical American party systems should consider this book.

The author’s fundamental argument is refreshingly simple: Belief patterns drive party leaders and other political elites. Ideas matter. A focus on mass electoral behavior detracts attention from this, and results in a misleading emphasis on discontinuities and sudden changes in party appeals. While elite belief patterns can change, they show remarkable continuity over much American political history. Gerring employs both content analysis and the careful use of nonquantitative materials to examine the alteration of campaign appeals within party coalitions over time. The result is a provocative reassessment of many of our earlier schematic patterns.

Gerring believes Whig-Republican history is best viewed in a continuity of two broad cycles: the “Nationalist Cycle,” 1828–1924, and the “Neo-Nationalist Cycle,” 1928 to the present. The first cycle recalls Herbert Croly’s (The Promise of American Life, 1991) notion of a nationalist party of the dominant agenda, in this instance the imposition of order on disparate sectional forces challenging nationalist impulses. In the first period, the Whig-Republican themes of choice involved social harmony, mercantilism, free labor, and a kind of limited nineteenth-century statism. There is, in short, a degree of unbroken continuity from Lincoln to Coolidge, which also drew strength from the belief patterns of American Whigs. By this view, 1928 constituted a break in Repub-
lican politics; the party began to stress antistatism and free-market capitalism in a more directly populist fashion well prior to the New Deal.

Gerring sees continuity between contemporary Republi-canism and the campaign conducted by Herbert Hoover in 1928. He feels the party was tilting at collectivist dragons, throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, which only enhanced these dispositions. Barry Goldwater was speaking lines originally scripted by Hoover. Unabashedly democratic and populist, the post-1928 Republicans have moved great distances from the measured style of their Whig antecedents. The division of Republican electoral history into two overall stages implicitly challenges the importance of both the 1896 election and the Progressive Era to the evolution of Repub-
lican doctrines. Even the New Deal period constitutes less of a break than once thought. For Gerring, Republican appeals show remarkable continuity, with electoral reversals often having less independent effect than once thought.

The Democratic Party, as always, proves a more difficult case. Three broad epics emerge in its development: Jefferson-
ian (1828–92); Populist (1896–1948); and Universalist (1952–92). The first period involves the widely accepted notion of the nineteenth-century Democratic Party repre-
senting antistatism, sectional perspectives, and a preoccupa-
tion with liberty at the expense of nationalizing efforts. The middle period stresses the egalitarian, majoritarian efforts of William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, with far less emphasis on the effect of the heirs to the “Bourbon” tradition, such as Alton Parker, John W. Davis, or even Alfred E. Smith. The final period is viewed as stressing a broad influence that emphasizes social welfare concerns, civil rights, and to some degree redistributive policies.

All important attempts at grand theory generate discus-
sion, and this work will prove no exception. Gerring dates the Republican conversion to modern free-market economics to the 1920s, but this may impose a false continuity. Republican presidents of the 1920s saw themselves as spokesmen for the “nationalizing” impulse, and the Right-Left distinctions so familiar to post-1936 commentators were not part of the political dialogue of the 1920s. Indeed, the terms liberal and conservative were not in extensive use before 1934. The “new era” economics of the Hoover period saw not only the commonly recognized allegiance to the protective tariff but also the maintenance of a high-wage policy that grew out of the Republican “associational” efforts of the 1920s. The inability of Republican leaders to consider real modification of this nationalist economic system was the principal cause of the wage inflexibility that developed after 1929. Much of this bore little relation to free-market economics.

Gerring correctly points out that the party moved gradually toward an endorsement of free trade by the late 1940s, but its inability to do so throughout the 1920s and 1930s was a primary source of the party’s intellectual decline. Initially hostile to Keynesian economics, GOP spokesmen often had little to offer in terms of a cogent overall approach to discussions of political economy during the 1930s. Walter Lippmann noted correctly that the GOP in the 1930s lost its mantle as the party of ideas. The most profoundly important shift within the party after the 1920s actually involved an internal transformation. The formerly conservative party leaders of the Northeast were replaced by the liberal Dewey-Rockefeller groupings there, while the formerly insurgent West was represented after 1940 by such conservative stal-
warts as Robert Taft and, later, Barry Goldwater. This internal Republican transformation would have profound consequences by the 1960s as regional political power shifted.

In the case of the Democratic Party, Gerring’s Populist stage may overstate the continuity between the egalitarian impulses of separate periods. The successful Wilsonian coa-
232lion of 1912 and 1916 contained substantial antistatist Bourbon elements. It should be recalled that the dais of Liberty League dinners in 1935 and 1936 featured numerous prominent Wilsonians bitterly hostile to the New Deal. Even the nomination of Roosevelt in 1932 was a near thing, the product more of hostility to a second Smith candidacy than fidelity to a progressive agenda. Had there been a few more ballots, Newton Baker, Wilson’s last Secretary of War and later a prominent New Deal critic, likely would have been the compromise choice. The Democratic Party remained so inconsistently responsive to New Deal initiatives after the fight over the Holding Company Act of 1935 that Roosevelt began to develop an extraparty apparatus, as Sidney Milks has pointed out (The President and the Parties: Transformation of the Party System since the New Deal, 1993).

This important, genuinely original study should serve to point out how important the politics of elite groupings can be. It will generate discussion for some time. It deals carefully and thoughtfully with the evolution of electoral coalitions over time, and it also should attract the attention of scholars in the areas of communication and rhetoric. All scholars of historical party dynamics will find it required reading.

ences. Edited by Pippa Norris. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rien-
nier, 1997. 335p. $59.95 cloth, $23.95 paper. W. Lance Bennett, University of Washington