

# political book notes

*Public Affairs books to be published in April.*

**American Dream/Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy.** *Sandy Vogelgesang.* Norton, \$13.95.

**The American Prosecutor: A Search for Identity.** *Joan E. Jacoby.* Lexington, \$28.95. The title of this book is misleading. Instead of "Catcher in the Rye: DA-Style," we get "How I spent my LEAA grant." Jacoby deserves credit, however, for focusing on the nuts-and-bolts of DA offices instead of on courtroom showmanship. The most useful sections are her comparisons of the prosecutors in New Orleans, Kansas City, and Boulder, Colorado. Although Jacoby thinks they are all doing fine, another conclusion is that if you're going to commit a crime, do it in Boulder. New Orleans' DAs will vigorously pursue your case only if they are certain to get a conviction. But the office also has a "post-conviction tracking unit," which might step in to oppose your parole application. In Kansas City, the policy is to keep the docket moving, dispose of cases as early as possible. Plea bargaining is pervasive, but justice is swift—the DA files charges within 20 hours after arrest. In prosperous, beautiful Boulder, however, the emphasis is on "sensitivity to the defendant." The community wants criminals to serve their terms locally, preferably in some sort of community service program, because, they believe, a person is "bummed out" returning to Boulder from the state penitentiary.

—James Lyons

**Authority.** *Richard Sennett.* Knopf, \$10.

**Death Row.** *Bruce Jackson, Diane Christian.* Beacon, \$11.95.

**Farm and Food Policy: Issues of the 1980's.** *Don Paarlberg.* University of Nebraska, \$16.50.

**How to Win Votes.** *Edward N. Costikyan.* Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, \$12.95. Costikyan is a former Tammany leader who analyzes campaign techniques with humor and a healthy skepticism. He develops rules for campaigning, embellished with anecdotes drawn largely from his New York City experience. His conclusions are unsurprising, however: Anyone rich and vigorous enough (preferably residing in an area represented by an enfeebled incumbent of the majority party),

who can persuade enough people to visit strangers in their homes over a year in advance of the election, who can articulate "new" approaches to old problems, and who can keep all of the above in motion many hours a day for many months (it helps to be unemployed) has a plausible shot at elective office. Being born to the right parents or famous in an unrelated field supercedes most of the above.

Less obviously, Costikyan targets the emerging non-voting majority as the key to electoral success in the 80s. As a graduate of the era of party machines who laments the demise of their local clubs and personal services, Costikyan is suitably optimistic about the potential for hooking the non-voter on the ballot habit. But he points out that constant polling by the candidates, and constant readjustment of their programs to match those polls, tend to reduce the distinctions between them, making the outcome of the election seem increasingly irrelevant—and encouraging voters to stay home.

—Pat Martin

**In the Absence of Power.** *Haynes Johnson.* Viking, \$12.95. See "Richard Reeves on Political Books" in the February issue.

**Kennedy and Roosevelt.** *Michael R. Beschloss.* Norton, \$14.95. Among the fascinating facts uncovered by the 23-year-old author of this book is that during the twenties, while Joseph Kennedy, Sr. was making his millions, FDR was also trying his hand in the business world—and displaying a flair for the flaky that was to remain unequaled until his son James launched his own career in commerce. But whether FDR was trying to corner the lobster market or Kennedy was manipulating RKO and Pathe, neither manifested zealous solicitude for the rights of the average investor. Who knows—it may have been guilt that led to the SEC, their one great joint venture.

If Kennedy was the better businessman, Roosevelt was clearly the better politician. He used Kennedy much more than Kennedy used him, shamelessly manipulating the Boston Irishman's desire for social respectability with empty honors like a largely ceremonial ambassadorship to the Court of St. James. It was an appointment that ended Kennedy's own political life, and made it necessary for him to live

through his sons—for, by opposing aid to Britain in 1940, he earned the right to oblivion that belongs to those who are dead wrong at crucial moments in history.

—Charles Peters

**Nuclear Power and Legal Advocacy.** *Constance Ewing Cook. Lexington, \$17.95.* Cook gives a thorough account of the uses of “legal advocacy” to stall, obstruct, and ultimately prevent the building of nuclear power plants. Among the lessons: It doesn’t matter who wins the lawsuit. Given the possibilities for “lengthy regulatory hearings and subsequent litigation,” the “impact of the duration of the judicial process has been as significant as the impact of actual court rulings.” What’s more, “it is likely that restrictive new legislation will contribute to the further use of legal advocacy, perhaps this time by both sets of interest groups.” This should encourage the anti-nuclear forces—since the loser in these endless regulatory skirmishes is inevitably the side that wants to do something, Cook persuasively demonstrates that the mighty nuclear industry never had a chance against the array of ill-funded interest groups that took it to court. But the rest of us should be troubled, if we think that sometimes the government needs to get something accomplished quickly.

—Robert M. Kaus

**On and Off the Floor: Thirty Years as a Correspondent on Capitol Hill.** *Samuel Shaffer. Newsweek, \$8.95.*

**The Progressive Presidents: Roosevelt, Wilson, Roosevelt, Johnson.** *John Morton Blum. Norton, \$11.95.*

**The Rise and Fall of the Shah.** *Amin Saikal. Princeton, \$14.50.* Nothing’s more galling for a prophet than to be overtaken by your own forecasts. That’s what happened to Amin Saikal, an Afghan-born political scientist who now teaches in Australia. In 1975, convinced that the Shah would someday be toppled, Saikal began working on a history of the regime. The prevailing view, of course, was that the Shah had things under control. Saikal amassed convincing evidence to the contrary. By the time he ran it all through his typewriter, however, Iran had long since been swept into the maelstrom. Saikal’s scholarly tone makes for dry reading, but it’s worth the effort, to help arrive at a better understanding of where all that fear and vitriol came from.

**The Squeeze.** *James Dale Davidson. Summit, \$11.95.*

**Sweden: The Middle Way on Trial.** *Marquis W. Childs. Yale, \$12.95.*

**Three Farms: Making Milk, Meat and Money from the American Soil.** *Mark Kramer. Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$12.95.* Starting with a

man who actually satisfies the romantic image of the farmer—gruff but kind, working dawn to dusk, fiercely independent—Kramer moves you across the landscape of American agriculture, finally arriving at the California agribusiness venture where machines do everything but the eating. Kramer lived on the farms he was researching, and it has paid off. He sees the sophistication with which a supposed rustic simpleton perfects the details of a cow-milking gallery. He empathizes with the agribusiness scientists who breed tomatoes for hardness so harvesting machines can’t cut through them any more than your teeth can. This book is keenly and quietly written by a writer who has the knack for getting right up into the action, while maintaining enough distance to duck the combine arms.

—Gregg Easterbrook

**The Ultimate Tyranny.** *Eugene J. McCarthy. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$12.95.* In this hodgepodge of ideas, mostly inspired by his third-party campaign for president in 1976, McCarthy makes two convincing points: First, the Democrats and Republicans, wherever the courts let them, will gang up to rig the election laws against minor parties. Second, the federal campaign-financing laws have turned over our basic democratic processes to a bureaucracy of unusual incompetence and spinelessness.

McCarthy has great fun poking holes in the desperate attempts of the Federal Election Commission and the Federal Communications Commission to rationalize their two-party favoritism. But it is the fun of the crank litigant, too embedded in his righteous cause to understand the other side. What McCarthy won’t admit is that in a sensible system, he would get his chance to run for president, but at some point candidates with only five- or six-percent support would be weeded out, letting the voters choose among those with enough votes to win. As it was, McCarthy might have split the liberal vote and thrown the election to Ford, so the desperate rationalizations of the Democrats were understandable.

The remainder of the book consists of a sometimes maddening series of musings on the Constitution, the press, and the bureaucracy (e.g. “the thrust of the ‘negative income tax’ concept is that all incomes should approach equality and, by projection, that all wealth should be equally distributed”). The climax comes when McCarthy, after 200 pages asserting his right to “affect the outcome of the election” and attacking “the intrusion of partisanship,” laments the “irresponsible legislative actions” that stem from “the breakdown of party discipline.”

—R.M.K.

**Unrepentant Radical: An American Activist’s Account of Five Turbulent Decades.** *Sidney Lens. Beacon, \$14.95.*