

bound up in our nation's inability to grasp the true state of science today—call it *Dissciency*—and leave the lunatic fringe to *The National Enquirer*.

—Elliott Beard

**Life Itself: Abortion in the American Mind.** Roger Rosenblatt. *Random House*, \$20. Outside Buffalo's two abortion clinics, anti-abortion protesters scream, "Murderers, murderers!" Across the street, members of abortion rights groups retort, "Nazis!" An armory holds nearly 200 arrested members of the national anti-abortion group Operation Rescue. Clinic defenders scuffle with police.

Looking at this scene, you might say America is at war. Rosenblatt, a former essayist for *Time* and now a commentator on the "MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour," has written a book that aims to be a peace plan. When I first heard of it, I was intrigued and hopeful. Rosenblatt asks people to accept that they disagree. Then, he hopes, once people start to listen to one another, they will discover they have more in common than they thought and will lay down their angry placards.

Rosenblatt's plan is both simple and rational, but this does not mean it would work in practice. Real efforts to bring the two sides together show how difficult it can be. Consider the Greater Bridgeport (Connecticut) Adolescent Pregnancy Program. This coalition of about 20 social service agencies from across the abortion spectrum initially aligned to fight teen pregnancy. (One in five births in Bridgeport is to a teen mother, making its teen pregnancy rate twice that of the state's.) The coalition includes representatives of the Bridgeport Catholic diocese and Planned Parenthood. Not only does the group agree to avoid discussing abortion, but it excludes from its ranks representatives of the city's abortion clinic and Operation Rescue. Because the coalition is in constant danger of violating the Catholic Church's prohibition on artificial birth control, staffers get around the problem with verbal gymnastics worthy of Thomist philosophers. For instance, in coalition-sponsored sex education courses, staffers never "promote" birth

control, they "give information" about it.

These efforts are a far cry from what Rosenblatt has in mind. In his post-abortion-war idyll, anti-abortion activists will allow abortion until the fetus is viable—the same policy that was in force in the mid-seventies after *Roe v. Wade*. Rosenblatt's only nod to anti-abortion interests is to say he would like to see abortion discouraged, but he does not say how. His view is staunchly pro-choice, sprinkled with phrases from the National Abortion Rights Action League and Planned Parenthood. He gives no ground to the concerns of abortion opponents. In fact, he ignores his peace plan's first tenet: Listen to the other side.

For nearly 20 years, anti-abortion activists have fought an uphill but increasingly successful battle. By helping to elect hundreds of anti-abortion politicians to state office, they have played a crucial role in passing laws restricting teenagers' and poor women's access to abortion in more than half the states. Other restrictions, such as requiring a woman to notify her spouse before having an abortion, are just months away from going into effect. Abortion opponents will risk arrest, harass abortion doctors, and even bomb their offices—actions that arise from extremities of feeling that aren't going to dissolve because it might be "reasonable" for these people to compromise. The status quo—which they see as legalized murder—will never be acceptable.

The polls, too, show just how complicated this issue is. Rosenblatt cites a survey taken in 1989, nearly 20 years after the legalization of abortion, showing that although 77 percent of Americans believe abortion is either murder or the taking of a life, 73 percent also say the abortion decision should be up to the woman. Rosenblatt ran into this contradiction when he went to Iowa to do some reporting. Even Minnette Doderer, a pro-choice state legislator Rosenblatt interviews, said, "You know what I don't like about abortion . . . ? Who likes to think of themselves killing a fetus?" Another supporter of legal abortion, Rita Bronson, a mother, says, "I don't feel comfortable with abortion." If Rosenblatt had done

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more first-hand reporting, he might have seen that many people express similarly ambivalent views. There is something presumptuous about claiming to have the answer to "America's most divisive social question" in 181 pages of big type and wide margins.

The divisiveness of the abortion issue can be interpreted in various ways. Some see it as a culture war, others as a gender war, still others as the centuries-old war between the secular and the religious. However you interpret it, those who support legal abortion must acknowledge that the incidence of abortion in the United States—the highest of any Western, democratic country—is disturbing. The abortion rate in the United States is twice that of France, England, or Italy and four times that of Holland, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the leading reproductive health research organization. Perhaps the statistic is a clue to the rage that continues to fuel our abortion battles when most European countries have managed to accept a compromise.

Even such bastions of Catholicism as France, Italy, and Spain incorporate their moral disapproval of abortion into essentially pro-choice laws. In Italy, a woman may have an abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, after counseling and a seven-day waiting period. In France, abortion is legal during the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. If a woman wants a later abortion, she needs permission from two physicians who must certify that the child would be born with deformities or that the mother's life would be threatened if she continued the pregnancy. The government pays 70 percent of the cost of an abortion. Both laws underscore that an abortion ends a life and should not be used as a method of birth control. To that end, the French government aggressively promotes contraception, offers at least a six-month maternity leave, and gives cash grants to mothers and favorable tax treatment to families.

These countries' strategies are the very thing Rosenblatt is writing about when he says he would like to permit abortion but discourage it. How do we get there? There will be no simple laying down of arms. There can be no winner-take-all plan. It may be a long negotiation, but if the goal is to find a

way to reflect Americans' respect for women's independence *and* their concern for human life, no effort is too great.

—Alissa Rubin

**The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected.** Earl Black, Merle Black. *Harvard*, \$29.95. Frustrated by federal orders and intervention, Louisiana Governor Earl Long once shrugged hopelessly: What can a man do now that the feds have the bomb? Black and Black offer a belated answer to Long's question: The feds have the bomb, but the South has the votes.

In convincing detail, the Blacks dramatize the great new fact of presidential politics: The South, composed of the 11 slave states that seceded in 1860 and 1861, is the richest electoral prize in the nation. Solidly Democratic just 40 years ago, the South is now just as solidly Republican in presidential elections. This book is a clear and credible survey of that phenomenon, and it's especially welcome in a year of generalizations about "the Bubba vote." The Blacks' most important point here is that Bubba—a white voter with patriotic sympathies and a distrust of Washington—is everywhere, and the Democrats had better pay attention to him.

The Democrats now enter the presidential campaign with a base of only Minnesota and the District of Columbia—2 percent of the electoral vote. Thirty-nine states now usually go Republican, including all 11 southern states. The South controls 54 percent of a winning electoral majority; in four of the last five elections, victorious Republicans have swept the South's electoral votes. In other words, the presidency is now the Republicans' to lose, and the South is their greatest area of strength.

So what do these southerners, whose wariness of Washington has now spread nationwide, believe? Core white Republicans made up 44 percent of the total southern electorate in 1988. "They feel exceptionally positive toward southerners, conservatives, the military, the importance of religion, all symbolic representations of the established order, as well as toward Republicans," write the authors. And that's not simply a provincial profile: Core white

Republicans accounted for 41 percent of the northern electorate (the Blacks use "North" to describe any state outside of the old Confederacy) the same year. The GOP began with those blocs and built stunning majorities, North and South.

The matter of race is inescapable. Working- and middle-class whites, North and South, have left the Democrats believing that the Great Society legacy diverted their tax dollars and jobs to undeserving blacks and the poor. In terms of social policy, the Democrats are viewed as nothing less than an invading force.

If the South is now a mirror of national themes, is there anything southern about the new alignment? Perhaps it is this: The southern tradition of honoring the past evolves out of the same fear that made Nixon, Reagan, and Bush attractive to voters everywhere. White southerners possess a cultural fear of forcible intervention that destroys familiar social order. The South has stories of damn Yankees; these days, the North, too, can cluck over liberal atrocities.

Think, for instance, of the vicious fight against busing in South Boston in the seventies, the success of California's Proposition 13, or New Jersey's retaliation against Jim Florio. At the heart of each is fear of the unfamiliar and resentment of intrusive government. Those sentiments are as common to southerners as bourbon whiskey or cornbread. If the Blacks are right, then Democrats must recognize that the men and women who turned to the GOP did so because they couldn't accept the post-1968 Democratic orthodoxy.

In the Blacks' view, and it seems a sound one, the solution for the Democrats is to replay the Carter strategy. "What the Democrats need," they write, "are extraordinarily skilled candidates who generate enthusiasm among the party's two essential groups, blacks and core white Democrats, but who are also attractive to the South's swing whites, the conservative white Democrats and moderate independents."

That Bill Clinton is the presumptive nominee in 1992 suggests that the Democrats are learning that lesson. But, for legions of white southern voters, the Republicans are the ones who