

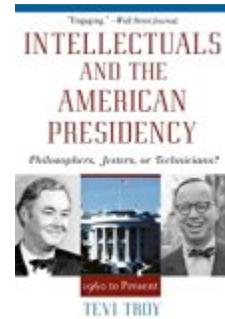
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Tevi Troy. *Intellectuals and the American Presidency: Philosophers, Jesters, or Technicians?* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002. viii + 254 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-0825-5; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-0826-2.

Reviewed by Raj Jethwa (Policy Officer, Youth and Regional Affairs, Trades Union Congress, London)

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As If Ideas Mattered...

Tevi Troy's *Intellectuals and the American Presidency* provides an interesting description of the way in which intellectuals have come to play a role in U.S. politics. At the heart of Troy's work is a discussion about the role of ideas in the presidency itself. How far do theories and ideologies shape the program of an administration? How far do programs have to be trimmed or redefined in government, and what part do resident intellectuals play in helping to implement policies and initiatives?

Troy takes an obvious route by tracing the growth of the role of so-called "intellectuals" in the White House chronologically, president by president. He begins with the appointment of historian Arthur Schlesinger under John F Kennedy, moves on to a brief discussion of Schlesinger's relationship with Lyndon Johnson and his subsequent replacement by Eric Goldman, before spending time looking at the influence of Daniel Patrick Moynihan on the Nixon administration, especially in the area of race and social inclusion. These three chapters, representing the long decade of the 1960s, probably also represent the high point of the single intellectual influence on U.S. presidents. That is certainly the impression created by Troy's narrative and the structure of this book. This is not necessarily surprising given that, politically as well culturally, the 1960s can often be seen as the most ideological point in U.S. history since the 1930s.

Troy goes on to examine the role of Robert Goldwin on the fleeting Ford administration, the lack of a coherent intellectual message during the Carter presidency and the growing influence of conservative think tanks under Reagan. The book ends with a survey of directionless

drift of George H. W. Bush and the role played by the Democratic Leadership Council in helping Bill Clinton to define a new message for the 1990s.

The book is an excellent if brief history of U.S. presidential politics as seen through the prism of a few central academics and institutions. It is not, and this would be the one key criticism, a history of ideas and their influence on public policy. On the contrary, it is an institutional history which begins by describing how a key development in this narrative was the creation of the modern presidency itself, under the direction of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Prior to that point the president lacked the staff support for generating ideas and initiating policy proposals that today is taken for granted as a major part of any government.

Nor does the book really focus on the social forces or economic developments that led to the growth of ideologies or new analyses. The 1960s saw upheavals in the politics of race and gender, disenchantment, and frustration over Vietnam, growing fears over the possibility of nuclear war and a major confrontation between superpowers, and together these forces culminated in a series of major reactions in popular culture. Yet none of these factors seem to have had any effect on the ideas that intellectuals were feeding to various U.S. presidents. Instead we read about the role of the resident White House intellectual in garnering support for candidates and presidents among the wider intellectual community. We read about the role of the intellectual as the resident historian, or in arranging the White House Festival of the Arts.

This is not a criticism of Troy, but more perhaps of how administrations tend not to have fully developed

policy programs or not to approach academics on the basis of genuinely seeking to develop solutions to social problems. More, the impression is created of politicians attempting to buy the support, or at best silence, of prominent academics, in order to bolster their own intellectual credentials.

The one intellectual adviser who does appear to have had more influence than any of his counterparts in other administrations is Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Moynihan was a Democratic hangover who was kept on under Nixon. Moynihan was an odd choice for a Republican president, but his attacks on the welfare system as it then existed in the United States possibly had some attraction for Nixon. In his chapter dealing with the relationship between Moynihan and Nixon, Troy does indeed look at policies on race, employment, and social security, and the internal battles that a resident intellectual in the White House would routinely have to fight. Troy also contends that Nixon chose Moynihan precisely because he wrote things that enraged the academic community.

Where Troy does look at broader social changes and their impact upon academic thought, he draws the conclusion that the growth of rightwing think tanks was due to upheavals on campus. In Troy's words:

"Student uprisings at Yale, Columbia, and Cornell, among other places, frightened and repelled many conservative professors. These professors, including Goldwin, Cornell's Walter Berns and Thomas Sowell, and Yale's Robert Bork, rejected the death threats and indifference to academic freedom they saw on campuses and moved to the freer and more politically involved world of the think tank" (p. 216).

As Troy goes on to say that the intellectuals who began to work for conservative think tanks were not political activists, but "the threat posed by the student revolts of the 1960s, however, changed their minds. Involvement in politics now seemed necessary to protect the universities—and themselves—from threats to the established order" (p. 216). While this is not an analysis I

share, I do at least agree with Troy that there was a clear ideological dimension to the rise of conservative think tanks and institutions. This is a point which Troy himself supports through his assertion that many of those who went on to develop the agenda of the rightwing in U.S. politics believed in the need to defend the existing order against broader social changes.

The Carter interregnum is probably best remembered for the "malaise" speech, although, as Troy points out, the word "malaise" did not appear in the text of the speech. Nonetheless, it is remembered this way anyway. In a 1992 episode of the cartoon series *The Simpsons*, for example, a statue of Carter appears with the words "Malaise Forever" sculpted into the pedestal (p. 139). Ted Kennedy, Carter's challenger for the Democratic nomination in 1980, is the one Troy suspects of labeling the speech thus, with the tag sticking.

As Troy points out, the Reagan administration needed no real intellectual ambassador since Reagan brought to office a clear and populist brand of conservatism that reduced even the most complex foreign policy issues to simple solutions. Reagan also represented an attack on the perceived Washington establishment, an image from which his successor, George H. W. Bush, was keen to distance himself. Troy's analysis of the Clinton years includes a discussion about the role of the Democratic Leadership Council, a network set up to modernize Democratic Party thinking following Walter Mondale's abysmal defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan. However, Troy's main focus is on the role played by Sidney Blumenthal to encourage intellectuals to defend a scandal-ridden President.

Tevi Troy's account of the attempts of various presidents and candidates to court the support of the intellectual community is readable and contains some real gems of information. However, of the most recent figure to occupy the White House, one wonders whether Troy himself will ever regret the fact that "Bush's admitted lack of interest in ? reading a 500-page book on public policy or something' helped Bush in the 2000 campaign" (p. 194).

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