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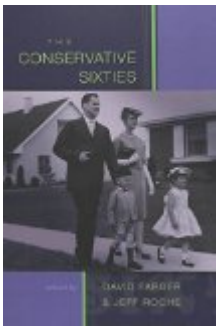

David Farber, Jeff Roche, eds.. *The Conservative Sixties.* New York: Peter Lang, 2003. vi + 211 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8204-5548-8.

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The lamentation that historians of twentieth-century United States have ignored conservative movements has been oft repeated since the early 1990s. Michael Kazin kicked off this trend in 1992 when he wrote in the pages of the *American Historical Review* that our cosmopolitan "cultural tastes and liberal or radical" politics had led us to eschew "research projects about past movements that seem ... bastions of a crumbling status quo or the domain of puritanical, pathological yahoos."[1] In 1994, Alan Brinkley honed this criticism a bit more, arguing that the problem was not necessarily a dearth of scholarship pertaining to the history of conservatism, but rather why historians did not centralize the content of these studies into "the way most of us write and talk about" U.S. history.[2]

It would be an understatement to say that historians have taken up the challenges offered by Kazin and Brinkley. Since the early 1990s, a plethora of studies have appeared on conservative political and social movements--many of which seek to centralize the role of conservatives in our understanding of twentieth-century U.S. history. The essays in David Farber and Jeff Roche's edited volume *The Conservative Sixties* should undoubtedly be placed among the best of this new literature. Not only do the essays add to our understanding of twentieth-century conservatism, but, taken together, they also upend our traditional understanding of the sixties as a "period when most every long-standing cultural tradition and moral verity was challenged by the 'baby boomer' generation who dared to 'question authority'" (p. 1). Moreover, the lengthy, thoughtful discussion this book generated on the H-1960s list should put to rest the idea that historians are not interested in modern conservatism and its central role in the history of the twentieth century.

However, with the passing of old critiques have emerged new ones. Farber and Roche argue in their introduction that while historians have taken up the challenge of writing the history of American conservatism, they have done so in a limited way. Specifically, they assert that historians have been too focused on what they call "overview" and "organizational" studies. This, according to the editors, has led to a historical ne-

glect of "studies of the conservative movement at the grass roots" (p. 4). Thus, the essays chosen for the book are designed to remedy this perceived lack of attention as it relates to the 1960s. Through this focus on everyday conservative activists, the editors argue that a clear narrowing between the "Old" and "New" Right can be seen--with a focus on the 1960s revealing "a clear continuity in conservative philosophy among these Americans" (p. 4). Moreover, by establishing this continuity through the various essays, the editors argue that the multiple ways activists chose to communicate their politics did not lead to a true fragmentation in the conservative movement. Rather, "anticommunism, extremism, Goldwaterism, Reagan Democracy, religious fundamentalism, and 'law and order'" merely become the various ways activists at the local level developed "to communicate a deep-rooted set of beliefs"--a belief set largely shared by all conservative activists (p. 4).

The impressive essays in this volume do, indeed, go a long way towards advancing these twin theses. The local grassroots studies and vivid biographic portraits of key conservatives help to demolish the supposed distance between "Old" and "New" Right as all local activists and political figures during this period are shown to hold a common "deep-rooted set of beliefs" revolving mainly around anticommunism, local control, and a distrust of "elites" of the liberal--not corporate--variety.

However, in a testament to the high quality of the essays in this volume, many of them advance original interpretative frameworks independent of the larger stated theses of the editors. The essays by Michelle Nickerson, Jeff Roche, Donald Critchlow, and Scott Flipse stand out in this regard.

Flipse's "Below-the-Belt Politics" is especially provocative. In a rich study of the history of Protestant evangelical thought from 1960 to 1975, Flipse shows how and why the "New Religious Right" shifted away from more moderate positions on social issues towards the hard right positions with which they are associated today. On everything from birth control to women's rights to abortion, Flipse shows how evangelicals once embraced more moderate stances which by and large mirrored the larger society. However, with the huge increase in abortions, federal court intervention, and the emergence of the counterculture, Christian evangelicals went hard right on all of these issues, forming new alliances with Catholics and becoming directly involved in political organizing. This essay superbly demolishes the myth of the monolithic, unchanging Christian right so prevalent in today's mainstream media.

Jeff Roche's "Cowboy Conservatism" breaks new ground as well. Through a local study of the Texas Panhandle in the 1960s, Roche argues persuasively for the articulation of a "cowboy conservatism"--an ideal which meant "defending Christianity, family, whiteness, capitalism, and tradition" (p. 85). This ideal, Roche persuasively argues, emerged not from watching sixties upheavals on the television but rather through "local battles to define and defend local values" (p. 80). Thus, Roche's essay delivers rich insights into the effects local "SDS activism, Black Power advocacy, busing, and prairie counterculturalists had on local politics" (p. 80). In doing so, Roche expands on the work of Beth Bailey and others who are just beginning to show historians how "heartland" conservatives in the sixties were pushing back against activism at the local level as much as--if not more than--that which they saw on their TV screens.[3]

Finally, Michelle Nickerson's "Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls" and Donald Critchlow's "Conservatism Reconsidered: Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism" both do much to reframe the historical debates regarding gender and expertise in the fifties and sixties. Nickerson, in her examination of conservative women's grassroots activism in California, argues persuasively that that these women did not fit the stereotype of

the apolitical fifties and sixties housewife. Rather, they made up the activist base for many conservative campaigns, including Barry Goldwater's. The 1960s conservative housewives' political power came not only from their status as "moral mothers" but also from their respected position as "experts by virtue of their intense study" (p. 60). Here, Nickerson persuasively challenges Elaine Tyler May's view of the fifties "politics of expertise" as one which undermined political action by grassroots activists.[4]

Likewise, the essay by Donald Critchlow on the early career of Phyllis Schlafly (pre-ERA opposition) shows how it was her education and expertise, as much as her position as wife and mother, which allowed her to lecture across the country on issues ranging from education to defense policy. The books she authored were devoured by grassroots conservative activists who used them to frame their own developing political philosophies. Taken together, the essays by Critchlow and Nickerson not only re-frame how historians should view conservative activism in the sixties, but also how we should view women's activism during that same period.

Focusing on the exemplary attributes of these four essays should not detract from the other fine essays in this volume. Specifically, the remaining essays could all be employed in undergraduate survey classes and/or more specific classes on the conservative resurgence. David Farber's essay will help students see the commonalities among political activists on the left and right during the sixties. Jonathan Schoenwald's and Evelyn Schlatter's essays on the more "extreme" elements on the political right will introduce readers to facets of the conservative movement that modern conservatives like to obscure. The essays by Mary Brennan and Kurt Schuparra provide a concise look into the 1964 Goldwater campaign and Ronald Reagan's early career, respectively. Finally, the essay by Michael Flamm is excellent in detailing the use of "law and order" as an organizing issue for local activists.

Taken together, these essays add greatly to our understanding of modern conservatism and its centrality to postwar U.S. history. Moreover, as previously stated, the editorial focus on grassroots activists shows continuity in conservative thought and action which rose above the differences often stressed by past historians. However, the exclusive focus of the volume on grassroots activists leads to another historiographic/theoretical problem which historians of modern conservatism have not yet begun to truly grapple with: a near exclusive focus on grassroots activism at the expense of an examination of high conservative power in the postwar period.

As stated at the beginning of the review, the editors of *The Conservative Sixties* argue that historians of modern conservatism have shunned "grassroots" studies in favor of what they term "overviews" and "organizational" studies. First, it should be pointed out that this categorization is artificial. For instance, two of the four studies cited as "organizational" could easily be described as "grassroots"--namely, the work by John Andrew and Greg Schneider on the Young Americans for Freedom.[5] However, even if you accept the classification system of the editors, it is still incorrect to argue that "what has only just begun to emerge are studies of the conservative movement at the grass roots" (p. 4). Rather, I would argue that the opposite is the case, with historians of modern conservatism focusing almost exclusively on writing social and social/political histories of various conservative movements. While the editors only cite the work of Lisa McGirr, Jeff Roche, and Michelle Nickerson in this regard, many more studies go unmentioned--including books mentioned by Michael Kazin back in his 1992 essay.[6]

In my mind, then, the problem with the field now is not that it is not studied, or not centralized, or not studied at the grass roots, but that the "high power" of the movement is still ignored by histori-

ans. What *The Conservative Sixties* reveals, then, is no longer a bias against studying conservatives, but a bias towards studying modern conservatism through a sixties lens--that of the "grassroots" social history. This lens then decentralizes or ignores other key happenings in the highest realms of conservative power. For instance, where is the essay in this volume about corporate elites who were planning at this time to undermine the political economy of the New Deal? What about the article on the University of Chicago's economics department and its key role as a site of conservative intellectual formation during this period? What about the small group of wealthy conservative families who began in the sixties to pour money into a media and policy infrastructure--one which now dominates our country? Should not all of these be included in an account of the "conservative sixties"?

Moreover, even when essays in the volume have a chance to explore this type of high power, they do not. For instance, Michelle Nickerson's essay briefly mentions that a Republican running for California state educational superintendent in 1962 was funded by "oil company executives, bankers, and real estate giants" without going into detail as to their motives (p. 54). They are cited in one sentence and then she goes right back to describing the motives of the rank-and-file activists. Likewise, Donald Critchlow briefly mentions the role of a right-wing think tank in changing Phyllis Schlafly's philosophy from moderate to hard right--but again, this is only briefly mentioned and the project of the think tank is not discussed further. Thus, even when given the chance, scholars are not scrutinizing the high power of the conservative resurgence in the same way they are the grass roots.

I do not mean to suggest that this work is not being done at all but it is clearly a much smaller subset of the scholarship--especially when compared to the plethora of grassroots social histories on the rise of the right.[7] And even though the title of this review would suggest otherwise, I am not proposing an either/or proposition towards the study of modern conservatism. Rather, I am arguing that scholars need to employ both approaches that examine the grass roots and those which allow us to examine the happenings in the high echelons of power. Such a project is important not only for historical accuracy but also for those of us who are concerned about the political implications of giving the vast majority of the attention to the grass roots. Namely, by making this our focus to date we have helped reify the half-true notion that conservatives "won out" in the end because they were better organized and because their ideas were more powerful and persuasive. This focus also gives a false aura of equality to political movements on the left and right--thus implicitly denying the huge monetary advantage conservatives had when organizing. Finally, by slighting the elite conservatives and their actions, we ignore the fact that it has been their economic policies which have been the most triumphant--not the social policies which tend to animate the conservative grass roots.[8]

I would argue this suggests a new and important avenue of study for historians of modern conservatism--one which seeks to bring our perspective back into balance. In other words, one which gives the grass roots their due without minimizing the high reaches of conservative power organizing at the same time to create the world in which we now live.

Notes

[1]. Michael Kazin, "The Grass-Roots Right: New Histories of U.S. Conservatism in the Twentieth Century," *The American Historical Review* 97 (1992): p. 136.

[2]. Alan Brinkley, "*AHR Forum*: The Problem of American Conservatism," *The American Historical Review* 99 (1994): p. 450.

[3]. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[4]. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

[5]. John A. Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997). Greg Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

[6]. Kazin reviews: Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), and Rebecca E. Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987). Other "grassroots" social/political histories include (among others): Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Samuel G. Freedman, *The Inheritance: How Three Families and the American Political Majority Moved from Left to Right* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, The New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Thomas J. Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction Against Liberalism in the Urban North," *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): pp. 551-586. Finally, for even more citations, see: Leonard J. Moore, "Good Old-Fashioned New Social History and the Twentieth-Century American Right," *Reviews in American History* 24 (1996): pp. 555-573.

[7]. For examples of studying the history of high conservative power, see: Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); John L. Kelley, *Bringing the Market Back In: The Political Revitalization of Market Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

[8]. Thomas Frank makes this point most persuasively in *What's the Matter with Kansas*.

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