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George Thomas Kurian, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Republican Party and The Encyclopedia of the Democratic Party.* Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. xi + 1864 pp. $399.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56324-729-3.

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Two-Party Politics, From D to R

Reference materials on American politics have been large in number, size, and quality in the past thirty years. Important new works, like L. Sandy Maisel's *Political Parties and Elections in the United States: An Encyclopedia* and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *Running for President: The Candidates and their Images*, have been carefully shelved next to old classics, like Schlesinger's *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, Kirk H. Porter and Donald B. Johnson's *National Party Platforms, 1840-1976*, and Jack P. Greene's *Encyclopedia of American Political History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*.[1] Not to be forgotten are the *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* and the historical atlases of Kenneth C. Martis–fine materials in their own right.[2] In many ways then, due to the weights of these works, academically and literally, librarians will undoubtedly need to take the tensile strength of their budgets and shelving units into consideration when acquiring further tomes on American politics in the future.

Enter editor George Thomas Kurian, braces and supports in hand if needed, with a new multi-volume set. As the editor of reference works on third world nations and world police organizations, among others, including the forthcoming *A Historical Guide to the U.S. Government*, Kurian has demonstrated that he knows how to fill gaps in the existing literature.[3] But is there a gap in the reference literature on American politics? Kurian never really addresses that issue. In the preface to his encyclopedia, however, he does spell out what he considers to be the uniqueness of American politics–the durability of America's two-party system. He suggests that the major parties have remained viable for two overriding reasons: structurally, they have voiced and favored moderation instead of extremism, and historically, the Constitution has promoted a two-party system. As Kurian notes, "the strength of both the Democratic and Republican parties is in the middle, and it is when they return to the middle that they are able to renew their vision and communicate with the American people on the right wavelength" (v. 1, pp. ix-x). Kurian's "structural" and "historical" themes appear sporadically throughout the rest of the set, especially in Volumes One and Three, but they are not exhaustively developed. Instead, the encyclopedia's fifty contributors tend to focus on the parties' numerous contradictions or inconsistencies. This line of analysis generally succeeds because, as Kurian correctly points out, "the history of political parties is filled with paradoxes" (v. 1, p. ix).

The editor's explanation for the exceptionality of American politics is generally satisfactory, but if a new set on American politics is really needed, is it needed *at this time*? In other words, why did Kurian choose to edit an encyclopedia on American politics now? Kurian put this latest project together–his first devoted entirely to politics–in order "to mark the bicentennial of parties and party politics in America" (v. 1, p. ix). Party politics may or may not have been born in 1796; such an anniversary is hard to prove or disprove. By itself, however, it most certainly is not a sufficient explanation for why a new encyclopedia is needed at this time, since many anniversaries go unheeded and unmissed. If Kurian's anniversary is conceded, is it enough to mark a "bicentennial" of this magnitude with the release of a work focusing largely on what political scientists have called the third party system–as the set's title itself suggests–which is approximately 140 years old? This question goes unraised and unanswered by Kurian. All in all, doubts remain about the lack of coverage of the first and second party systems in this set, considering the purported reason for its timing. More puzzling is why Kurian undercut the encyclopedia's raison d'etre even further by going to press when he did. Although the project has a publication date of 1997, it was printed in 1996, so the results of the last election were not included. Fortunately for Kurian, such sins, while cardinal, are not necessarily unforgiveable in and of themselves.

As the encyclopedia's title indicates, Kurian's work is split in halves. Volumes One and Two are on the Republican party, while Volumes Three and Four are on the Democratic party. Volumes One and Three are split into four main sections: a sixty-five page historical sketch; an issues and ideology section summarizing party positions on nearly fifty topics apiece, each in essays of two to four pages in length; biographical sketches of each party's presidents, vice-presidents, losing presidential candidates, speakers, and other notables, each a page or two long; and, a listing of each party's congressmen and governors, which includes dates of birth and death (if available or applicable), relevant family ties, tenures of service, and other significant posts held. Volumes Two and Four also divide into four main sections: a section summarizing each party's national conventions; complete reprints of national party platforms; succint analyses of presidential election results; and, nine useful appendixes. Finally, four separate indexes are available on both parties.

The historical sketches that open the set are comprehensive and well-written. Gil Troy handles the Republican party, while Professor Rutland revisits his work on the Democrats. Troy's seamless essay surprisingly outdoes Rutland's sketch. Troy blends pithy facts with excellent analysis of national party machinery. Rutland, on the other hand, tends to rely overly much on catchy anecdotes in lieu of deeper themes. Too often his sketch reads like a mere Democratic reply to Republican candidates or issues–the party and its organizers lack centrality. Part of the reason for this loss of focus no doubt stems from Republican successes. Historically, the Republican party has generally been better organized and lubricated than the Democratic party, especially during the period of "Republican ascendancy" from roughly 1865-1933. Nevertheless, Rutland shrinks away from controversial party leaders and embarrassing party stands instead of confronting them, thereby making Republicans look more impressive than they really were in some cases. His discussion of the Democratic party during the Civil War era, for example, fails to mention Ohio Copperhead Clement Vallandigham, while the Copperheads themselves are reduced to a paragraph of text. The party's "New Departure" during Reconstruction is likewise so obscured that the movement–much less Vallandigham's role in it–is never mentioned. Each sketch ends with a good bibliography.

Numerous topics, including abortion, affirmative action, African-Americans, arms control, big government, campaign finance and campaign finance reform, campaign materials, campaigns and elections, the Cold War, congressional elections, congressional party leadership, crime, defense, drug policy, education, foreign policy, freedom of speech, gun control, health care, immigration, Jews, media, the minimum wage, national committees, nominating conventions, other minorities, party discipline, party organization in Congress, the presidential nomination process, presidential nominations and elections, primary elections, public perception of parties and candidates, realignment and dealignment, religion, school prayer, Social Security, states' rights, term limits, third parties, tort reform, trade policy, voting behavior, welfare, and women are covered in the issues and ideology sections of the encyclopedia. Specific to the Republican party are topics that include the Contract with America, McCarthyism, Modern Republicanism, monetary policy, and Reaganomics. Specific to the Democratic party are topics that include the Democratic Leadership Council, fiscal policy, labor, and the McGovern-Fraser Commission. Noticeably absent from Kurian's list are essays on banking and/or currency, as well as environmental policy. In addition, an essay on A. Mitchell Palmer's "Red Scare" would have nicely counterbalanced Tom Lansford's essay on McCarthyism, while an essay on big business would have played well off Tim Morris's essay on labor.

Contributors authored their essays in the issues and ideology sections in matched pairs–Stephen D. Van Beek, for example, wrote his essays on term limits both for the Republicans and the Democrats. In theory, this approach brings needed continuity to the issues and ideology essays. In practice, however, it sometimes tends to breed repetition and dullness. Thirty-two of the ninety-seven essays share at least two paragraphs; worse, of the thirty-two repeaters, nearly 40 percent are reprinted in toto from Volume One to Volume Three. Such shortcuts are extremely disappointing, especially for hot-button issues like affirmative action, campaign finance and campaign finance reform, and tort reform, among others.

A number of issues and ideology essays, whether repetitive or not, lack historical depth for a variety of reasons. Tunnel vision appears to account for Cynthia J. Levy's essay in Volume One on arms control, which fails to mention Republican efforts at the Washington Conference of 1921-1922; her essay on defense in the same volume similarly neglects Chester Arthur's naval buildup, Theodore Roosevelt's use of the "Great White Fleet," and Roosevelt's calls for a military buildup prior to America's entrance into World War I. Ditto for Quentin Kidd's essays on the Cold War. Kidd's work ignores scholars who have located the origins of the crisis in the diplomacy of the great powers at the conclusion of World War II.[4]

Faulty assumptions and overlapping subject matter contribute to the shallowness of other essays. Arthur Blaser presumes the existence of an independent press in his sketches on the media, so his work fails to discuss how both parties controlled the papers via patronage until the late nineteenth century. An example of a subject that seemingly applies to several topics and is addressed by none is the controversy over public funding of parochial schools in the 1870s, which is not covered in six essays on education, religion, and school prayer. Finally, failure to consult important sources weakens a few essays, particularly J. David Gillespie's accounts of third parties. In one of the few provocative comments in what are otherwise conventional essays, Gillespie suggests that "some historians and many third-party advocates contend that the Republican party was born in 1854 as a *third* party but then soon intruded itself into the ranks of the national major parties, replacing the Whigs as the principal challengers of the Democrats" (v. 1, p. 186). Gillespie is seemingly unaware of the scholarship of William E. Gienapp and others who have maintained that the Republicans did indeed start out as a third party before they coopted and replaced the *Know-Nothings*; this view has been the standard view–not a minority or controversial view–for years.[5]

Of course, those more interested in current events or political theory, instead of historical depth, will find much of use in the issues and ideology sections. Students of political science in particular will find insightful introductions to the ideas/themes of commentators and scholars like Walter Lippmann, V. O. Key, Jr., Charles M. Jones, and Stephen Skowronek, in essays by Christian Georgen, Douglas Harris, and Frauke Schnell. Appropriate bibliographic entries accompany the essays in the issues and ideology sections as well, which provide starting points for further inquiry.

Errors of ommission and commission mar some of the essays in the biographical sections of Volumes One and Three. All of the parties' residents, vice-presidents, losing presidential candidates, and speakers appear to be represented, but some important ommissions occur in the "other notables" category. Eighty-four Republicans and ninety-nine Democrats are represented in these essays, usually in a few paragraphs each. However, on the Republican side, missing notables include Lee Atwater, James Baker, Benjamin Butler, Zachariah Chandler, John Hay, Jean Kirkpatrick, Trent Lott, Oliver North, Colin Powell, and Carl Schurz, among others, while August Belmont, Bill Bradley, Tom Daschle, Jefferson Davis, Thomas Hendricks, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Dan Rostenkowski, Allen Thurman, Boss Tweed, and Maxine Waters, among others, are missing from the notables on the Democratic side. Granted, any list of this sort will leave out some important people, but it is not really clear why Kurian picked some and not others. Considering the amount of rhetoric that has been devoted to scandal during the past few years in Washington, perhaps the biggest ommissions in the biographical sections are Michael E. Meagher's failure to examine Whitewater in his essay on President Clinton, and William C. Binning's failure to mention Speaker Gingrich's troubles with GOPAC.

Subtle errors of commission occur in some of the essays in the biographical sections. Within a span of two paragraphs in his essay on Schuyler Colfax, for example, Arthur Blaser mistakenly labels Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner a Democrat and confuses Cuba with Santo Domingo (v. 1, pp. 256-57), while Tim Morris mistakenly claims Kansas was admitted as a free state in 1858 in his essay on James Buchanan (v. 3, p. 202). Something also seems wrong about categorizing Andrew Johnson and John Crittenden as Republicans, and Horace Greeley and Lyman Trumbull as Democrats. Johnson probably never ran on a strictly Republican ticket in his life, while Crittenden has usually been defined as the quintessential Whig. Greeley was a Liberal Republican, not a Democrat, and Trumbull earned his formidable reputation in the Senate as a Republican. These problems of classification point out how difficult it is to sluice the varied streams of American political history into two main confluences.

The remaining sections of Volumes One and Three, and all of the sections of Volumes Two and Four, are generally useful and appropriate. The lists of congressmen and governors by party are wonderful reference tools, as are the reprints of the national party platforms. The sections on party conventions and presidential elections are strictly conventional, however, so do not expect to see cutting-edge scholarship reflected in Kurian's analysis of the election of 1844, for example.[6] The appendixes include party rules, lists of party leaders and whips in the House of Representatives and Senate, rolls of party defections in Congress, party convention sites and dates, data on national committee chairs, addresses for state committee headquarters, and analyses of House election results and party affiliations in Congress. General, biographical, geographical, and minorities and women indexes wrap up the set for each party.

The flaws in Kurian's set are troubling. Tighter editing would have eliminated subtle errors of fact, as well as the occasional typo, but no amount of editing could correct the structural decisions to focus on current events at

the expense of historical depth, to repeat large parts of other essays, or to go to press before the results of the 1996 election were known. Bicentennials should be bicentennials. A less hagiographical touch at times would also have been helpful. Nevertheless, although Kurian's encyclopedia is flawed, it has its strengths. Students will find it accessible and easy to read. Undergraduate political science and journalism students in particular will find much of use in the issues and ideology sections, while history students will find the reference lists and appendixes helpful. Historians truly interested in ideology, however, will still be best served by Greene's work. Those most interested in material culture will find the illustrations helpful, but more of use to those historians can still be found in Schlesinger's latest study. Members of the general public will enjoy the historical sketches and biographies, but the sketches in this work will never overshadow the *Dictionary of American Biography* or the upcoming *American National Biography.* Even academics will find the primary sources useful, and in this area, Kurian provides a valuable update to Porter and Johnson's standard. But will librarians want to add these volumes to their overburdened shelves and overtaxed budgets? Yes, but it still would not hurt to see if Kurian knows his way around a shelving unit first.

Notes:

[1]. L. Sandy Maisel, ed., *Political Parties and Elections in the United States: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols., New York: Garland Publishing, 1991; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *Running for President: The Candidates and their Images*, 2 vols., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994; Schlesinger, ed., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, 4 vols., New York: Chelsea House, 1971; Donald B. Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, comps., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1976*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978; and, Jack P. Greene, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Political History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, 3 vols., New York: Scribner, 1984.

[2]. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 2nd ed., Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1985; Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of United States Congressional Districts, 1789-1983*, New York: The Free Press and London: Collier Macmillan, 1982; Martis, *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789-1989*, New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. and London: Collier Macmillan, 1989; and, Martis, *The Historical Atlas of State Power in Congress, 1790-1990*, Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1993. Also notable are Robert Allen Rutland, *The Democrats: From Jefferson to Clinton*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995, and Rutland, *The Republicans: From Lincoln to Bush*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.

[3]. George Thomas Kurian, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Third World*, 3rd ed., 3 vols., New York: Facts on File, 1987; Kurian, ed., *World Encyclopedia of Police Forces and Penal Systems*, New York: Facts on File, 1989; and, Kurian, ed., *A Historical Guide to the U. S. Government*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. After mastering police forces and penal systems, perhaps its entirely appropriate for Kurian to turn to American politics and government.

[4]. See, for example, Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth,* New York: Knopf, 1995.

[5]. William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. Also see Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings & the Politics of the 1850s*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

[6]. For a good summary on the latest scholarship on the election of 1844, as well as some new ideas on the contest, see Lex Renda, "Retrospective Voting and the Presidential Election of 1844: The Texas Issue Revisited," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 24 (1994), 837-854.

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