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Robert Alan Goldberg. *Barry Goldwater.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. xiv + 463 pp. $22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-300-07257-0; $24.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-06261-8.

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On the eve of the 1964 Presidential election, historian Richard Hofstadter spoke for most academics, and a majority of the American people, when he asked of the Republican nominee, "When, in all our history, has anyone with ideas so bizarre, so archaic, so self-confounding, so remote from the basic American consensus, ever got so far."[1] Three decades later, Barry Goldwater's calls for lower taxes, States' Rights, and a balanced federal budget have become the orthodoxy not only of the Republican Party, but–if President Clinton's 1996 State of the Union is any guide–of the Democratic Party as well. To be sure, many academics continue to find the conservative ideology of Goldwater and his successors alien and anachronistic, but it has become much, much harder for them to discount such ideas as removed from the basic American consensus.

In *Barry Goldwater*, Robert Alan Goldberg, Professor of History at the University of Utah, offers a meticulously researched, highly readable account of how the Arizonan helped shape that new conservative consensus. The biography roots Goldwater's conservatism in the memory of pioneer forebears and in the myth of the individualistic West. Goldberg then traces the Arizona's rise through the GOP, and his emergence as the preeminent marketer of right wing ideas, in the U. S. Senate and in his 1960 manifesto, *The Consience of a Conservative.* The narrative, like Goldwater's career, reaches an early climax with the Senator's defeat in the 1964 presidential race, a defeat that nevertheless laid the groundwork for later Republican success. Goldwater's ambivalence about the consequences of that success, most notably the rise of the Christian right, serves as an intriguing coda to the biography.

Goldberg's key contribution is to place Goldwater firmly in the context of the American West. He builds on the work of historians who in the past two decades have deconstructed the myth of western individualism. These scholars have exposed a region traditionally hostile to "interference" from Washington, D.C., but dependent on federal subsidies in defeating, first, the Indians and then the even greater challenge of the desert. In the twentieth century, for instance, New Deal water reclamation projects and post-war military Keynesianism transformed Goldwater's Arizona from barren aridity to Sunbelt prosperity.[2]

In the chapters on Goldwater's forebears and coming of age (undoubtedly the most fascinating in the volume) we witness the journey of his Jewish grandfather from the Polish shtetl, through the boom and bust years of the California gold rush, to the edge of the Arizona desert, where he established a thriving dry goods store. By the time Barry was born in 1909, his father had abandoned his ancestral faith for Episcopalianism, and had transformed Goldwater's into the state's first department store, the repository of all that was stylish east of the Rockies.

These chapters also reveal the shaping of Goldwater's philosophy, the consciousness of a conservative. Although he admits that he was "born in a log cabin equipped with a golf course, a pool table, and a swimming pool," Goldwater cherished his pioneering forebears and the civilization they out of this wilderness. He ignored that government facilitated these individuals' actions. He also developed a life-long love of the outdoors, cultivating the practical skills and persona of a frontiersman. Goldwater viewed the growing collectivism of the 1930s and 1940s, particularly the rise of labor unions, as "coercion." America could only flourish, he argued, when it returns to the individualistic ethos of the pioneers. Observing that Americans have traditionally seen the Arizonan as a Western original, Goldberg concludes that "when Americans look at Barry Goldwater they see their mythic past" (p. 335).

Goldberg makes clear that style mattered far more than substance in Barry's rise through the Republican ranks. Goldwater, neither a legislative tactician, nor an original conservative thinker, was a marketer of ideas. Retail had always been his strong point. At the height of

the Depression, Goldwater had set a sales record in his father's department store, and in wartime he had cleverly hawked men's underwear decorated with red ants using the jingle, "You'll rant and dance with ants in your pants." As campaign chair for Senate Republicans in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he used an equally vibrant pitch to win a national following among those concerned with Reds in China, Eastern Europe, and in American labor unions. Preaching to the converted, Goldwater had little need to justify his aggressive conservatism; he merely needed to fire up the troops. Month after month, he honed his uncompromising message in front of true blue conservatives.

The Senator's penchant for bluntness also made good copy for the national news media, who noted that Goldwater's rugged "style" was, like the urbane John Kennedy's, attractive to women, but also more appealing to men. Critics who doubted there was little of value under his trademark cowboy hat promptly labeled him the Marlboro Man.

But even in the television age, a politician could not rise on style alone. Goldberg makes clear that the Senator benefited from a renascent radical right, particularly the John Birch Society (JBS). Like Goldwater, the Birchers warned against the scourge of socialism at home and abroad: unlike Goldwater, the JBS believed that the red menace reached as far as 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Goldwater found this and the Society's more conspiratorial claims ludicrous, but in the 1950s, he contended that Birchers "are the finest people in my community" (p. 138). Quite simply, as Goldwater's ambitions broadened, he needed the grass roots fervor of true believers.

It was, however, Goldwater's bold, self-confident manifesto, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, (1960) that propelled him to leadership of the grass roots right. Conservatism, the Senator told his readers, was not concerned with serving the interests of a privileged few, but with extending freedom to all. New Deal liberalism and "Modern Republicanism" had sought to promote the general welfare. In contrast, Goldwater argued, conservatives viewed each person as a complex individual, and as such should strive to "achieve the maximum amount of individual freedom … consistent with the maintenance of social order." He also defended a narrow reading of the Constitution, in which the states served as the main bulwark against the federal government's encroachment on the individual's right to liberty. That defense of states rights proved attractive to southern white conservatives.

There was little ideologically fresh in the volume. Goldwater had essentially written a 123 page primer of the best of Hayek, Buckley, Russell Kirk and Milton Friedman. But, as Goldberg makes clear, it was once more Goldwater's marketing technique, his Western bluntness, and his shoot from the hip style (notably in his call for total victory in the Cold War) that sold the product. Pat Buchanan spoke for many young conservatives, when he recalled that Conscience was "our new testament; it contained the core beliefs of our political faith; it told us why we had failed, what we must do. We read it, memorized it, it quoted it" (p. 139).

There is little new in Goldberg's narrative of the 1964 presidential election, but he tells that story deftly and judiciously. He catalogues in detail the internecine party machinations involved in securing the nomination. (Perhaps too much detail, as Goldwater himself is sometimes lost). But he captures well the Senator's less than vaulting ambition, his insecurity, and his clear sense of inevitable defeat–a defeat sealed by an acceptance speech that declared "extremism in the name of liberty" to be "no vice."

Goldberg aptly labels the San Francisco convention the "Woodstock of American Conservatism." For years to come, the new right would recall the Cow Palace much as the flower children would view Max Yeager's farm: the "crucible for birthing a better world." (Of course, there may have been dope and nude Republican mud-wrestling too, but, unfortunately, Goldberg doesn't tell us). But rather than peace and love, conservatives savored the belligerence of the Goldwater crusade. For Texas Senator John Tower, the '64 convention was the Alamo before San Jacinto.

Goldberg largely affirms the view of most scholars of the new right (see, e.g., the Edsalls, *Chain Reaction*, 1992) that in defeat, Goldwater shifted his party's political, ideological, and economic base from the East to the South and West. The GOP platform's equivocal stance on Civil Rights, and its denunciation of "inverse discrimination" shattered blacks' already brittle allegiance to the party of Lincoln, and broadened the party's appeal among whites in the Deep South. By demonizing the federal government and incanting the mantra of low taxes and balanced budgets, the Goldwaterites had finally repudiated Eisenhower's "Modern Republicanism." From 1964 onward, Republicanism became synonymous with "conservatism" and conservatism became synonymous with worship of the market, particularly in high growth areas like San Diego and Orange County, California, where Goldwater outpolled Johnson. Nineteen sixty-four also witnessed

the emergence of a new conservative champion, Ronald Reagan, who offered the same policies, but with a softer sell: the calm reassurance of a midwesterner rather than Goldwater's western brusqueness.

Some may find more problematic Goldberg's defense of Goldwater against a "defamation" campaign unprecedented in American political history (p. 209). Contemporary conservative diatribes against "liberal media bias" might steel the reader against claims of "unfairness" in political reporting. And, indeed, Goldberg concedes that the Senator's proclivity to "shoot from the hip" contributed to his negative press. When Goldwater mused, "I haven't really got a first class brain," reporters no longer smiled: they agreed. What had seemed colorful coming from a tough talking Western senator–a suggestion to scrap the nuclear Test Ban Treaty, or make social security a voluntary program–now reflected immaturity in a presidential candidate.

Yet if Goldwater was his own worst enemy, Goldberg makes a convincing case that the media went beyond the bounds of fair criticism. One magazine doctored Goldwater quotes, then found psychiatrists to liken the nominee to Hitler and pronounce him susceptible to "unconscious sadism." Once broached, Goldwater's critics, from Norman Mailer to Governor Brown of California found the f-word, fascism, too good to resist. Through repetition, then, the "big lie took on its own truth," and L.B.J. succeeded in painting Goldwater as an extremist. Above all, in the much-ballyhooed "daisy ad," the Democrats suggested–and most voters came to agree–that Goldwater's belligerency would bring Armageddon just that little bit closer.

The last third of Barry Golwater relates the Senator's career after the spotlight had faded, and traces his journey from "martyrdom to canonization" as the Republican Party built on the Goldwater message of 1964 to win five of the next seven presidential elections. Goldberg shows, however, that for a growing number of those who called themselves conservatives, the Barry Goldwater deserving of sainthood died in 1964. The Arizonan's growing apostasy, notably his support of Nixon's China policy in 1972 and his opposition to Reagan in 1976, diminished him in the eyes of the new "new right." Finally, Goldberg examines the Senator's increasing hostility to the moral conservatives who transformed the Republican party in the 1980s. We are left with the image of a crusty Goldwater approaching his ninetieth year. He is forthright in support of a woman's right to choose, and blasts Clinton's equivocation on gays in the military. "You don't have to be straight to fight and die for your country," he reminds Clinton, "you just have to shoot straight."

In essence, Goldberg's Goldwater appears far more attractive the farther he is from political power. As an energetic young businessman in Phoenix, a keen student of native American culture, or, in retirement, as critic of the religious right, Goldwater comes across as the ornery, but honest, conscience of western individualism. Those on the left who read this volume may have to pinch themselves to remind themselves that, if elected, Goldwater may well have extended the Vietnam War beyond Indochina, and could have delayed voting rights legislation.

In its own right, then, *Barry Goldwater* is a useful addition to the political histories of post-war America. Goldberg also joins a growing number of historians seeking to rescue post-war American conservatives from the enormous condescension of their colleagues. 1995 witnessed the publication of Dan Carter's long-awaited biography of George Wallace, *The Politics of Rage*; Mary Brennan, *The "Right" Side of the Sixties*, an examination of Southern Goldwaterism; and Michael Kazin's examination of Populisms of left and right, *The Populist Persuasion.* All of these works have denoted race as the driving force behind the rise of the right. Goldberg's account of Goldwater's southern strategy largely affirms that analysis. The Senator may have personally opposed segregation (and may have unilaterally integrated his Air Force Reserve unit) but as a politician he knew to go "hunting where the ducks were," and, in the 1960s that meant winning the loyalty of southern white conservatives.

Goldberg's emphasis on the West and Goldwater's strong opposition to labor unions proves somewhat more problematic to those such as Kazin and GOP strategist, Kevin Phillips, who have emphasized the class dynamics of the emerging Republican majority. In these analyses, Goldwater's conservatism was stifled by an abstract "Madisonian rigidity," and was too hostile to organized labor to win northern working class support. In short, Goldwater was not enough of a "populist," to use the much overused word of our own times. It was only when George Wallace, then Nixon and Reagan appropriated the blunt cadences of blue collar America that the Republicans could break the Democratic Party's traditional hold on working class whites.

Goldberg's biography suggests that the appeal of the right is more complex, and cannot be explained solely by appeals to "the people." Even before Wallace and Nixon, Goldwater appealed to the "silent" Americans and "forgotten Americans" who "quietly go about the business of paying and praying, working and saving" (p. 150).

However, Goldwater spoke not of a silent "majority" or of the "little people" but of individuals, dehumanized and drowned out by the "clamor of pressure groups" (by which he included farmers' associations, labor unions, consumer groups, ethnic and religious societies).

It is this appeal to individualism that may mark Goldwater's singular legacy to modern Republicanism, and to contemporary American political culture. To be sure, Goldwater was not alone in warning of bureaucratization and automation. Many on the left, notably Erich Fromm, also warned of the alienation of the individual in mass society. Goldwater's genius lay in challenging the New Deal's notions of community, and reformulating free market ideology in the language of western individualism. In the 1990s, as the bonds of civic society decay daily, Americans trust each other less, and their government not at all. Barry Goldwater, a man who flew mercy flights to Indian tribes during the depression, may well lament that loss of community and civic trust. But if more Americans are, in Robert Putnam's phrase, bowling alone, Goldwaterism, certainly facilitated this change.[3]

Notes:

[1]. Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review*, April 1994.

[2]. Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A History of the American West*, 1992.

[3]. Robert D. Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America," *The American Prospect* (Winter 1996) and "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Prosperous Community," *The American Prospect*, (Spring 1993).

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