

Timothy J. Lombardo. *Blue-Collar Conservatism: Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia and Populist Politics.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 328 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-9543-6.

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Published on H-1960s (February, 2019)

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While historian Alan Brinkley's 1994 article calling for more serious studies of conservatism launched a flurry of important research, political historians have recently reinvigorated scholarship on this topic to consider various perspectives on the "rise of the Right" that include region, race, gender, and class. Put Timothy Lombardo's *Blue Collar Conservatives: Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia and Populist Politics* on that list. Lombardo's insightful and carefully researched book follows the rise and fall of Frank Rizzo, the controversial mayor of Philadelphia from 1971 to 1979. Rizzo's rise to power from high school dropout to commissioner of police and finally, mayor, however, is not the focus. Lombardo instead uses Rizzo as a foil to explore the people who loved and hated him and blue-collar white Philadelphians' uneven and complicated migration from liberalism to conservatism. In fact, the first half of the book only subtly predicts Rizzo's role and personal influence on this pivotal shift that has shaped modern American politics. Scholarship on the rise of the Right such as Matthew D. Lassiter's *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (2006) and Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (2001) has focused on Sunbelt conservatives' political growth. Lombardo offers a similarly rigorous and original exploration of conservatives more recognizable in

the white working-class communities from the industrial American cities of the Rustbelt and the Northeast.

As he argues that historians have simplified this political transition, and that the "ultimate conversion from New Deal liberalism to blue-collar conservatism remains clouded by broad brushstrokes" (p. 5), Lombardo considers the centrality of the urban crisis and new vulnerabilities for Philadelphians that complicate this one-dimensional narrative. To be sure, Philadelphia's blue-collar conservatives fought against school integration and low-income housing in their white enclaves, and supported law-and-order politics that emphasized discriminatory policing. Still, they also encouraged government support for improving their neighborhoods or funding Catholic schools, all the while blaming elite liberals for the perceived threats to their notion of security, tradition, and neighborhood homogeneity.

Thus, police achieved unprecedented reverence in white neighborhoods. These Philadelphians held faith in "law and order" to contain the so-called urban crisis and the concerns about rising crime. Conversely, Lombardo shows the traumatic consequences of law and order for people of color. Black communities, especially civil rights advocates, coined the term "racist Rizzo" to sum up their impression of his selectively extreme,

and often violent, tactics to confront black protesters as police commissioner. Importantly, Lombardo gives voice to civil rights leaders and African Americans to explore ways in which they pressured Philadelphia's Democratic leaders to pursue strategies such as integration and policing reform. The contrasting perceptions that these communities held of the police and the "law-and-order" police commissioner, reveal divisions that portended the city's future battles and Rizzo's polarizing reign as mayor.

At its most critical points, *Blue Collar Conservatism* interrogates the color-blind patterns of discourse that white ethnics in Philadelphia, and across the nation, used to defend their white privilege and assert their considerable, but fleeting, political capital. Lombardo repeatedly explores the role of race in the populist rhetoric that swept Philadelphia's white working class. In one devastating example, Lombardo compares two distinctly different versions of a letter sent by an angry Philadelphian to Fred Druding, the president of the Whitman Council that aimed to block a public housing project in a predominantly white neighborhood. While the published version of the "color-blind" letter in the *Whitman News* complained about "young toughs who beat and rob tenants and force them to flee" in South Philadelphia's existing projects, Lombardo uncovers the original that read, "black toughs intimidate white tenants, forcing them to flee" (p. 192). Thus, Lombardo leaves no doubt that this color-blind defense only created a veneer of civility, as the book shows a string of political defeats, including the end of funding for Catholic parochial schools, that intensified this racist animosity and made it even more obvious. This approach offers a timely model for journalists to more accurately address racism in politics. As Lawrence Glickman argues in his recent article, "The Racist Politics of the English Language" (2018), the rhetoric of color-blind racism and terms such as "racially tinged" have normalized racism in the press. To be sure, Lombardo has his share of terms such as "racial poli-

tics" and "racialized system," but only in the context of denying the transparency too often granted to color-blind language.

While Lombardo exposes the racism that motivated blue-collar conservatism, he handles his subjects with careful attention to humanizing their concerns about neighborhood traditions and economic considerations that threatened white privilege during the American urban crisis, stating: "They were not simple reactionaries" (p. 5). Lombardo offers a careful urban history of Philadelphia after WWII. *Blue Collar Conservatism* constructs a nuanced analysis of the city's spatial dynamics that pitted working-class whites against liberal leaders and black Philadelphians. Ironically, well-intentioned liberal programs such as housing and transportation developments in sections of the city, such as Northeast Philadelphia, offered a middle-class, semi-suburban lifestyle that encouraged an internal white flight within the city's limits (a "white noose"). In turn, these established communities targeted liberal elites who sought to solve the city's racial disparities in housing, schooling, and policing. "Indeed," Lombardo argues, "reform liberals' urban renewal helped create and maintain Philadelphia's 'proud neighborhoods' and 'urban jungles'" (p. 40). Here, while populism was a conservative draw for the white working class, its members also utilized liberal measures to preserve their privilege.

As for Rizzo, Lombardo is not as forgiving. From his *scappo il capo* (crack their heads) policing to his racist rhetoric, Rizzo's career speaks for itself. At Rizzo's lowest point, one which he apologized (periodically) for later, he advocated for a change to the city's charter that would allow him a third term, telling his crowd during a speech to support the charter change and "Vote White." And while the causes for working-class whites' concerns—not African Americans or liberal policies but "economic restructuring and generational change"—continued to threaten traditional blue-collar institutions and values, Rizzo's presence in-

troduced an eerily familiar “one of us” leadership that provided a misleading sense of security for his loyal constituency.

The book amplifies this local study’s larger significance, including federal courts’ and policies’ influences on Philadelphia’s politics. It also explains that this populism resonated with national politics and Richard Nixon’s vision for a New Majority that carved out working-class white urban ethnics from the New Deal Democratic coalition across the country. In fact, Nixon’s national affirmative action strategy, the Philadelphia Plan, borrowed from the city’s effort meant to soothe concerns about racist hiring practices while avoiding the quota system that alienated white blue-collar workers. In addition, as Philadelphia’s blue-collar conservatives moved into the suburbs, they spread their politics past the city’s boundaries. As a testament to a book that reconsiders the existing narrative, Lombardo’s epilogue leaves the reader considering how this conservatism translated in new demographic contexts outside of the urban spaces that defined its origins. Last, explaining how presidential candidates such as Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump tapped into this populism, *Blue-Collar Conservatism* raises new questions about ways in which Republican candidates courted these voters to compare their influence on the GOP with the simultaneously growing conservatism in the Sunbelt’s suburbs. While its conclusion shows that this is a timely book, Lombardo’s scholarship provides an important intervention that demonstrates there is still much to learn about the rise of the Right.

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Citation: Seth Blumenthal. Review of Lombardo, Timothy J. *Blue-Collar Conservatism: Frank Rizzo’s Philadelphia and Populist Politics*. H-1960s, H-Net Reviews. February, 2019.

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