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Cornelis A. van Minnen and Sylvia L. Milton (eds.), *Political Repression in U.S. History* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2009, \$34.95). Pp. 242. ISBN 978 89 0865 9319 4.

This is a splendid if somewhat uneven collection of essays which had its origin in the Roosevelt Center's Eighth Middleburg Conference of European Historians of the United States held in April 2007. The papers presented at these conferences, which hold to a high standard of scholarship, have over the past few years resulted in the publication of some fascinating, worthwhile, and occasionally controversial collections of essays. Of the fifteen contributors to this collection, fourteen teach or have taught at various universities in the UK, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands (the Middleburg home of the Roosevelt Center). An American scholar, the shrewd, talented radical historian Ellen Schrecker, who participated in the conference, contributed a sparkling essay on political repression in the US by the state which was "completely within the law – and, often, *was* the law" (159, original emphasis).

It is a tribute to the contributors and to the editors Sylvia Hilton (professor of US and Latin American history at Madrid's Complutense University) and Cornelis van Minnen (director of the Roosevelt Study Center and professor of American history at Ghent University) that this collection, dealing as it does with a bunch of disparate topics that take place over two hundred years, does not read like a hodgepodge of conference papers slapped together in book form, but presents a coherent overview whose contents complement each other.

"This book of essays," in the words of the editors, "aims to discuss the relationship between political repression and democracy in the history of the United States," an intimate relationship which, as they point out, "cannot be ignored, much less denied" (7). Nor should it be, since, it seems to me, it is a discrete part of the US past, as well as one that is ongoing, and it would seem on the basis of current events that it probably will be in the future: there were, are, and will be tensions between majority rule and minority rights in the United States – a subject that has over the years preoccupied commentators on the country's development, be they visitors like the 1830s tourist, the French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville, or his late nineteenth-century counterpart, Lord Bryce, or contemporary scholars such as Robert Justin Goldstein and William Preston Jr.

The majority of the essays deal with events in the years after the Civil War, more than half deal with events during the twentieth century and one deals with post-9/11 events. While some essays are better than others, all in my opinion are worthwhile. Notwithstanding their wide range chronologically, thematically, and linguistically, they are a good read. They are jargon-free. Only some of the essays make extensive use of primary sources, but in my opinion the authors all are *au courant* in terms of secondary sources. Their conclusions are familiar and will not come as a surprise but while most of the authors carry their politics on their sleeves, their contributions are well argued and convincing. It seems to me that there is not a clunker in the lot.

Not surprisingly, there is a common thread which underlies the essays. It dwells on the fears that result in an expressed need to rein in democracy and the repression

of those who are deemed threatening to the announced way of life in the US. Legal and extralegal measures against those who seem to be threatening has won public favor as putative threats to the US are dealt with, whether the threat is deemed to be the freed slaves during Reconstruction, the German Americans during World War I, US citizens and legal residents of Japanese descent during World War II, the communist Left (native-born or not) during the McCarthy era, and illegal immigrants post-9/11.

Thomas Clark, an assistant professor at the University of Kassel, intelligently treats an early manifestation of that fear in his penetrating essay on some of the less respectable ideas of James Fenimore Cooper. That American author, as Clark notes, was widely traveled, undoubtedly intimately familiar with republican ideas, and much concerned with “natural justice and natural law,” yet when Cooper felt that certain groups threatened his traditional view of society in the US he “delegitimized” them; Clark concludes that Cooper had “a paranoid fear” that the US was threatened both externally and domestically and that therefore “the oppression of ‘un-American’ citizens and African-Americans was necessary for the survival of democracy” as he defined it (53). Authors of essays in this collection, in dealing with their subject, find that variations of Cooper’s ideas are responsible not only for the legal repression of dissent, but also for the extralegal pressures that society’s more privileged and powerful in society can impose when the popular will has been manipulated and aroused.

There is also the matter of voluntary self-imposed censorship, which leads to repression of views that the powers-that-be consider inimical. María Luz Arroyo, a Spanish Open University lecturer, convincingly details how publication of the memoirs of liberal historian Claude Bowers, US ambassador to Spain during the 1930s Fascist uprising against the Republic to which he was sympathetic, were delayed fourteen years. “The available evidence,” for Luz Arroyo, strongly suggests that the delay resulted in part from Bowers’s “forbearance”; having written critically of Anglo-American policies toward the Republic during the Civil War as well as the subsequent Franco regime, Bowers was unwilling to embarrass his friend President Franklin Roosevelt who had appointed him (151). Later, Bowers continued to defer publication because the State Department pressured him to make changes in his manuscript. He felt able to publish uncensored only when the exigencies of the Cold War resulted in US policy towards Franco’s Spain that made his comments superfluous.

Overall this is a very useful book, though it is not without the occasional flaw. For example, in Melvyn Stokes’s essay “The Inquisition in Hollywood: Repression on/behind the Screen” (which breaks no new ground, but is a workman-like overview) he mistakenly notes (176, n. 12) that the film *I Was a Communist for the F.B.I.* (dealing with the Bureau’s Pittsburgh informant Matt Cvetic) was “spun off into a syndicated television series called *I Led Three Lives*” (it dealt, of course, with Herbert A. Philbrook, employed by the FBI in New England as “citizen, ‘Communist,’ and counterspy”). Such errors do not detract from the book’s sterling qualities as an intelligent chronicle by a splendid group of authors of the often less than honorable treatment of dissent in the United States.

*Professor of History, Seton Hall University*

DANIEL J. LEAB