

proved the most important factor both uniting and driving the disparate militia forces.

Drawing on the historical case studies of Fries's Rebellion in Pennsylvania at the end of the eighteenth century, the Sons of Liberty Conspiracy in Civil War-era Indiana and Illinois, and the Black Legion in Michigan and Ohio during the Depression, Churchill effectively locates the contemporary militia movement in the context of earlier insurrectionist movements that shared the libertarian interpretation of the Revolution. With care and precision, he then details the distinct constitutional (or Whig) and millenarian wings of the militia movement. In relation to the former, Churchill convincingly refutes the commonplace misconception that the militias' members are offshoots of the white supremacist and Christian Identity movements, instead elaborating on a far more nuanced and subtle set of convictions and concerns that animate a heterodox set of Americans to join and promote a primarily defensively oriented set of groups.

This is a landmark study that deserves widespread attention. A model of careful and dispassionate scholarship, it marries an immersion in the historical literature on American political violence to a supremely well-reasoned and far-reaching exploration of one of the least understood of contemporary social movements. Churchill has provided a rigorous and methodical analysis of the various militias operating in the US, one that substantially advances our understanding of a set of Americans whose modern preoccupations – far from being esoteric and bizarre – have powerful echoes throughout American history.

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Andrew Wroe and Jon Herbert (eds.), *Assessing the George W. Bush Presidency: A Tale of Two Terms* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, £70.00 cloth, £22.99 paper). Pp. ix + 292. ISBN 978 0 7486 2740 0, 978 0 7486 2741 7.

Sometimes nothing seems so remote as the day before yesterday – the day before President Obama and “yes, we can.” Very recent presidential history often receives short shrift, as historians wait for documents to become available, and political scientists turn their attention to the President of the day. All this – and the need to achieve some kind of perspective on the extraordinarily controversial presidency of George W. Bush – makes this collection from Andrew Wroe and Jon Herbert extremely welcome. The editors of *Assessing the George W. Bush Presidency* have done a brilliant job in assembling a book which will be of great value to all commentators on, and students of, the contemporary presidency.

This is not simply a random collection. The essays are all distinguished by high quality, while the editors add additional coherence by outlining in their introductory and concluding chapters a theory of George W. Bush's presidency. For Wroe and Herbert, this was indeed a tale of two terms. The first term saw significant legislative success, ranging from educational reform to health-care expansion (both, significantly, passed with bipartisan support). Particularly after reelection in 2004, and buoyed up by the perceived opportunities opened up by the War on Terror,

President Bush turned towards intense partisanship, “going public” and “governing by campaigning.” The upshot, for the United States and for Bush’s historical reputation, was fairly disastrous. Wroe and Herbert conclude that American “soft power,” military power, and economic power were all damaged under Bush. They suggest that the Bush years may presage a real shift away from free-market ideology, though the editors are cautious about proclaiming the end of conservative dominance. The essays in this book follow up the “tale of two terms” theme in an original and analytically sophisticated way.

As Wroe and Herbert emphasize, and as the essays in the collection illustrate, this was a strange “conservative” administration. The Bush foreign policy, after all, was largely devoid of the caution which one might suppose to be a conservative characteristic. On the domestic front, Eddie Ashbee concludes that Bush largely failed to deliver on the political agenda of the Christian right, which ended the first decade of the twenty-first century in some disarray. Maurice Vile shows that Bush was no friend of states’ rights. Bush was a big-government, big-spending conservative, who (as James Pfiffner argues) claimed “to be able to ignore the law” (42). Debates over foreign policy, like the Bush and Cheney claims to expansive executive power, will be more familiar to many readers – especially in Europe – than controversies surrounding domestic policy. Partly for this reason, it is the chapters on domestic policy which really catch the eye. Jonathan Parker, for example, neatly summarizes the inherent importance of the No Child Left Behind education reform, trenchantly noting its failure to deliver positive results. Alex Waddan notes the irony of Bush leaving as his “headline” legacy in social programmes for the elderly “an expensive new benefits programme” (178). This is a fine collection, the best available account of the presidential politics of the day before yesterday.

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Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King (eds.), *The Unsustainable American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. £17.99). Pp. 343. ISBN 0 1953 9214 0.

In the wake of Scott Brown’s election as the junior senator for Massachusetts, there was a flurry of talk about the “ungovernability” of the US. The Senate Republican Conference had, with the acquisition of its forty-first member, seemingly stopped the Obama agenda in its tracks. Although the President had secured the largest margin for a Democrat since 1964, and Congressional Democrats controlled both chambers, it appeared just over a year later that all the “hopey, changey stuff” (as the former Alaska governor put it) would have to be abandoned.

In *The Unsustainable American State*, Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King go beyond these proximate considerations (indeed, the volume was published at a time when many still entertained high hopes for the Obama administration), and instead draw upon the deeper and broader approaches associated with historical institutionalism. The fourteen authors consider the contemporary economic crisis, but at the same time reflect upon much longer-term shifts and processes. In particular, the