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Sidney Blumenthal, *The Strange Death of Republican America: Chronicles of a Collapsing Party* (New York: Union Square Press, 2008, \$24.95). Pp. 328. ISBN 978 1 4027 5789 1.

The George W. Bush presidential era has certainly bequeathed us plenty of publications that negatively critique the performance of his administration. Sidney Blumenthal's *The Strange Death of Republican America: Chronicles of a Collapsing Party* is among them. This builds upon Blumenthal's first volume on the Bush presidency, *How Bush Rules: Chronicles of a Radical Regime* (Princeton University Press, 2006), and provides a natural companion to his seminal 1986 publication, *The Rise of the Counter-establishment: The Conservative Ascent to Political Power* (Times Books, 1986). Blumenthal's latest volume seeks to chart the decline of the Republican Party, which, according to him, "after nearly two generations of political dominance, rapidly disintegrates under the stress of Bush's failures and the Republicans' scandals and disgrace" (1–2).

Stylistically it is written like a journal, or diary, with each entry headed and dated. This approach serves Blumenthal well as he leads the reader chronologically through the various trials and tribulations that affected the GOP during his period of study (May 2006–November 2007). These difficulties include: Republican scandals, the dire 2006 Republican midterm election results, the departure of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and the literal trail of Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Throughout, Blumenthal meticulously covers the issues that seemingly dogged the Bush administration during the twilight of its rule. Notably these include the continual debate as to the legitimacy of the 2003 Iraq War, the administration's approach to al Qaeda and the treatment of enemy combatants, and the alleged weakening of domestic governmental agencies coupled with the circumnavigation of traditional intelligence agencies, such as the CIA, for political purposes.

Blumenthal's account works on many levels. For example, as an issue is raised he usually manages to link it to one of the main protagonists of the era, some of whom are introduced into the narrative by headlines (e.g. "Dances with Wolfowitz"). This, therefore, allows him to give the history of how the protagonist fits into the landscape of the Bush presidency. The result is that the reader is given a great deal of background information on Bush's cohort, which in turn provides the book's rich contextual bedrock.

In terms of weaknesses, Blumenthal tries to do too much. Although he successfully manages to introduce and analyse prominent publications of the period – his critique of Bob Woodward's work on the Bush presidency is scathing – Blumenthal is somewhat less successful when he tries to inject abstract theory. For example, whilst it is delightful to read in isolation, the discussion concerning the aesthetics of the Bush presidency, the "pathology of Bush's kitsch" (123), which hammers home Blumenthal's disdain for the administration, jars with the main body of the text, which is far more grounded.

Nevertheless, Blumenthal's *The Strange Death of Republican America* is a solid read. If he does update it, as he has done with *The Rise of the Counter-establishment* (Union

Square Press, 2008), perhaps we can look forward to his analysis of the 2008 Republican presidential campaign, where his headlines could include “Paling around with Palin.”

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