

Retro clichés include: (1) the NRA as a controlling, “top-down” (261) cultural monolith, oblivious to the reality of American gun culture as large, diffuse and horizontally organized into numerous autonomous local interpretive communities; (2) gun owners as the embodiment of a paranoid defective masculinity that compensates, *à la* Freud, via the gun; (3) the intrinsic male chauvinism of gun culture despite two recent women NRA presidents, numerous women elected board members, and increases in the numbers of women gun owners and holders of permits to carry concealed weapons; (4) dismissal of genuine threats to American gun rights – thereby reducing NRA “gun crusaders” to Chicken Little status; (5) a concurrent acceptance of the public-relations tactic of “reasonable common-sense” gun controls used by antigun organizations to mask an incrementalist policy designed to hinder gun ownership in any way possible; and (6) the alleged extremism of the NRA’s leaders for not reflecting more moderate views of the membership, despite the obvious facts of democratic election and overwhelming financial support by members.

Melzer pummels a straw man to set the mood, a popular technique in antigun books and news, where despite the availability of articulate spokespersons, reporters somehow manage to interview the kook in the coonskin cap in the back parking lot. At the Reno 2002 NRA annual meeting, Melzer finds “Floyd” (25), a gauche man clumsily patronizing women at a seminar. Melzer also notices people at the Reno meeting wearing western-style garb, affirming frontier masculinity. But many Nevadans wear cowboy hats and boots every day. Similar lack of sensible comparison haunts the book; properties attributed to NRA members are well distributed across the general population, too. One expects qualitative method to yield thick description, but said description need not be thickheaded.

*Department of Communication, University of Toledo*

BRIAN ANSE PATRICK

*Journal of American Studies*, 44 (2010), 3. doi:10.1017/S0021875810001507

Robert H. Churchill, *To Shake Their Guns in the Tyrant's Face: Libertarian Political Violence and the Origins of the Militia Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009, \$35.00). Pp. 370. ISBN 978 0 472 11682 9.

Much sensationalist attention has been devoted to the militia movement since the fateful events at Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas in 1992 and 1993. In this groundbreaking study, Robert Churchill provides the most comprehensive, erudite and scholarly refutation of the conventional wisdom about the militias yet published. Using a combination of archival research and extensive interviews with their members, Churchill demonstrates how the militias’ remarkable growth in the 1990s relied upon a combination of political influences (the end of the Cold War, the Clinton administration’s push for new gun-control laws, and the paramilitarization of police units) and technological developments (the rise of faxes, email, and the Internet) that facilitated the emergence of a loose coalition of groups with a shared interest in firearms and martial training. Central to the rise of the militias, however, was the recovery of a libertarian understanding of the American Revolution. The conviction that civilians had not only a right but also a duty to take up arms against what they perceived as the wanton exercise of unconstitutional power by the federal government

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.

*Birkbeck, University of London*

PROFESSOR ROB SINGH

*Journal of American Studies*, 44 (2010), 3. doi:10.1017/S0021875810001519

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,