

entities. Given the demands and challenges of managing the discrete efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is hard to be optimistic about the outcome.

—James H. Lebovic

### THE COALITION CRACKS

Susan Dunn: *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010. Pp. 361. \$27.95.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670511003597

Students of American politics are quite familiar with the New Deal coalition crafted by Franklin Roosevelt, consisting of Southern whites, Northern working-class ethnics, and eventually African Americans, both North and South. This would be the partisan engine driving fundamental changes in the role of government beginning in the 1930s and extending at least through the Johnson administration in the 1960s. However, this coalition was fragile and arguably contained irreconcilable elements—in particular Southern conservatives versus the rest of the party. In *Roosevelt's Purge*, Susan Dunn presents a rich and in-depth narrative of one of the first renderings of this conflict within the post-1932 Democratic Party between the South and the rest of the party as she describes Roosevelt's attempt to purge Southern conservatives who resisted the full measure of the New Deal.

Dunn explains that despite Roosevelt's landslide victory in 1936 in which he carried every state except two, the New Deal began to stall in 1937. The Supreme Court was at the center of the opposition as it struck down two cornerstones of FDR's recovery plan—the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the National Industrial Recovery Act. Roosevelt's response was the ill-fated “court-packing” plan which would be gutted in Congress as Southern Democrats joined Republicans (the “conservative coalition”) in opposition to the legislation.

FDR then turned his attention away from an obstructionist court to the obstructionists in Congress. He attempted to execute what came to be called the “purge” strategy, which involved orchestrating primary challenges to conservative, mostly Southern, Democrats by progressive New Dealers. The results for Roosevelt were a disaster as he challenged ten conservatives but defeated only one.

Dunn is clearly at her best in the approximately ninety percent of the book dedicated to sifting through the details of these ten 1938 congressional midterm elections. However, both her explanation of why FDR attempted this purge and her speculation about what he had in mind more generally are less satisfying.

Dunn argues that Roosevelt carried out the purge strategy as a result of a fit of pique. Repeatedly she tells us that Roosevelt's “Dutch was up.” While no

doubt a contributing factor, one wonders if more was not at issue than the mere desire for revenge. For example, in his exhaustive treatment of the court-packing episode in *FDR v. The Constitution* (Walker, 2009), Burt Solomon suggests that a much more dynamic process is at work. It involves an enormously popular president attempting to deal with problems facing the very survival of the republic while operating more generally in a world of totalitarian leaders. Alternatively, or perhaps in addition to these other factors, simple hubris leading to overreaching is not at all unusual among executives, especially those who are wildly popular.

The most speculative element of Dunn's analysis is her argument to the effect that FDR had something much grander in mind than a desire to bring recalcitrant members of the party back into the New Deal fold. She maintains that he wished to redesign the party system in order to present a clear choice between distinct and disciplined parties. In short, she feels that what FDR had in mind is what political scientists refer to as a responsible party model whereby conservative and liberal parties compete for electoral favor and the winner implements their vision once in office.

Such a conclusion requires us to view Roosevelt rather differently than is normally the case. First, we would need to assume that one of the nation's premier politicians did not appreciate the structural barriers (e.g., federalism, midterm elections, and the separation of powers) frustrating a system of responsible parties. Second, we would have to suppose that FDR did not understand the political implications of this sort of ideological reorientation of the system. Making the Democratic Party a unified voice for liberalism would have required, as would eventually be the case, an effective purge of Southern rank-and-file members as well as elected officials. However—and this is the dilemma that would confound the Democrats for several generations as the party moved in a more progressive direction—a purge of the South would threaten, if not end, the Democrats' majority party status.

Rather than some grand design to make the party system over, it seems much more reasonable that FDR wanted to get a few more critical members of Congress on board in support of the unfinished parts of the New Deal. In fact, Dunn appears to admit as much when she concludes that “in the end Roosevelt's position” on party leadership and party realignment “was hard to tell so often did he waver and tack” (228).

For most of the remaining ten percent or so of the book, Dunn describes the subsequent evolution of the party system all the way down to the present day. Although the material is quite familiar, to a political scientist this is an especially interesting portion of the book. Support for the Democratic Party from the conservative South becomes increasingly problematic, especially as the national party takes a more progressive position on race. Southern whites leave the Democratic Party as the GOP beginning with Richard Nixon pursues the “Southern strategy.” Quoting Merle Black, Dunn observes that by the time we get to 2008 “Dixie” may as well be the anthem of the Republican Party (272).

Dunn completes her analysis by evaluating the party system that has developed since the New Deal against the standard of “energetic” government. Despite her belief that FDR would be proud of the system that has developed, in the final analysis she tells us that it is insufficiently energetic. The problem is not the parties but rather the “horse and buggy political system itself, bequeathed to 21st century Americans by the Framers, those elitist, self-protective, 18th century gentlemen who feared energy in government as well as popular power and majority rule” (275). In other words, barriers such as federalism and the separation of powers make any semblance of responsible party government impossible in the American situation. As a result, she rather remarkably argues that both the New Deal policies of the 1930s and more recently Obama's agenda have fallen prey to the Framers' “majority-pulverizing constitutional blueprint” (276).

Dunn's opinions about the Founders, their handiwork, and the virtues of energetic government are presented without discussion. She thus fails to acknowledge, as was certainly the sober judgment of Founders such as James Madison, that energetic government can be controversial, dangerous, and unstable government. She likewise fails to acknowledge that the “majority-pulverizing constitutional blueprint” often may not render majorities entirely or even substantially impotent. Although they did not accomplish their entire agenda, arguably the policies of Obama and most certainly those of Roosevelt changed the regulatory culture in fundamental and progressive ways. It may well be the case that much—perhaps not all, but much—can be energetically accomplished by what others have characterized as a “semiresponsible” party system.

When *Roosevelt's Purge* deals with the practical politics of these ten primary elections, it clearly fills a gap in our history of Roosevelt. However, Dunn's speculation about Roosevelt's motives and his grand design, along with her advocacy of energetic government, would perhaps benefit from a more nuanced discussion.

—Jim Franke

### MORAL RHETORIC, EASY CASES

Joseph H. Carens: *Immigrants and the Right to Stay*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. Pp. 114. \$14.75.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670511003603

This slim volume (fewer than 20,000 words; it can be read in under an hour) is a shortened version of a forum published in 2009 in the *Boston Review*, a bimonthly magazine (also available online), on the question whether