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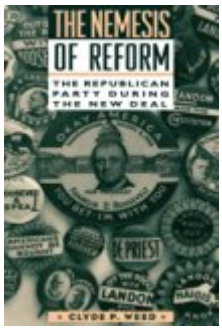

Clyde P. Weed. *The Nemesis of Reform: The Republican Party during the New Deal.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. xiv + 293 pp. $37.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-08486-4.

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The presidential election campaign of 1932 has often been considered a watershed in U.S. political history marking the decline of the Republican coalition that effectively had dominated national politics since 1896. In 1932, the Democratic party under Franklin D. Roosevelt created a new majority coalition with 22,821,857 popular votes (472 electoral vote) to the defeated Republican candidate, Herbert Hoover's, 15,761,841 votes (59 electoral votes). New Era Republicans caught up in what one Boston business leader called the slowly sucking maelstrom of the Great Depression lost 103 seats in the House of Representatives and 12 in the Senate giving Democrats a majority of 313 to 117 in the House and 59 to 35 in the Senate. Ever since, scholars have debated the political and historical significance of the election. In NEMESIS OF REFORM, Clyde Weed, a political scientist at Southern Connecticut University, joins that debate by arguing that minority party behavior, especially by activists and party elites, has been just as important to completing the process of political realignment as the more commonly studied work of the new majority party.

Political historians have built on the work of V.O. Key, Jr.'s idea of "critical elections" to create a sizeable literature on the nature, timing, and significance of national elections that have so thoroughly altered the landscape of party politics that we can point to either "realigning elections," or, more generally, "realigning periods" providing a broad overview of how political change has mirrored broader economic, social, or ethnocultural changes. Yet in contradistinction to the work of such well known scholars as Walter Dean Burnham, Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., and James L. Sundquist among others, Weed suggests that realignment theorists have given too much credence to the rationality of vote maximization seeking behavior of parties and too little to the more passionate beliefs, rhetoric, and behavior of party elites in minority parties caught in the midst of realigning periods.

Weed suggests that beyond the work of James T. Patterson, historians have paid too little heed to how the political changes in Republican Party circles in the 1932-1939 period affected the consolidation of the New Deal majority. Rather than pro-

viding us with a detailed history of the party in the 1930s, he is more interested in placing that history in the context of how Republican leaders political strategies and flawed perceptions of public opinion prior to the post-1936 use of detailed opinion polls delayed the Republican response to the New Deal system by accepting its new position as the minority party. He attempts to go beyond traditional scholarly study of mass voting behavior to focus on "party strategies, interest groups, and the process by which elites innovate new party positions" (p. 1) during realigning periods.

The author organizes the study in three parts which give a brief overview of Republican party dominance to 1932, the "Descent to Minority Status" in the 1932-1936 years, and confronting the New Deal in the 1937-1939 period. Weed draws on a wealth of information ranging from classic secondary accounts through printed sources such as the *Congressional Record* and the *New York Times* to research in individual manuscript collections at the Library of Congress, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and Yale University. At a number of key points, Weed relies on the standard historical accounts of the period with especially heavy reliance on works by William Leuchtenburg, Albert Romasco, Barry Karl, and James Patterson [1]. Throughout the work, Weed presents detailed data and striking quotations that place the politics of the 1930s in a new light for most historians while challenging political scientists and those historical sociologists who have been calling for us to "bring the state back in" to pay more attention to the role of party elites as historical actors.

The most striking sections of *Nemesis of Reform* are those which detail the subtlety of the regional split between eastern conservative Republicans and western insurgent progressives and what Weed terms the "perceptual problems" of Republican leaders in understanding and acting upon the political realities of the rise of urban liberalism and its part in creating the New Deal majority. This account goes beyond Patterson's enlightening work on the late 1930s to reveal the complexities of Republican party elite strategies over the whole 1932-1939 period and reminding us of the efforts of House minority leader Bertrand Snell (New York) and Senate minority leader Charles McNary (Oregon) in trying to find common ground among the two factions of the party in opposition to the New Deal. Between 1934 and 1936, Weed argues, the "issue space" between Republicans and Democrats widened, while Republican leaders failed to see the permanent shift in voter behavior as new urban liberals in the Northeast and Midwest transformed the Democratic party. By 1937-1938, Republican leaders began opportunistically joining with conservative Southern Democrats as FDR's 1936 mandate was swamped in a tide of opposition to the Supreme Court packing plan, the recession of 1937, and new voting patterns in reaction to what Barry Karl has called the Third New Deal of 1937-1939.[2] By the end of the 1930s, Republicans had found their political souls in principled opposition to the thrust of the New Deal while pragmatically making their peace with parts of New Deal reform.

At the core of this work in chapters 6-9, Weed gives the most detailed and thoughtful narrative of Republican response to the New Deal in print. Strategizing for Alf Landon's 1936 campaign only papered over continuing regional divisions in the party. Republicans remained confused over how to react to the legislative agenda of the First Hundred Days, the broader social reforms of the Second New Deal, and the defection of Southern conservatives from the Democratic coalition in the late 1930s. Weed's larger interpretive point is that Republican leaders, used to national political dominance, had to learn what it meant to become the minority party in a new party system now dominated by the opposition party. Republicans only learned how to play the minority party role

after a painful learning curve that cost their party dearly.

To support the contention of regional division within the party, he provides tables of congressional voting patterns on major pieces of New Deal legislation while self-consciously eschewing consideration of "the complex mosaic of state and local politics" and foreign policy issues (p. 6). Initial support in the 74th Congress (1933-34) by both factions of such conservative legislation as the Glass-Steagall Act and the Economy Act gave way to party confusion and split voting (opposition by eastern conservatives and support by western insurgents) on the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Federal Emergency Relief Act, and creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. As the New Deal shifted toward social reform in the 74th Congress (1935-36), Republicans remained divided over reaction to the Public Utility Holding Company Act, the Wagner Act, the Wealth Tax Act, the Social Security Act, and the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.

Weed's central argument is that the political realignment of the 1930s was only completed when the Republican regional schism narrowed in the 75th Congress (1937-38) due to changing circumstances, a brief flirtation with creating a formal conservative coalition with Southern Democrats, FDR's overreaching his mandate, and gradual convergence between the eastern and western wings of the party. FDR's 1936 mandate left the Democrats with a huge spectrum of opinions that could only lead to factionalism, while the failed Court packing plan, vacillation in responding to the recession of 1937--"Roosevelt's recession", compromise over the executive reorganization bill, and failure of the 1938 purge of Southern Democrats gave the Republican leadership renewed hope, confidence in their opposition to further reform, and the strategic insight to recognize that as a minority party they could criticize and oppose New Dealism wholesale. By 1939, the Republican party had accepted its role as the minority party thus making the realignment of the 1930s complete.

In broader historical terms, Weed both modifies the idea of political realignment theorists and challenges the inclusiveness of those who bruit about the significance of state administrative capacity. He argues convincingly that the history of the New Deal realignment remains incomplete without more attention to the ideology, political rhetoric, and voting behavior of Republican elites who opposed the New Deal. In speeches on the floor of Congress and heartfelt despair in private correspondence, Republican politicians voiced their sincere opposition to the New Deal as an attack on traditional American concerns. In rediscovering that rhetoric, Weed reveals the historical roots of the nineteenth-century world view that so permeates national politics in twentieth-century American political rhetoric.

Yet while Weed's argument assumes a connection between the changing economic institutions of modern America and the two-party system, he never persuasively supports that view. For the 1920s, for example, Weed provides useful summaries of works by Robert Cuff, Ellis Hawley, Guy Alchon, and Barry Karl [3] on the wartime mobilization of 1917-18 and New Era economic policies, but he never convincingly demonstrates the link between what Hawley has termed the associative state and the outmoded rhetoric of Republican leaders in the 1924-32 years. For the 1932-39 period, Weed cites the relevant works of Robert Himmelberg, Guy Alchon, Ellis Hawley, Herbert Stein, and Robert Collins [4] regarding the political economy of reform that led to the failure of Hooverian voluntarism (mistakenly cited as "volunteerism") by 1932, the National Recovery Administration of 1933-35, the economic policy debate of 1937-38, and the rapprochement between business and government by 1938. Yet no connections are shown between key business groups and the leadership of the Republican par-

ty. While it is refreshing to see a political scientist take historians' work seriously, Weed seems so concerned with using fellow political scientist Anthony Downs *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) as a foil that he never quite brings together the results of his own thorough research with that of the historians whose work he cites.

In the conclusion, Weed returns to the theoretical fray to toss out an intellectual challenge to the much-praised historical sociologists:

"...if, as state theorists have suggested, the autonomous decisions of state administrators are important factors in policy development, so to [sic] are the decisions made by party elites. But the activities of political parties are often treated simply as by- products of changes in mass voting behavior, with little consideration given to party strategies, elite perceptions, and the ability of party leaders to shape and influence political conflict. Consequently, the independent actions that can emerge from these groups have often been overlooked." (p. 204)

Yet the personal, political, and institutional connections among and between these elites and their counterparts in other modern institutions are exactly what recent historians (whose work is cited throughout this account) have detailed through research in primary sources. Weed could have clarified just what he thinks the links were between Republican elites and such key business institutions as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Liberty League, and the Business Advisory and Planning Council. Weed s lack of familiarity (via primary source research) with these institutions and the people who led them is reflected in the mistaken identification of General Electric president Gerard Swope as "Gerald Swope" (pp. 23, 78) and Chamber of Commerce president Henry Harriman as "Harry Harriman" (pp. 27, 129). A much more careful reading of the work of Ellis Hawley and Kim McQuaid [5] would have helped Weed to make better sense of the complexity of business-government relations in the 1929- 1940 period.

What *The Nemesis of Reform* suggests for scholars is that we need to carefully reconstruct the intricate web of relations--once called political economy--among people and institutions in the commercial, industrial, political, and public realms. Perhaps the time has come to integrate political, business, institutional, and cultural history in ways that were only hinted at during the unexpectedly packed session on revitalizing political history held at the recent Organization of American Historians convention in Washington, D.C. Several members of H-Pol noted at that session that we can continue the dialogue begun there through the medium of electronic communication over Internet mailing lists. Weed's work may be dismissed by some as "traditional political history," but it raises a number of questions that seem to lie at the center of the reemerging interest in a more broadly defined political history.

Finally, Weed recognizes that his work has implications for the contemporary political scene as political analysts and spin masters make claims for the latest political realignment:

"The effect that individuals with disproportionate interests can have on weakened minority coalitions during periods of heightened political conflict remains one of the unappreciated components of the realignment process. The realignment paradigm needs to move beyond the consideration of mass electoral behavior to an understanding of the role activists and elites can play in party coalitions." (pp. 208-209)

In light of the heavy traffic of posts to H-Pol following the 1994 congressional elections, we may have much to say about the history of minority parties during periods of political realignment such as our own.[6] At the very end of this interesting, thought-provoking work, political scientist Clyde Weed leaves us with some tantalizing suggestions worthy of further thought and discussion that have come up on this list of late. He asserts

that minority parties played key roles in such earlier political realignments as the 1852-1860 period and the system of 1896 as well as the 1930s. He leaves us with the implicit question, will the Democratic party play such a role in the 1990s? *The Nemesis of Reform* gives us plenty to think about, discuss, and consider for future research.

NOTES

[1] William Leuchtenburg,*Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York, 1963); Albert Romasco, *The Politics of Recovery: Roosevelt s New Deal* (New York, 1983); Barry D. Karl,*The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago, 1983), and James Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal* (Lexington, 1967).

[2] Karl, *The Uneasy State*, pp. 155-181 and Karl, Constitution and Central Planning: The Third New Deal Revisited, *The Supreme Court Review* 6 (1988): 163-201. Cf. Patrick D. Reagan, Governmental Planning in the Late New Deal, in *For the General Welfare: Essays in Honor of Robert H. Bremner*, eds. Frank Annunziata, Patrick D. Reagan, and Roy T. Wortman (New York, 1989), pp. 271-302; John W. Jeffries, The New New Deal: FDR and American Liberalism, 1937-1945, *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (Fall 1990): 398-418; Alan Brinkley, The New Deal and the Idea of the State, in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, 1989), pp. 85-121; Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1995).

[3] Robert D. Cuff, *The War Industries Board: Business-Government Relations During World War I* (Baltimore, 1973); Ellis W. Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order* (New York, 1979, 1992); *Herbert Hoover as Secretary of Commerce: Studies in New Era Thought and Practice*, ed. Ellis W. Hawley; Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science and the State in the 1920s* (Princeton, 1985); and Karl, *The Uneasy State*.

[4] Robert F. Himmelberg, *The Origins of the National Recovery Administration: Business, Government, and the Trade Association Issue, 1921-1933* (New York, 1976); Alchon, *Invisible Hand of Planning*; Hawley, *Great War and Search for a Modern Order*; Herbert Stein, *The Fiscal Revolution in America* (Chicago, 1969); and Robert M. Collins, *The Business Response to Keynes, 1929-1964* (New York, 1981).

[5] Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton, 1966) and Hawley, A Partnership Formed, Dissolved, and in Renegotiation: Business and Government in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Era, in *Business and Government: Essays in 20th-Century Cooperation and Confrontation*, eds. Joseph R. Frese, S.J. and Jacob Judd (Tarrytown, NY, 1985), pp. 187-219; Kim McQuaid, *Big Business and Presidential Power: From FDR to Reagan* (New York, 1982) and *Uneasy Partners: Big Business in American Politics, 1945-1990* (Baltimore, 1994).

[6] For a report on the state of the art among realignment theorists, see *The End of Realignment? Interpreting American Electoral Eras*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Madison, 1991).

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