

Books

FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny by Kenneth S. Davis

(Putnam; 936 pp.; \$15.00)

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For forty years—my entire lifetime—American politics has been dominated by the “Roosevelt coalition.” Periodically, hopeful Republicans, despairing liberals and frustrated radicals have predicted its demise, and every so often these days a political savant proclaims its end. No wonder: The coalition has outlived its founder by a quarter century of whizzing political change and is, by any standard, the most durable party alignment of American history. Of course the coalition has an undeniably battered appearance, and especially in its liberal-intellectual wing looks rather scamy and run-down. But it endures: Not even George McGovern’s best efforts could shake its hold on Congress, and Mr. Nixon, like every postwar President, must sense the Rooseveltian presence behind his shoulder.

If durability is a test of art, then Franklin Roosevelt must be judged to be among the greatest of political artists. Machiavelli was a failure in politics altogether; the Kaiser dumped Bismarck, and Metternich was chased out of Vienna by a mob. But Roosevelt, as a delicatessen waiter remarked to me in 1968, could still “take all these bums.”

And it is as an artist that Roosevelt must be judged. He was no intellectual; he was not even an ideologist; he was no technician or policy planner. The “best and the brightest” would never have admitted him to their circle. He was, in the old tradition, a gentleman amateur, undisciplined save in manners and courtesy, a dilettante, a light-

weight, altogether out of phase with the times. Once, horrified by a Roosevelt reference to the heroism of “Serbia” during World War II—which seemed to suggest support for the Yugoslavian monarchy—Louis Adamic sought out Mrs. Roosevelt and was told not to worry, that the President was always confused on the subject of Yugoslavia because it had begun as Serbia in his stamp collection. Could such a man make foreign policy in the atomic age? Yet Roosevelt, after all, was a partisan of an international trusteeship for Indochina, recognizing then that French colonial rule was dead. Perhaps we should require that our foreign policy experts collect stamps; Hoover was an expert too.

Roosevelt will always be fascinating to biographers because his personality is the key to his artistry, something Justice Holmes recognized at once: “a second-rate intellect, but a first-rate temperament.” Kenneth Davis’s work is only a part of what is already a long tradition.

There is little new in Davis’s biography, though it should be said that he integrates the work of others with considerable skill. His technique of setting the narrative of Roosevelt’s early life in context by lengthy discussions of the political environment may be useful to the general reader. Others are likely to find these interruptions both trite and annoying. And somehow Davis contrives to say too much and too little. The details of Roosevelt’s early life parade by, one does have a sense that FDR had indeed a sense

of “destiny,” but somehow the man himself fails to emerge.

Of course there is a sense in which every event, however trivial, is part of the unique combination that is an individual personality. But it strains the imagination, somehow, to believe that if FDR had been admitted to the Porcellan Club, rather than being forced to settle for Fly, he would have been much different. I wonder, too, whether it would have changed matters much if he had been a success in football in his years at Croton.

Perhaps it would, but I think it slights Sara Roosevelt too much to think so. This was, after all, an essentially fatherless boy living under the aegis of a mother who was shrewd, self-centered, self-righteous, powerful, loving and utterly ruthless. Roosevelt knew economic and social security in ways that few men do; psychologically he was engaged in a constant, desperate struggle to affirm some kind of manhood and personal identity.

No wonder, then, that he turned to Cousin Ted as a model. As Davis shows, Franklin patterned his life on Theodore’s in an almost slavish way: he too would serve in the legislature, be Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York and President. He too would be hawkish, “realistic” and—though here he was to be frustrated—a war hero.

In fact, while reading Davis’s biography, I became convinced that there was an element of inevitability, a hint of nemesis, about Franklin’s paralysis. Franklin followed Theodore’s doctrine of “the strenuous life” as devotedly as he did everything else about TR. Repeatedly he drove his far from robust constitution to the breaking point, and the events at Campobello have all the iron logic of Greek tragedy. It may be that polio taught Franklin that Cousin Ted was a bit of a poseur, a frightened boy in his own way; it may also be that his affliction freed Franklin from the need to struggle so desperately against his own desires for dependence. All that is speculation, but the pattern and the denouement are real.

Finally, Davis makes Roosevelt's religion altogether too genteel, too external, though he acknowledges the importance of FDR's belief in a benevolent Providence to his political life and beliefs. Rexford Tugwell, in his *The Democratic Roosevelt*, described Franklin's loneliness at Croton, his isolation at a time when the need for friendship is most intense, his sense of distance from his aging and dying father. Tugwell contended that FDR turned to religion out of a driving personal need and that the consolation and confidence he found in it sustained him through the rest of his life. Roosevelt was no more a theologian than he was a philosopher; there is something inelegant and simple about his faith. And yet that faith which upheld him when TR's pre-

scriptions laid him low, which helped him to transform Teddy's frenzied toughness into a creed of compassion, is hardly to be deprecated by contrast to the brittle word-schemes of contemporary theology.

Everything I have said here gives too little credit to Eleanor, to Louis Howe, to all of Roosevelt's friends and heroes, and even to the uniqueness of Roosevelt himself. But it does not strain the truth too much to say that Roosevelt's early years taught him—born as much of an aristocrat as one can be in America—a humbling lesson which was critical to the democratic brilliance of his political art: "Kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Saxon blood." More too, we might wish to remind the leaders of our time, than intellect and expertise.

winism in Germany" could hardly be surpassed. Paul Kluge's equally fine "National Socialist Europe Ideology" demolishes the revisionist myth that the Nazis were just good, misunderstood Europeans and exposes them as unashamed German imperialists. Moreover, in outlining Hitler's and Himmler's plans for their postwar "New Order" in Europe, Kluge demonstrates the lunatic extremes to which the Nazis were prepared to go in actually applying their crude Social Darwinist view of the world.

Karl Dietrich Bracher's "Stages of Totalitarian 'Integration' (*Gleichschaltung*): The Consolidation of National Socialist Rule in 1933 and 1934" offers, like the whole book, more than its title would suggest. What Bracher really provides is a schematic account of the whole period 1930-34—first the paralysis of parliamentary government, then the period of rule by presidential decree and, finally, the rise of Hitler to fill the power vacuum.

Two other essays treat specific aspects of this political transition. Theodor Eschenburg's "The Role of Personality in the Crisis of the Weimar Republic" is very illuminating. Though broad economic and political forces paralyzed the Republic, nevertheless Hitler could not have become Chancellor without the intrigues of particular individuals in high places. Likewise, Hitler might have been stopped by the powerful socialist movement but for the shortsightedness of its leaders, as detailed in Erich Matthias's "The Downfall of the Old Social Democratic Party in 1933."

Once in office Hitler was not yet in power. That took almost a year and a half to consolidate. Two important milestones in the process were the Reichstag Fire, with the pseudo-legal terror that followed it, and Hitler's Blood Purge of Nazi and conservative dissidents on June 30, 1934. These topics are dealt with in essays by Hans Mommsen and Hermann Mau, respectively. Mommsen takes the revisionist position that the Nazis had nothing to do with the fire—he believes that the Dutch vagabond caught in the burn-

Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution

edited by Hajo Holborn

(Pantheon; 491 pp.; \$12.95)

Robert E. Neil

In the aftermath of World War II, thinking Germans had a profound psychological need to "digest" their recent past—the collapse of the Second Empire in 1918, the failure of the Weimar experiment in democracy and the nightmare of the "brown years" (the slang expression for the Third Reich). Perhaps the single most important contribution to this effort at self-understanding has been made by the *Quarterly for Contemporary History* (*Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*), published since 1953 by the institute of the same name in Munich. Though the *Quarterly* deals with all aspects of contemporary history, its main concern is with twentieth-century Germany.

From *Republic to Reich* is a selection from the journal of ten excellent, thought-provoking essays that deal with the Nazi dictatorship and

its origins. The late Hajo Holborn of Yale made the selection and wrote the rather unhelpful introduction. Contrary to dust jacket and title page, however, he did not edit the book. That was done after his death by Susan Gyarmati, whose name does not appear on the title page and who is not otherwise identified. This is a shame—and raises questions about publishers' ethics—because she has done a very able job of providing the reader with footnote guidance to unfamiliar material.

The essays are grouped into four sections, which I find arbitrary and likely to confuse the newcomer to the field. Accordingly, I shall discuss them in the reading sequence that I would recommend. For a lucid briefing on the currents of thought that could give rise to Nazi ideology, Hans-Günter Zmarzlik's "Social Dar-