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2-2006

## Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority, by Robert Mason

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Genovese, Michael A., "Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority, by Robert Mason" (2006). *Political Science and International Relations Faculty Works*. 11.

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military-industrial complex, an understudied subject, is important in this connection and as a problem in its own right. The defense sector would wish to have weapons gaps become political issues during presidential campaigns, and more generally would resist for economic reasons any shrinking of the defense base (as, for example, in the contemporary controversy over proposed American military base closures).

Finally, the study is important for demonstrating that internationally consequential political developments can be unrelated to national intelligence. Eisenhower shared with Kennedy the latest intelligence about the superpower balance of forces during the campaign, but Kennedy "chose instead to believe unofficial estimates, promulgated by journalists and maverick military officers, that inflated Soviet missile strength" (p. 4). The recent American invasion of Iraq affords another case of major decision making not being based on national intelligence.

Preble's study has weaknesses. First, the political impact of the military-industrial complex as the author defines it is unproven here. Kennedy did make important gains over Adlai Stevenson's showing in 1956 in areas in which defense production employment was cut, yet Preble does not establish that those gains were more substantial than gains made elsewhere for Kennedy's victory, and in San Diego, for example, a city hard hit by defense cutbacks, they were not determinative, the California electorate remaining in the Republican column. Finally, the military-industrial complex does not seem to have been important in stimulating the Kennedy administration's defense buildup, although the administration used the missile gap as a cover to legitimate the buildup.

Second, Preble leaves unresolved the question of how important national intelligence information was in this episode. He notes "the confusion and uncertainty inherent in the intelligence of that era" about Soviet forces (p. 69); the more "confused" the intelligence, the more justified Kennedy was in seeking alternative sources of information about the Soviet missile buildup. Preble believes it "highly unlikely" that Central Intelligence Agency Director Allen Dulles, who briefed Kennedy on behalf of the Eisenhower administration, would have told him there was no missile gap (p. 165). Yet intelligence about Soviet missile strength, a key asset obtained from highly sensitive U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union, warranted optimism; the U-2s failed to discover even one operational Soviet ICBM during Eisenhower's administration (p. 109). In light of this, Preble's point about "Kennedy's . . . continued confusion over the nature of the Soviet arms buildup" (p. 169) is hard to understand. Eisenhower, who controlled the U-2 flights, was manifestly not confused about the buildup.

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ROBERT MASON. *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2004. Pp. 289. \$39.95.

How did the United States voting public make the transition from a solidly Democratic majority based on the liberalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal coalition to an era of heightened conservatism but no discernable governing party, skipping a major partisan realignment in the process? Robert Mason, in his finely crafted examination of the era of Richard M. Nixon, argues that while the transition started in the early 1960s with the rise of Arizona's conservative Senator Barry Goldwater, it was really Nixon who envisioned the possibility of a major transformation and attempted an ambitious, and risky, strategy to achieve a "new majority" in the United States. That Nixon failed to achieve his vision should not deflect us from recognizing the strategic brilliance that animated this effort.

Goldwater's disastrous bid for the presidency in 1964 sparked a re-evaluation of partisan politics in the United States. Into the void stepped Nixon. For Nixon, it was a combination of personal ambition and partisan opportunity that led him to attempt a major political transformation of American politics. His ambition was great, but the risks also were great.

In the 1960s, the old order was severely challenged. The war in Vietnam, crime, student protests, racial unrest, urban violence, the rise of the counter culture, and the failure of the left to meet these challenges effectively led to an opportunity for Republicans to attack the prevailing orthodoxy. As Mason writes, "The profound disruptions within American society provided a good opportunity for a candidate in opposition to [President] Johnson and a party in opposition to the Democrats" (p. 23). Republicans, for the first time in thirty years, entertained the possibility they might become the majority party in America. The intellectual drive came from the writings of Nixon staffer Kevin Phillips, in his influential book *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969), and Democratic analysts Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, whose work, *The Real Majority* (1971), gave support to the possibility of realignment. The political impetus came from Nixon's political and personal ambitions.

Mason traces Nixon's new majority strategy to Goldwater's concern for "the forgotten Americans," the white middle and middle-lower class who paid their taxes, did their jobs, stayed out of trouble, but were ignored by the interest-group-dominated Democratic Party. Nixon morphed Goldwater's forgotten Americans into his own "silent majority." These were the troops of the new realignment, the potentially switchable voters to whom Republicans needed to appeal. While Mason touches on the role race played in this strategy, some might argue that he pays far too little attention to the power of race to drive many middle-class Americans, especially in the South, into the Republican fold. Prior to the 1960s, the "solid South" referred to the solidly Democratic South. Today, it means

solidly Republican. Race played a key role in this transformation, a role that Mason may underemphasize.

Opposition to a growing federal government also played a role in this transformation. But where Goldwater was a libertarian conservative, Nixon was a conservative internationalist, willing to make his peace with a burgeoning federal role. It was Ronald Reagan, a decade later, who brought the antigovernment sentiment solidly into the Republican playbook.

Nixon believed that he could woo labor, Catholics, and the white South into the Republican Party, creating a new and enduring Republican majority. Primarily on the basis of "social issues" (most voters were "un-young, un-poor, and un-black"), Nixon hoped to transform partisan loyalties and convert this transformation into political clout for his own ambitions. His initial efforts failed to see his new majority materialize, but this did not deter the president. But as the 1972 election approached, Nixon jettisoned party for personal gain. Obsessed with re-election, Nixon largely abandoned his party in favor of winning a personal victory. This strategy worked fabulously for Nixon—he won in a landslide—but proved disastrous for his party. The Democrats maintained control of both the House and the Senate, as well as most state houses.

After Nixon's 1972 victory, the crimes of Watergate crushed the president and his hopes for a new Republican majority. Nixon resigned in disgrace, a step ahead of impeachment and conviction. The Democrats won the presidency in 1976, and hopes for a new Republican majority were dashed. But if there was not a new Republican majority, there clearly was movement in the American electorate. Ticket splitting and de-alignment occurred; a weakening of partisan loyalties and the rise of independent voters were also evident. Rather than a new majority, there was no majority.

Mason does a fine job of bringing us back to the turbulent days of the 1960s and 1970s. He makes excellent use of archival materials and his writing is lively and accessible. His argument may not be original, but he executes his task with skill and insight. While he fails to take the power of race fully into account in his analysis, and while he also skates very quickly over Nixon's plan to govern without Congress via an "administrative strategy," Mason nonetheless helps us grasp the bold strategic vision of Nixon, the flawed execution of that vision, and the missed opportunity of the president.

Mason could have focused greater attention on the messenger: was Nixon the right person to lead a major partisan transformation? In many ways the answer is no. Nixon was brilliant but deeply flawed. He was often his own worst enemy, lacked the communication skills necessary to lead a major transformation of partisan loyalties, and, in the end, sacrificed party for personal victory. It took a Reagan to animate the conservative movement in the United States, a movement that was perhaps the final nail in the New Deal coffin, and one that has left no governing majority for the nation.

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ERIC ALTERMAN. *When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and its Consequences*. New York: Viking Press. 2005. Pp. ix, 447. \$27.95.

STEPHEN GRAUBARD. *Command of Office: How War, Secrecy, and Deception Transformed the Presidency, from Theodore Roosevelt to George W. Bush*. New York: Basic Books. 2005. Pp. xiii, 722. \$30.00.

A common theme of these two books is the use of lies and deception by twentieth-century presidents. For Eric Alterman this is his central focus. For Stephen Graubard it is part of a broader analysis that also includes issues of war and secrecy. Both authors also reflect the resurgent interest by historians in presidential biography.

Yet Alterman and Graubard have written two very different books. Alterman is concerned with the consequences that presidential lies and deceptions (he makes no distinction between the two) have had on the nation's foreign and domestic policies. He does this by examining the unintended results of presidential misrepresentations of four major events in U.S. foreign policy: the Yalta Conference of 1945; the Cuban missile crisis of 1963; the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents of 1964; and the Iran-Contra scandal of 1986–1987. In contrast, Graubard is concerned with what he regards as the declining stature of the presidential office for most of the twentieth century, but especially since the presidency of Harry S. Truman. In his view, only four modern presidents have been worthy of the office: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Truman. Beginning with Dwight D. Eisenhower, incompetence, especially in matters of foreign policy, has, in his view, increasingly characterized the inhabitants of the Oval Office. War, secrecy, and deception have all contributed to this regrettable development. But Graubard's indictment of the more recent inhabitants of the White House is more extensive than the subtitle of his book suggests.

Alterman has written the more compelling of the two books. In an interesting introductory chapter, which is part philosophical, part etymological, he attempts to justify his interchangeable use of deception, evasion, and outright lies. He also sets the context for the four case studies that follow. Of those cases, the least persuasive is the one on the Yalta Conference. The problems that emanated from Yalta, he maintains, were not the result of the failure of the Soviet Union to live up to the agreements they made but the intentional lies and deception that Presidents Roosevelt and Truman allegedly made in presenting the results of the wartime summit to the American people. Indeed, he goes so far as to state that "one of the great and, for American democracy, most painful ironies of the beginning of the Cold War" was that Joseph Stalin "honored the deal" made at Yalta while "the Americans and their British allies reneged. And that's how the Cold War began" (p. 24).

In making this provocative statement, Alterman claims that Roosevelt not only knew that Stalin had no