



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States* by Craig A. Rimmerman

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Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson. By Robert A. Caro. (New York: Knopf, 2002. xxiv, 1,167 pp. \$35.00, ISBN 0-394-52836-0.)

Robert A. Caro's latest work on Lyndon B. Johnson is a terrific read: vivid, gossipy, opinionated, informed. Anyone who teaches twentieth-century American history will find material here for the best political lecture of the semester, on Johnson, the Johnson "treatment," and the interplay of personality and politics. The subject is not for the squeamish; it will be a bold and indeed insensitive instructor who relates Johnson's psychological abuse of secretaries, aides, and just about anyone else he thought he could intimidate, in all its incredible uncouthness. Nor is the subject new. But Caro recounts it with a relish and comprehensiveness no previous author has managed.

Caro writes biography like the journalist he was before he became one of America's most celebrated biographers. He relies heavily on interviews—his own, other journalists', and oral historians'. At its best, this approach can be very revealing, showing Johnson as he appeared to those who knew him from years of close contact. On other occasions it smacks of dubious hearsay, stories told by individuals whose authority and perspective Caro does not always make clear.

Caro might have been compelled to this approach even if it did not suit his style. Johnson rarely committed himself to paper; one searches the files of the Johnson Library in vain for more than the occasional note or marginal comment from Johnson himself. Finding Johnson in his own words will not be a problem for Caro when he gets to the presidency, as Johnson recorded hundreds of hours of White House telephone conversations. But for the Senate years, Johnson is difficult to pin down, and Caro has to rely on secondhand sources.

Caro's theme here, as in two previous volumes on Johnson and one on Robert Moses, is the quest for and use of power. Caro is fascinated with power; not surprisingly, his Johnson is obsessed with power. In the previous Johnson volumes, LBJ has sought power for its own sake; in the present installment we see

glimmerings of what he wants the power *for*. This is the point of Caro's exhaustive attention to the 1957 Civil Rights Act (whose importance he overplays). It allows Johnson, a rather despicable character till now, to begin to redeem himself—a redemption, we can be sure (from Caro's emphatic foreshadowing) that will be completed by the time Johnson and Caro reach the Great Society.

Caro's interpretation is persuasive to a degree. Johnson certainly was avid to climb the greasy pole. But whether he did so for the sake of the ring at the top or simply to get past all the others on the pole is difficult to say. It is entirely possible that Johnson's egregious dominance behavior had no goal besides mere dominance, the insistence of the schoolyard bully on having his own way. Perhaps this is the dynamic that drives all power seekers, but to dress it up as a quest for power can seem too grand. Johnson behaved similarly as a teenager; was he questing for power then?

Presumably all will become clear in the sequel(s). Till then, read Caro for the drama and the incredible detail; read Robert Dallek, *Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (2 vols., 1991, 1998) for balance and context.

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From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States. By Craig A. Rimmerman. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. xiv, 239 pp. Cloth, \$69.50, ISBN 1-56639-904-1. Paper, \$19.95, ISBN 1-56639-905-X.)

The title of Craig A. Rimmerman's book suggests a textbook on the gay and lesbian movement. In fact, the author, a political scientist, has written a thoughtful study, at once descriptive and prescriptive, that explores the rise, struggles, and future of the gay rights movement. Rimmerman analyzes leading gay and lesbian organizations and their strategies—assimilation, litigation, and direct action—which he finds, to one degree or another, inadequate. The author then explores the Christian Right's crusade against gay rights and closes by calling for an integrated,

grass roots–based campaign for a range of progressive issues, including gay and lesbian rights.

Rimmerman's narrative of the gay rights movement is his book's chief strength. General readers will learn about the birth of the homophile movement during the 1950s, court decisions for and against gay rights, the impact of the riot at the Stonewall Inn (1969), and the struggles of the last three decades. His chapter on the Christian Right places the movement in context, offering pungent, even vitriolic, quotations from the opponents of gay rights, including Anita Bryant, who once denounced gays and lesbians as "human garbage" (p. 128). He provides a full account of President Bill Clinton's policies toward gays and lesbians and a first look at those of President George W. Bush. The author's prose, often stilted and sometimes repetitive, is hardly compelling. But the basic information on this movement is here.

Rimmerman persuasively catalogs the shortcomings of the gay and lesbian movement. The assimilationist strategy, pursued by such groups as the Human Rights Coalition, has netted few gains. The employment nondiscrimination act has not been passed, and recognition for same-sex marriages remains a distant dream. Court action has produced more defeats than triumphs. The U.S. Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) upheld Georgia's law barring sodomy, while the supreme court of Hawaii's 1993 ruling in favor of same-sex marriages pleased gays but upset many straights. The latter decision led to the Defense of Marriage Act, signed by Clinton in 1996, which restricted marriage to heterosexuals. Rimmerman sees greater hope in unconventional politics, observing that ACT UP, the AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) Coalition to Unleash Power, a protest group active in the 1990s, maintains cells in many large cities. But he suggests that marching on Washington—a well-worn civil rights tactic employed by gays and lesbians in 1979, 1987, and 1993—has had limited impact on policy makers and has left the movement's leaders divided over its utility.

Rimmerman is less compelling in prescribing the movement's next course. He urges gays

and lesbians to close ranks behind a "radical democratic conception of politics" and adopt "multiple strategies" for political, social, cultural, and economic change (p. 169). He wants the movement "to move beyond a narrow focus on identity politics," meaning exclusively gay and lesbian concerns, and toward an agenda encompassing environmental protection, universal child care, and comprehensive health insurance as well as nondiscrimination and justice for gays and lesbians (p. 170). The proposal, however intriguing, remains inadequately developed. How would such a coalition be formed? Is the gay rights movement with its numerous divisions, so adeptly chronicled by the author, capable of such unity? Will gays and lesbians be able to move beyond their unique group identity—and should they even try?

Although Rimmerman raises more questions than he answers, he correctly sees the gay and lesbian movement at a crossroads. More than ever before, gays and lesbians have become visible in both politics and mass culture (a topic Rimmerman neglects). Yet they enjoy few legal protections. Provocative and informative, *From Identity to Politics* is a useful addition to the literature on the gay and lesbian movement and civil rights in general.

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Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker. By James Gavin. (New York: Knopf, 2002. 430 pp. \$26.95, ISBN 0-679-44287-1.)

Postmodern world or no, the romantic myth of the tortured artist continues to affect how audiences view their musicians. Nowhere is this more apparent than in James Gavin's trade press biography of Chet Baker, *Deep in a Dream*. In chronicling the life and death of Baker, the white trumpeter celebrated in the 1950s as the embodiment of "cool jazz" who quickly deteriorated into a pathetic junkie, Gavin both explores that deeply entrenched myth and, alas, succumbs to it.

The book opens like a scene from a film: a cast of mutually suspicious characters gathers at a cemetery to pay last respects to Baker, the