implement affirmative action, a policy that in practice came very close to quotas. The courts initially supported the regulators, and affirmative action became widespread in both the public and private sectors. Then the backlash arrived. Politicians campaigned against affirmative action, state ballot measures sought to eliminate racial preferences, and the courts imposed stricter constitutional limits. A policy that had been rejected by Congress thus slipped in through the other two branches and became a defining political issue.

These and the book's other tales (about the Immigration Act of 1965 and campaign finance reform) may sound disheartening, but I found them reassuring. Policymaking is about compromise, and the compromises don't end when a bill becomes law. Even if reformers realize all their goals in Congress—and they rarely do—they still must face implementers in the executive branch, successor congresses, lawyers using the courts to muddy the waters, and evolving social mores. Consequently, getting the policy right is not the only thing, or even the most important thing. Giving voice to the diverse interests is closer to the mark. Men and women must be able to exercise their complex, varied, conflicting, and unpredictable wills through the labyrinth of politics and governance. With his stories of apparent blunders and shortsightedness, Gillon reveals that the system works.

—Marty Linsky

FROM VOTING TO VIOLENCE:
Democratization and Nationalist Conflict.
By Jack Snyder. Norton.
382 pp. $29.95

ON BEING A SUPERPOWER:
And Not Knowing What to Do about It.
By Seymour J. Deitchman.
Westview. 350 pp. $32

The idea that democracies do not go to war with other democracies, popularized by Princeton University historian Michael Doyle in 1986, has become a dangerous political cliché. It is dangerous partly because of its effect on international relations—the Clinton administration seems to believe that democracy-building equals peace, with dubious results from Haiti to Kosovo—but mostly because, by begging important questions about the nature of democracy, it leads us onto treacherous ground.

In his thoughtful and penetrating book, Snyder, a political scientist at Columbia University, analyzes imperial Britain, revolutionary France, Germany from Bismarck to Hitler, and 19th-century Serbia. Nationalism, he concludes, is a regular and sometimes monstrous feature of young democracies. These nations suffer a wild and even vicious youth; indeed, "the process of democratization can be one of its own worst enemies." Nominal democracies without civic institutions and a sturdy middle class are especially vulnerable to nationalist demagogues. "If nationalist conflict is to be avoided," Snyder writes, "the development of civic institutions should be well underway before mass-suffrage elections are held. Likewise, it is better if a strong middle class emerges before press freedom expands and civil society groups get organized, or else these may be easily hijacked by an elite with a nationalist agenda."

At a time when support of democracy is almost reflexive, these are startling prescriptions. But Snyder makes a powerful case, one with which ancient Greeks and classical-minded Enlightenment figures such as Burke and Gibbon would have been familiar. Although the Russian election came too late for the author's deadline, his thesis helps explain why so many Russian reformers have soft-pedaled their democratic aspirations to back Vladimir Putin's attempt to restore a strong, centralized state.

Whereas Snyder concentrates on the problems of fledgling democracies, Deitchman considers the United States. The lonely superpower, perforce responsible for global stability, is also a media-saturated democracy that is sensitive to casualties, views the United Nations with suspicion, and expects the world to be grateful. Deitchman, formerly with the Institute for Defense Analyses, a research firm based in Alexandria, Virginia, starts with three credible scenarios. First, he asks whether the United States would really risk nuclear war with China to protect Taiwan, and he ponders the price in lost credibility if Taiwan were

abandoned. Second, he asks how the United States would react to an Islamic fundamentalist rebellion against the Saudi monarchy. Finally, he wonders whether an overstretched U.S. military could still retake the Panama Canal if it fell under the control of a narco-dictatorship. He concludes that a diminished military, increasingly distant from American society as a whole, greatly complicates the effective exercise of might.

But, as Deitchman notes, America's superpower primacy will not last forever. Although post-Renaissance Western culture has dominated the three other main cultures (China, India, and the Middle East) for some 500 years, the aberration is slowly but surely coming to an end: "Because modern technology by its very nature has now become globally available, and technology-based economic strength has also diffused around the world, it appears unlikely that any one of the major regional or even global powers will be strong enough to dominate the others at any foreseeable future time." As a patriotic American, albeit one worried about the nation's moral fiber, Deitchman does not ask whether this would be altogether a bad thing. Democracies, after all, are rather good at getting along with others once they get through the distressingly violent adolescence that Snyder analyzes so well.

—Martin Walker

THUNDER FROM THE EAST:
Portrait of a Rising Asia.
By Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. Knopf. 377 pp. $27.50

Kristof and WuDunn spent five years reporting from China for the *New York Times* and won a joint Pulitzer for their brave and informative pieces on Tiananmen. Thereafter, based in Japan, they covered Asia as a whole for their paper. Their political, economic, and social reporting—well researched, closely observed, and revealing—was in the best *Times* tradition. When it comes to writing books, though, the writers prove much less surefooted.

Thunder from the East seeks to explain the Asian crisis of the late 1990s and to speculate about the region's future. The crisis, Kristof and WuDunn conclude, "was the best thing that could have happened," because it destroyed the cronyism, bad business practices, and even the ill-advised kindheartedness that had stifled Asian economic development. As for the future, the authors predict (with *perhaps* and *probably* as safety nets) that "Asia is likely to wrench economic, diplomatic, and military power from the West over the coming decades." These conclusions, though plausible, are not particularly original, and they're repeated many times, as if the authors doubt the attention span of their readers.

The book does contain a mountain of fascinating material about the vast territory stretching from Afghanistan to the Pacific, though relatively little about China and nothing about Burma or Hong Kong. Kristof and WuDunn provide an evenhanded analysis of the Japanese massacre in Nanking in 1937, an informative discussion of Asian economic affairs (drawn largely from their reporting for the *Times*), and a chilling account of the region's pollution and its terrible costs and dangers.

But *Thunder from the East* suffers from an

A Ming dynasty nobleman's badge

overly personal style (the acknowledgments are a monument to cutesiness), jarring inconsistencies, and, too often, highly dubious generalizations. For example, the authors ascribe some five centuries of slow development in *Asia*, not just China, to misjudgments during the early 15th century, when Ming emperors terminated the Indian