

## Current Books

results caught Clark flatfooted. His response was to escalate, with more aircraft and talk of a possible ground invasion. But the goal of “impacting” Serbian forces in Kosovo remained elusive—he kept urging his air commanders to try harder, with few apparent results (and perhaps less than all-out efforts on their part).

NATO’s eventual success, against an isolated Serbia weakened by a decade of perpetual crisis, was preordained. But when victory came after 11 weeks, it did so despite the leadership displayed at the top, not because of it. “Strategic commander” Clark was simply out of his depth. Schooled to fight a major war against the Soviets, and obsessed with avoiding another Vietnam, he possessed neither the intellectual framework nor the grammar to formulate strategy in circumstances where the canonical lessons of the Cold War didn’t apply. The supreme commander didn’t even know what he didn’t know.

For a nation that, like it or not, exercises global military power, a strategically illiterate officer corps represents a serious danger. By calling attention to that danger, albeit unwittingly, *Waging Modern War* deserves recognition as an important book.

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH

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**THE NEW AMERICANS:**  
*How the Melting Pot Can Work Again.*  
By Michael Barone. Regnery. 338 pp.  
\$27.95

Sometime in the past year or two, American politicians awoke en masse with a terrible hangover on the issue of immigration. Policy had been dominated by restrictionists, who warned that a brown or yellow or multicolored tide was about to change the character of the nation, if not destroy it entirely. Gradually, though, the shrill voices of Pat Buchanan and Pete Wilson faded, the role of immigrants in the economic boom became clear, and legislators began amending or repealing the anti-immigrant statutes put on the books just a few sessions earlier.

Now, with the Immigration and Naturalization Service under orders to clean up its act, and new amnesties and guest worker programs under serious consideration, the tone of the popular debate has come full circle. Instead of books denouncing the rise of “alien”

influences and blaming immigrants for everything from Los Angeles traffic jams to Chesapeake Bay pollution, we have books extolling the contributions of immigration to American life and values.

A political commentator best known as the coauthor for the past three decades of *The Almanac of American Politics*, Barone sensibly debunks “the notion that we are at a totally new place in American history, that we are about to change from a white-bread nation to a collection of peoples of color.” On the contrary, “the new Americans of today, like the new Americans of the past, can be interwoven into the fabric of American life. . . . It can happen even more rapidly if all of us realize that that interweaving is part of the basic character of the country.”

Barone compares three groups of what he calls “new” Americans—blacks, Latinos, and Asians—with three ethnic groups that predominated among immigrants a century ago—the Irish, Italians, and Jews. Interesting, even compelling, Barone’s construct produces a number of useful insights about upward mobility and assimilation. Past and present have, in some respects, uncanny parallels. But there is also a major flaw in the approach. The African Americans of whom Barone writes have, for the most part, been in America far longer than almost anyone else he discusses, including most of the “white-bread” people. He acknowledges the problem early on, and then lamely dismisses it “for the purpose of this book.”



*A young Polish immigrant shoulders his trunk on Ellis Island in 1907.*

Despite that weakness, many readers will enjoy Barone's rapid, hold-on-to-your-hat histories of life in America for five of the six groups covered here. (His chapter on Asians seems cursory; perhaps he ran out of space, time, or interest.) The encyclopedic knowledge he has gained while visiting every congressional district in the country adds depth and flavor to his stories, though his periodic swipes at such policies as affirmative action

and bilingual education seem gratuitous.

The book may not live up to its subtitle, but it does provide a reassuring reminder that "the United States has never been a monoethnic nation." The American majority is made up of an ever-shifting coalition of many minorities. And yet, remarkably, out of that relentless change there emerges a unique and enviable stability.

—SANFORD J. UNGAR

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### *REVEALING THE UNIVERSE: The Making of the Chandra X-Ray Observatory.*

By Wallace Tucker and Karen Tucker.  
Harvard Univ. Press. 295 pp. \$27.95

This book might more appropriately have been called *Revealing NASA*, for there is not much here of the universe. The narrative ends as the first images are coming in from the \$2 billion Chandra X-Ray Observatory, named for 20th-century astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, and launched into Earth orbit by the space shuttle in 1999. These images, in which invisible x-rays are rendered in color, are rather less dramatic than the pictures we are used to seeing from the Hubble Space Telescope. They may be packed with valuable information for astronomers, but the average onlooker can be forgiven for thinking, "Ho, hum."

Which is not to say that the book is a "ho, hum" read. At the beginning, I was put off by an alphabet soup of acronyms (even Chandra started life as AXAF, the "Advanced X-ray Astrophysics Facility"). But as the pace picked up, I was drawn into the depiction of how the National Aeronautics and Space Administration works, technically and politically, and how an instrument such as Chandra gets built and deployed. The story is nothing short of heroic, and the Tuckers are ideal guides. He is a spokesman and she a science writer for the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, parent institution of Chandra science. They saw much of it happen, and they had access to the key players.

The universe reveals itself in every part of the electromagnetic spectrum, from low-energy radio waves to high-energy x-rays and gamma

rays. X-rays are produced by the most violent objects in the universe—black holes, colliding galaxies, exploding stars—but they are absorbed by Earth's atmosphere. Consequently, much of the fun stuff can only be seen if we heave our instruments thousands of miles into the sky.

The short wavelengths of x-rays place extraordinary demands on the optics used to focus them. Chandra's mirrors are the most perfectly shaped and polished ever produced. The fragile mirrors and detectors must be aligned to within the thickness of a few atoms, placed atop a hugely powerful rocket, and blasted into space. Perhaps never in the history of engineering has there been such a conjunction of delicacy and power. Indeed, you wonder why the astronomers and NASA managers and technicians ever bothered to try. The technical odds against success seem overwhelming—even without factoring in the political gauntlet that such a project must run before getting to the launch pad.

Lots of taxpayer dollars were riding on Chandra's success; lots of careers, too. Nearly 30 years passed between the first proposal for a large x-ray telescope and the final deployment. That's a huge chunk of one's life to devote to machinery that may never fly—and may not work if it does fly. On reaching the end of the book, readers will have a profound respect for the scientists who conceived the great space observatories and made them happen, and for the amazing skills that hide behind the flurry of NASA acronyms. The Tuckers have managed to turn a potentially dry technology tale into an edge-of-your-seat read.

—CHET RAYMO