

# HISTORY

## *SLOBODAN MILOSEVIC AND THE DESTRUCTION OF YUGOSLAVIA.*

By Louis Sell. Duke Univ. Press. 412 pp. \$34.95

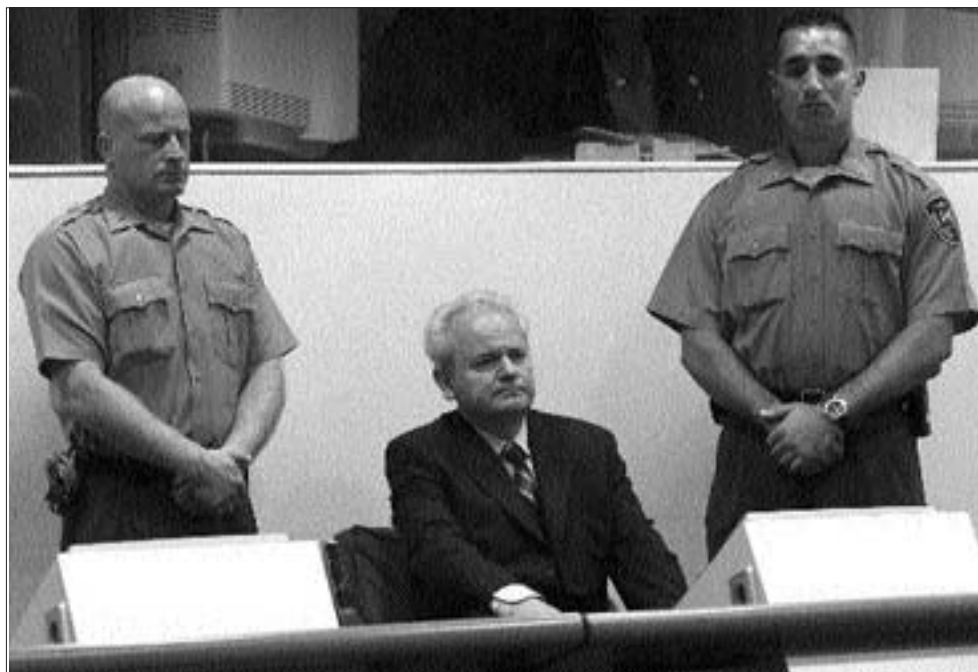
It has been inordinately difficult for anyone following the trial of Slobodan Milosevic to avoid reference to the old standby concerning the banality of evil. Once, this man had uniformed forces at his command, from the border of Austria to the northern frontier of Greece, and could call upon unofficial and deniable auxiliaries to spread hectic fear through driven and scattered populations. Now he sits in a dock and makes sarcastic interjections, while the multinational state he once dominated has been reduced to a bankrupt, dishonored province. Meanwhile, steady forensic work continues to exhume and identify the numberless bodies of his victims in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Serbia.

Sell, a former U.S. foreign service officer with many years of service in the Balkans, maintains the detached, objective style that has become appropriate for the anatomization of a criminal. There are moving volumes on the shelf about the outrages committed by the

perp, many of them written while the blood was still hot upon the pavements, but this book is more a cleanup. And it is the better for being written by someone with an educated sympathy for both the Serbs and, as they were once known, the Yugoslavs.

Milosevic's awful banality consists in precisely this: For most of his mediocre career he was a dull and dutiful party man, schooled in dogmatic platitudes and gifted only as an apparatchik. And then, on a more or less bureaucratic and routine trip to Kosovo in 1988, he abruptly realized that the grievances of the majority—the Serbo-Montenegrin alliance at the core of the country—could be conscripted for demagogic purposes.

From quasi-Stalinism to national socialism was not, in this context, a very daring leap, and Sell argues persuasively and with evidence that it was little more than a callous maneuver. When the Serbian minority in Krajina was finally purged and expelled by the Croats, Milosevic showed no more emotion than he had registered when Sarajevo was being pounded to ash. Nor did he manifest any genuine feeling when his Serbian compatriots in Kosovo were overtaken by the calami-



*Slobodan Milosevic in a characteristic pose at his war crimes trial in the Hague.*

ty his policies had prepared for them. His outbursts and tantrums, at least one of them witnessed by Sell, occurred only when his own amour-propre was challenged. Normally I distrust psychoprofiles, but the picture of a psychopathic personality as adumbrated here is convincing, and consistent with all the observable facts.

The self-pity of the majority population (the historic seedbed of fascistic ideas) has been angrily criticized by many previous students of this conflict, from whom Sell distinguishes himself by showing some empathy. The Serbs had historical reasons to fear for their diaspora within the old country, and there were other virulent nationalists on the scene, as well as many self-centered separatists. These points are true and necessary for our understanding. However, Sell slightly understates the way in which Milosevic deliberately sought to condition and encourage the same elements in other parties that he incited in his own. The textbook case is his covert agreement with Franjo Tudjman of Croatia to partition Bosnia between them in a late-blooming version of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

Surveying the Milosevic-Tudjman pact in sanguinary operation in Mostar and Sarajevo in the mid-1990s, I thought that if I could know about it, then so could the noble Lords Carrington and Owen, and maybe even Messrs. Vance and Baker and Christopher. A strikingly useful aspect of this book is the detail it gives, often at first hand, about the shameful vacillations—to put it no higher—of the Western mediators. Milosevic became so arrogant and exorbitant because he could not believe his luck in starting at least three wars and then being hastily invited to be a partner in peace, as he was at Dayton. Banal is hardly the word for the statesmen who could not recognize evil when it stared them in the face.

—CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

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**INTELLECTUALS AND THE  
AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:  
*Philosophers, Jesters, or Technicians?***  
By Tevi Troy. Rowman & Littlefield.  
255 pp. \$27.95

Troy declares himself early and clearly: “As the stories of the past eight administrations

show, the interrelation of intellectuals and presidents has developed into a crucial factor in determining presidential success.” Beginning with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., President John F. Kennedy’s “ambassador” to the intellectual community, Troy attempts to support that premise. It proves, in my view, a bit too heavy a burden.

A former Labor Department official who is now on President George W. Bush’s domestic policy staff, Troy draws on journalism, White House memoirs, and presidential archives for this portrait of how intellectuals and presidents have used, misused, and abused each other. He is especially valuable in underscoring the role of Martin Anderson of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, one of Ronald Reagan’s earliest, most consistent, and most valuable supporters, who worked to ensure that the White House and federal agencies were staffed with men and women who believed in Reagan’s ideas.

Other tales are engaging if familiar, such as Princeton University historian Eric F. Goldman’s labors as President Lyndon Johnson’s liaison to a wary world of intellectuals. The high—or low—point of Goldman’s tenure was the White House Festival of the Arts in 1965. Declining to attend the festival, poet Robert Lowell denounced the administration’s Vietnam policy. Another 20 writers, organized by Robert Silvers of *The New York Review of Books*, publicly endorsed Lowell’s position. Plunged into the kind of public controversy any White House abhors, the festival underscored the steady souring of relations between Johnson and the intellectual community.

The book’s virtues, alas, do not compensate for its shortcomings. Troy ignores Henry Kissinger because, unlike Schlesinger under JFK and Daniel Patrick Moynihan under President Richard M. Nixon, he was chosen “exclusively as his foreign-policy adviser, not as a broad-based intellectual adviser.” In overlooking Kissinger, the author brushes aside some of the most intriguing questions about the interplay between intellectual thought and public policy: Did Kissinger’s worldview help shape Nixon’s strategic vision? How much did it persuade Nixon to open the door to China, or shape his conduct in Vietnam? A look at Kissinger might also demonstrate, as Richard