

Second, the archives demonstrate that Teller himself was the source for many of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's allegations against Oppenheimer. In 1949 and again in 1952, Teller went to the FBI with suspicions about Oppenheimer's motives for opposing the development of the "super." According to Harold P. Green, the lawyer who drafted the charges against Oppenheimer for the 1954 hearing, "a very substantial portion of the charges, certainly most of them related to the H-bomb, were drawn from FBI interviews with Teller."

Teller portrays himself as a friend of Oppenheimer's. But from his own account, he clashed with "Oppie" early and often. The turning point in their fateful relationship came in the autumn of 1942, when the two physicists shared a first-class train compartment to Washington, D.C., for meetings with General Leslie R. Groves, who had just been appointed to run the Manhattan Project out of the Pentagon.

According to Teller, Oppenheimer complained about having to work with Groves, and added: "We have a real job ahead. No matter what Groves demands now, we have to cooperate. But the time is coming when we will have to do things differently and resist the military." A "shocked" Teller replied, "I

don't think I would want to do that." Oppenheimer quickly changed the subject, and Teller believes "the relationship between us changed at that instant." Oppenheimer might well have said such a thing. Some might even say he was admirably prescient. But in Teller's rendering of this story, the ugly implication is clear: Oppenheimer was not to be trusted with the nation's security.

Henry Kissinger, William F. Buckley, Jr., Tom Clancy, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, and Milton Friedman write the expected glowing endorsements for Teller's book jacket. "Now we know Ed Teller," gushes Buckley, "and rejoice in his company." You can't tell from these blurbs, but some eminent men who have known and worked with Ed Teller consider him a blowhard, even a madman. "He's a danger to all that's important," said the late physicist Isidor I. Rabi. "I do really believe it would have been a better world without Teller."

>KAI BIRD, a Wilson Center fellow, is writing (with Martin Sherwin) a biography of J. Robert Oppenheimer. His previous books include *The Chairman: John J. McCloy and the Making of the American Establishment* (1992), *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (1998), and *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy* (1998).

The Puzzling Persistence of Nationalism

WHO WE ARE:

A History of Popular Nationalism.

By Robert H. Wiebe. Princeton Univ. Press.

282 pp. \$24.95

Reviewed by Jim Sleeper

When death-embracing fundamentalists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America's most telling response came from New York City firefighters who likewise proved willing to face death—but in order to rescue others, not to slaughter them. Their sacrifice

found emblematic voice in Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, was amplified by Good Samaritan citizens, and prompted reverential, often unanticipated stirrings of patriotism in many of the rest of us. The sudden blossoming of flags received a good deal of comment, but there was scant

reflection upon patriotism's roots, almost as if looking too deeply into this unfamiliar sentiment of national belonging might prove discomfiting.

To some Americans, in truth, the heroes of September 11 seemed nearly as alien as the villains. The firefighters were bound into a brotherhood that has long irritated both the politically correct and the managerially sharp. These were disproportionately white ethnic men belonging to an intergenerational union that *bien-pensant* liberals have deplored as racist and sexist. They were “economically incorrect,” too, governed by work rules and prerogatives that, to free-market apostles of quarterly bottom-lining, betokened a medieval guild. Driven by loyalty and courage, these firefighters rushed in to save money managers and their minions, who, though many of them had been raised in the same ethnic and religious traditions, worked under dog-eat-dog rules that didn't reinforce fidelity and teamwork.

Whatever the origins of the firefighters' bonding and sacrifice, Robert Wiebe takes us further than most analysts of nationalism toward understanding how critical such attitudes are to the self-understanding of this or any nation. Writing briskly and unflinchingly—and well before September 11—he traces strains of political nationalism that have proved too elusive for ideology-driven analysts and passionate celebrants.

Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner tend to fit nationalism into functional analyses that are more respectful of class and political economy than of mystical ties of blood and soil. Martha Nussbaum and other liberals are generally skittish not only about blood-and-soil nationalism, but even about a more civic nationalism, such as our own, that sometimes circumscribes the universal rights it claims to affirm. Multiculturalists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Anthony Smith sometimes veer toward celebrating deeply felt national loyalties that end up doing more harm than good, while Niebuhrian realists such as Samuel Huntington subsume nationalism under broader “civilizational” rubrics that emphasize enduring cultural traits.

Wiebe will have none of it—or all of it, in the sense that he sojourns with each of these viewpoints without embracing them. That makes him a refreshingly odd sort of liberal. As he showed with *The Search for Order* (1967), an account of the United States in the 19th century, Wiebe, a historian at Northwestern University who died in 2000, was less an archivist than a synthesizer by well-informed assertion, and less a political theorist than an anthropologist. With a dry-eyed brilliance that recalls Walter Lippmann's, he conjures cultural and political narratives that are occasionally more glib than strenuous but that usually keep clear of both tendencies. If he does have a passion in *Who We Are*, it is to track nationalism's path among other currents—of religious, racial, and linguistic kinship—that sometimes move at cross-purposes with nationalism itself.

Wiebe begins with a definition that seems clear enough as a guide: “Nationalism is the desire among people who believe they share a common destiny to live under their own government on land sacred to their history.” But fasten your seatbelt: Each word can be unpacked like a Pandora's box. Wiebe has no interest in vindicating or vanquishing any of nationalism's many messages; neither has he patience for a cosmopolitanism that would wish it all away.

What he seeks is expositional clarity about something that has resisted capture or quarantine because it is so irreducibly human. “Rather than a gigantic fraud perpetrated time and again on the mindless masses,” he writes, “nationalism thrived because it addressed basic human needs.” In particular, it addressed (and still addresses) the need for a kind of familial continuity amid demographic upheavals within and beyond national borders.

Nationalism, in this view, is distinct from—and more potent than—statism. “States, hovering like crows over the nests that nationalists make, have also played on the sentiments of ancestry, destiny, and sacred soil,” Wiebe writes. “Try though they might, however, they have rarely inspired feelings of kin-connectedness, the core around which cultures of nationalism have developed.”

More commonly, the state attempts “to swallow kin-based groups inside a civic whole.” Nationalism often aspires to statehood, but its “grand fictive family” is restive within, and sometimes betrayed by, the state. When statehood cracks or decays, nationalism becomes resurgent.

Anyone with liberal or humanist expectations of politics will need a pretty strong stomach to accompany Wiebe through the twistings and turnings of nationalist affirmations—whether a fraught, failed Zionism or a humiliated, hopeless pan-Arabism, a blundering American white-racist triumphalism or a fatuous black escapism. Any one of these, let alone the whole procession, could turn an observer lachrymose, or just morose. Wiebe is unfazed.

He’s no free-market liberal: “Although individualism as an idea has a long history, capitalist individualism as an orientation has no past and little future. . . . The [capitalist] transactions people make do not bind them beyond those transactions. . . . Where people’s relations are no more than the sum of their market decisions, the best simple summary is Margaret Thatcher’s: ‘There is no society.’ Projected globally, that is the real jungle.” He also contends that, for better or worse, nationalist impulses have a longer future than democracy and socialism, nationalism’s two major historical accompanists and sometime-competitors, with their smug claims to universalism (“another form of provincialism”).

Even so, Wiebe acknowledges that nationalism will sometimes be submerged by other currents, including those created by two other major competitors since the 1970s, warlordism and religious fundamentalism. He observes that quasi-capitalist individualism can twist fundamentalism into unexpected forms: “As if he had been lifted from a James Bond movie, Western society’s quintessential foe at the turn of the 21st century was a single, elusive Saudi, Osama bin Laden, made immensely wealthy by the Western demand for oil, who, it was said, plotted the explosion of unpredictable targets on a global scale.” I rubbed my eyes on recalling that this prepublication edition of the book, with its useful observations about pan-Arabism, Islamic fundamentalism, and

even the Taliban, arrived early in August 2001.

I wish Wiebe had taken better account of Hannah Arendt’s contributions to our understanding of nationalism. She knew that any nation’s claims to fulfill universal yearnings are inseparable from its tendency to draw exclusionary boundaries around functioning communities and representative democracies that affirm those yearnings—and she understood that states that do this can be better than Wiebe acknowledges. Commendably resistant though he is to ideological and heuristic traps familiar to weary students of Marxist, liberal, and multicultural attempts to dismiss or redeem nationalism, he seems only intermittently responsive to the imperatives of politics, which, Arendt emphasized, can bring historical actors toward freedom or, if mishandled, drive them away from it.

And then there’s that nagging glibness. Wiebe calls socialism nothing but a program of fairness to workers, but if there’s anything socialists and conservative capitalists agree on, it’s that socialism is more ambitious than that. He calls the U.S. Constitution “astounding” in a way that makes it seem more an accident than the foundation of a noble and remarkably successful experiment. And he closes with a paean to diversity that, while more complicated than the kind limned by university administrators and third-rate pedagogues, remains vague. His parting admonition that we heed Huntington’s call to “renounce universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonalities” needs elaboration. Would that Wiebe could provide it in another book.

Still, this is the most bracing, insightful study of nationalism in years. Wiebe may make you feel at sea, but he teaches you how to sail, even if to no particular port. That may be just what we need as we try to understand how it is that firefighters have become our strongest spiritual bulwark against fundamentalist terrorists.

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