

craft. Consequently, the American government has made few long-term investments in Africa, especially post–Cold War, now that there’s no danger of dominoes falling to the Soviets. Further, the trauma of American casualties during the 1992–94 humanitarian mission to Somalia—especially the deaths of 18 soldiers during the episode made famous by Mark Bowden’s *Black Hawk Down* (1999) and its movie adaptation—eliminated any possibility that the Clinton administration would move beyond the usual neglect. Campaigning to succeed Clinton, George W. Bush went so far as to declare Africa strategically insignificant to the United States.

However, several factors have shifted the geostrategic calculus since Bush took office: growing hydrocarbon production in West Africa, the availability of ports and airfields along the littoral of East Africa, and, post-9/11, concern about transnational terrorist networks penetrating southward from North Africa. In this book, Donald Rothchild and Edmond J. Keller, political scientists at, respectively, the University of California, Davis, and the University of California, Los Angeles, bring together American and African scholars to consider a new model for American relations with Africa. Essays in the book focus on security issues, such as terrorism and ethnic conflict; social problems, such as HIV/AIDS and the environment; and economic troubles, such as trade policy and debt. While many of the authors continue to regard the continent as an object of humanitarian and moral solicitude—as does President Bush on some issues, most notably HIV/AIDS—they also recognize the connection between America’s strategic concerns and Africa’s needs in terms of human security. As Keller writes, “The United States has a vital interest in strengthening the military and intelligence capacities of poor countries like the ones we find in Africa. For their part, African countries could measurably improve their ability to solve problems of peace and security with the aid of the United States.” Such efforts are already under way. Since 2002, for example, the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa has

worked with the governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen to keep the peace and enhance security.

To be sure, many experts still see pursuing self-interest and alleviating suffering as mutually exclusive, and their linkage as ethically suspect or, at the very least, unrealistic. Even some of the authors here come across as hesitant in their efforts to balance mundane national interests (both African and American) with more idealistic visions of humanitarianism. Change will be gradual, but solid works like this one may hasten it.

—J. Peter Pham

## HISTORY

# Champion of Liberalism

THE PASSING OF RICHARD Hofstadter, felled by leukemia at 54, was a sad loss for American scholarship. His

masterly studies of American political thinking—including *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (1948), *The Age of Reform* (1955), and *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963)—constitute an enduring legacy, as does the work of the talented and prolific successors he trained at Columbia University, such as Robert Dallek, Lawrence W. Levine, and the late Christopher Lasch. All the more tragic, then, that when he died, Hofstadter had barely begun what was to be his masterwork, a three-volume history of America’s political culture from 1750 onward.

Hofstadter (1916–70) made his reputation in the 1950s by attacking the Progressive historians, notably Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles Beard, and Vernon Parrington, for imagining an America riven by class conflict. Shocked by the emergence of the “radical right,” he exposed its hyperpatriotism as a populist expression of “status anxiety.” Ironically, though, he found his work under attack from the New Left in the late 1960s. Younger historians, drawn to the neglected

**RICHARD HOFSTADTER:**  
An Intellectual  
Biography.

By David S. Brown. Univ.  
of Chicago Press.  
291 pp. \$27.50

underside of the American experience, repudiated his “consensus history” and disdained as grandiose apologetics the sort of gracefully written synoptic narratives he composed. Buffeted from both extremes of the political spectrum, and appalled by radical assaults on universities, Hofstadter clung to his faith in America’s liberal values but anguished over the rising generation’s apparent disdain for them.

In this splendid account, David S. Brown, a historian at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, shows that Hofstadter’s own past shaped his understanding of the American past. An eastern urbanite, he was leery of agrarian parochialism. The son of a Jewish father and a Protestant mother, he felt himself both outsider and insider. As a student during the Great Depression, he was drawn to Marxism and even joined the Columbia unit of the Communist Party in 1939, leaving it after only four months, disillusioned by Stalin’s purge trials. He came to believe that the best features of the American experience were its liberalism, pluralism, and inclusiveness; the worst, its anti-intellectualism, penchant for vigilante violence, and confusion of patriotism with conformism—in the phrase he coined, its “paranoid style.”

Though Brown shows admirable insight and sure-footedness in linking Hofstadter’s personality and values to his work, he does less than full justice to his subject’s central ideas. He would have done well to take more seriously the contention of Hofstadter and the influential political scientist Louis Hartz (who is neglected here) that, from the outset, American political discourse has been framed by a mythic and sometimes stultifying belief in what Hofstadter called *laissez-faire* individualism and Hartz termed “irrational Lockianism.” That thesis goes a long way toward explaining why socialism made scarcely a dent on the national consensus and why today the United States has the highest degree of income inequality among the world’s richest nations.

Clearly, there is much in Hofstadter’s understanding of this country still worth pondering.

Consider this observation in his half-century-old *The Age of Reform*: “War has always been the Nemesis of the liberal tradition in America. From our earliest history as a nation there has been a curiously persistent association between democratic politics and nationalism, jingoism, or war.”

—Sanford Lakoff

## Commission the Truth

PRESIDENTS FREQUENTLY resort to blue-ribbon commissions to help them find a way through, or at least temporary shelter from, political storms. High-level commissions took on the Pearl Harbor and 9/11 surprise attacks, President

John F. Kennedy’s assassination, and any number of lesser crises, such as the Iran-contra scandal during President Ronald Reagan’s second term. Their reputation is decidedly mixed. More than four decades after JFK’s murder, for example, the Warren Commission’s report remains the object of widespread ridicule. Yet such panels continue to appeal to presidents. Kenneth Kitts, an associate provost and political science professor at South Carolina’s Francis Marion University, sets out to explain why.

He focuses on five panels, all concerned with

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSIONS & NATIONAL SECURITY:**  
The Politics of Damage Control.

By Kenneth Kitts. Lynne Rienner. 194 pp. \$49.95



The Roberts Commission on Pearl Harbor was cited as a precedent by many who pushed for creation of a 9/11 commission. They overlooked the fact that the earlier investigation, headed by Supreme Court Justice Owen J. Roberts (in dark suit), was seen as flawed.