

## Book Reviews

*Look Homeward America: In Search of Reactionary Radicals and Front-Porch Anarchists* by Bill Kauffman (Wilmington: ISI, 2006) ISBN 1932236872

Bill Kauffman's latest book is a sympathetic look at various American politicians, artists, rabble-rousers, poets and saints—assorted men and women who do not quite fit into our usual political categories and often hold ideas that to the mainstream seem odd if not downright perverse. The politicians include Senators Eugene McCarthy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (on whose staff Kauffman worked for a time), socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs, President Millard Fillmore and Congressman Barber Conable, Jr.; the writers and artists include painter Grant Wood, novelist Carolyn Chute, Wendell Berry, and among the others most notably stand out Dorothy Day and Mother (Mary Harris) Jones. All these people have in common that, in one way or another, they supported localism and regional identity, opposed the burgeoning American empire (whether in 1898 or 1998), and refuse to fit neatly into the silly Left/Right, Liberal/Conservative categories that dominate and shape what passes for socio-political analysis today. Kauffman lovingly looks at these and other American intellectual misfits, but misfits only if we take our bearings from the corporate-dominated media and the other large institutions of American life, including academia, the federal government,

mainstream foundations, and so on. He understands that most of them were not saints. Moynihan he knew personally and is not shy about pointing out the political and personal flaws in a complex and intelligent character who did not live up to his own ideals or take advantage of his position to shake up our usual way of doing politics.

In addition to the heroes and semi-heroes of his book, Kauffman has his villains, including Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, George Bush *père* and *filis*, Dick Cheney and many others. Here I think that sometimes he is a bit too Manichean. According to Alan Carlson, for example, FDR's social policies were firmly pro-family and pro-maternalist, encouraging women to stay at home and care for their families, and for their men to receive a living wage so that they could do so, policies that surely Kauffman wholeheartedly approves of. Despite his angling to get into World War II even before we were attacked, I do not think that Roosevelt can be painted *simpliciter* as evil. And while Kauffman is ready to forgive Millard Fillmore for his political errors and faults—including signing the Fugitive Slave Act and taking the anti-Catholic Know-Nothing oath—because of what he sees as his good points, such as his opposition to the Mexican War, he does not even mention Lincoln's own opposition to that war. It is certainly true that Lincoln has been made

into almost a demigod by mainstream history and his many flaws are not sufficiently known, but still, fair is fair.

And as for his heroes, why does Kauffman not make more of the fact that his friend Barber Conable was president of the World Bank, an institution that has done as much as anything else to destroy local economies around the entire globe? He barely mentions his heading that organization and says nothing of its noxious practices. I got the feeling that whether someone got on Kauffman's Approved List or his Condemned List depended less on the totality of that person's good or bad acts than on whether he caught his fancy or irritated him, and that in some cases he could just as easily have put someone among his villains as among his heroes. But Kauffman is clear that the dividing line between hero and villain is not the line that is said to divide the right and the left. At the outset he states that he has little or no use for the conventional political divisions with which journalists, and too often even scholars, operate. He writes of his subjects, "In our almost useless political taxonomy, some are labeled 'right wing' and others are tucked away on the left, but in fact they are kin: embodiments of an American cultural-political tendency that is wholesome, rooted, and based in love of family, community, local self-rule, and a respect for permanent truths."

Kauffman, though, is not equally hostile to all our political labels. He does seem to want to rescue the term *conservative* from what the post-World War II fusionist movement made of it, reducing it simply to an anti-Communist, pro-corporate ideology, which eventually became today's bellicose, statist and amoral neo-conservatism. But neo-con attitudes have deep roots in America's past, in the imperialist desires to seize Cuba before the Civil War—championed largely by Democrats and opposed by Millard Fillmore—in the spate of annexationist and interventionist acts by the U.S. government that began with Hawaii and the Spanish-American War and has lasted until our own day. And Kauffman is at pains to show that these interventions and conquests, whether political or economic, harm and destroy not only other peoples and their lands, but our own too. For it is in large part the sons (and now daughters) of America's small towns and villages and her big city neighborhoods which sometimes function like small towns, that fought these wars, and that, if not killed or maimed in them, very often were displaced to other parts of the country, and never managed to find the way back to the place where their own people lived. In particular World War II moved millions of Americans around, increased the divorce rate and spawned the "subsidised day-care industry." It also put an end to many promising regional and local cultural initiatives that had flourished in the 1930's, including the

"Iowa poetry renaissance [the] efflorescence of Upstate New York fiction [the] regional theater movement . . . even North Dakota cornhusking contests." And the Cold War that followed brought with it more bigness, including the Interstate Highway system and "the acceleration of school consolidation."

Another political term that Kauffman seems to flirt with is *libertarian*, sometimes using it as a term of approval, although he does note in the beginning that he had become disillusioned by his sojourn among the libertarians of *Reason* magazine. But this term brings up the entire question of Kauffman's attitude toward government, particularly the federal government. Although I share the opinion of those who think that we would be better off had the Articles of Confederation never been replaced by the 1787 Constitution, nonetheless that did happen. And under our present Constitution and its settled judicial interpretation, there are virtually no barriers to the operation of corporate business among the several states. Although it is probably true that most governments in all times and places have had an inherent tendency to expand and grasp for ever greater power, still in the United States one of the most important factors causing an expansion in the federal government was the prior expansion of big business. Until corporations and businesses are forced to decentralize, until they are firmly subjected to state and

local authorities, we will unfortunately need to have a large and powerful federal apparatus to deal with them. It is true that, especially now, federal regulators function more as facilitators than as watchdogs of corporations, but the root of this lies more in conservative ideology and ultimately in the legacy of Adam's sin than in any particular arrangements we have made of governmental powers. In short, although I entirely agree with those who say that both the country and its government are too big, the solution cannot lie in a libertarian direction in which we simply turn ourselves over to the market. The words of Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* point out the real way toward curbing private economic power: "A stern insistence on the moral law, enforced with vigor by civil authority, could have dispelled or perhaps averted these enormous [economic and financial] evils." And moreover, the creation of intermediate groups, self-governing, yet subject ultimately to state supervision, is the true way toward economic reform, a reform in which we look neither toward the unfettered market nor to a central government bureaucracy. But the State as such is not an evil, rather it is a positive and necessary good. The difficulty is that the term *State* has become so laden with bad connotations that many who are by no means true libertarians or anarchists are confused about the right way to go and are apt to embrace a position in reaction to real evils

without necessarily wanting to commit themselves to all the implications of that position.

But to return to Kauffman, what can we say of his thesis that the real America lies in those devoted to their own homes and their own places, to people who have no ambition to rule the world or corner the wheat market? "There are two Americas: the televised America, known and hated by the world, and the rest of us. The former is a factitious creation whose strange gods include HBO, accentless TV anchor-people, Dick Cheney, re-runs of *Friends*, and the National Endowment for Democracy." But it has "no connection to the thousand and one real Americas that produced Zora Neale Hurston and Jack Kerouac and Saint Dorothy Day and the Mighty Casey who has struck out." But which really is the real America? It seems to me that just as in the interpretation of the Constitution there have been, since the time of President Washington, two groups, each of which could find some plausible support in the text for their centralizing or decentralizing proposals, similarly within American culture there has been the restless pioneer spirit, *not* attached to any home and desiring always to push on, to steal someone else's land, if need be, but always to move further on. At the same time, not all Americans felt this way, and some, perhaps many, finding themselves plumped down by their own immigrant and moveable fathers, were content to stay where

they were born and cultivate their own piece of earth and love their own families. I think there is no doubt but that the former has had more cultural influence than the latter, but I do not know which group historically was the larger. Kauffman seems to think that the latter are the real and true Americans, but can we ever know this? We cannot ask our fathers about what mattered to them, about what they lived for. And even beyond this, there is, it seems to me, a question of definition. What, in the end, do we even mean by America? A particular place with many particular local cultures, or an idea which defined a people, an idea which could become incarnated anywhere we choose to impart it, even at the point of a gun? In 1917, the Democrat Woodrow Wilson said, "We shall be the more American if we but remain true to the principles in which we have been bred. They are not the principles of a province or of a single continent. We have known and boasted all along that they were the principles of a liberated mankind." And eight years later, Republican Calvin Coolidge voiced a similar sentiment when he spoke: "The old sentiment of detached and dependent colonies [has] disappeared in the new sentiment of a united and independent Nation. Men began to discard the narrow confines of a local charter for the broader opportunities of a national constitution. . . . The narrow fringe of States along the Atlantic seaboard advanced its frontiers across the hills and plains of an intervening continent

until it passed down the golden slope to the Pacific. . . . We extended our domain over distant islands in order to safeguard our own interests and accepted the consequent obligation to bestow justice and liberty upon less favored peoples. . . . Throughout all these experiences we have enlarged our freedom, we have strengthened our independence. We have been, and propose to be, more and more American." I am sure that Kauffman would excoriate both these statements, but still we must ask ourselves the question: Have the ideas of Wilson and Coolidge been the prevalent ideas that have shaped American culture and politics and resonated in the American heart? The fact that the 1787 Constitution was (democratically, even if illegally) substituted for the Articles of Confederation is not a good sign. Probably the truth is that most Americans have been confused. Few see the picture as clearly as Wendell Berry or Bill Kauffman. Poor farmers and union members patronize Wal-Marts, unaware that in so doing they are destroying their own economic well-being, not to mention their families and communities. No one forced virtually everyone to buy a television or the many new communications gadgets that abound today. It is true that the populace has been massively misled, lied to, abused and sacrificed to the enrichment of corporate elites and government hubris. But have we been entirely without fault in this? Was there not in fact an eagerness on

the part of Americans to embrace the corporate-sponsored pseudo-culture that we are now seeking to impose upon the whole world?

Kauffman is not unaware of this difficulty. He tells of a journey to Columbus, Mississippi, in the heart of Faulkner country, during which he overheard the conversation at the next table in a diner, "four ladies [who] spent the next half-hour recounting the plot of the previous night's episode of *Friends*, that vulgar and witless NBC sitcom. . . ." And later he asks, "Is a resistance, a revival of small-scale politics possible when Mississippians prefer *The West Wing* to *Welby*?" Kauffman appears to have no answer to his own question. At another point he says, "Just for fun, why don't we pretend that our culture is reclaimable. That it's not too late for America to tip Wood-ward, rather than for Rupert Murdoch, the Disney Channel, and Starbucks." So Kauffman expresses a hope that somehow such a resistance and revival is possible, a hope more than an affirmation. I am much less sanguine, absent a massive purging, nay, an exorcism, of the American soul, to rid us of the claptrap of over two hundred years of secular messianic rhetoric, of the religion of progress and external activity, of the America represented by almost all our official organs, whether of government, education, business or the media. But if such a purging never happens, we can still educate our

individual souls. And despite anything I have said, Bill Kauffman's book is a fine place for most of us to begin.

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*Out of Due Time: Wilfrid Ward and the Dublin Review* by Dom Paschal Scotti (Catholic University of America Press: Washington, D.C., 2006) ISBN 0813214270

Wilfrid Ward was a member of one of the most intellectually distinguished English Catholic families of the last two centuries. His father William George Ward was an Oxford convert and disciple of Newman whose delight in controversy might have made him, in another age, a good candidate for talk radio. ("There are two views of which I, as usual, take the more bigoted.") His wife, Josephine, was a popular novelist who was connected by family ties to the Duke of Norfolk. His siblings became variously nuns and priests, one of them, Bernard, a fine historian. His daughter, Maisie, wrote what is still the best biography of G.K. Chesterton. With such a pedigree, and with considerable gifts in his own right, Ward could hardly have failed to shape Catholic opinion in the dying days of Victorian England and in the years immediately before the First World War. That he did so, but at some cost to his health, reputation, and happiness, is the subject of this solid and useful intel-

lectual biography. Wilfrid Ward was "out of due time"—a man too original and philosophically impatient for some of his more staid contemporaries—but his impact was lasting. His ambition and achievement, Father Scotti maintains, was to "educate Catholics to their responsibilities, . . . to broaden their horizons, [to discourage] intellectual flabbiness" and, all the while, to maintain the "institutional loyalty and deferential conservatism" that made all of it possible. Lesser men would have buckled under the pressure. Ward himself eventually grew weary.

The *Dublin Review* was the vehicle for this influence. Founded in 1836 by Daniel O'Connell and Nicholas (later Cardinal) Wiseman, it was the most important journal of serious Catholic opinion in the English-speaking world, enormously significant in its day. Ward edited it from 1906 to 1916, publishing writers such as Belloc, Chesterton, Alice Meynell, Herbert Thurston, C.C. Martindale, Robert Hugh Benson and others less distinguished, asking only that their articles be "well written, loyal to the Church, understanding of the world, and sympathetic to whatever was valuable outside the household of faith."<sup>1</sup> This tall order was achieved more often than not. The Review was both serious and accessible to the general reader—a rare double. It was also unsectarian. Wanting to attract non-Catholic readers and writers, Ward succeeded in opening its pages to contemporary opinion across a