

RONALD H. BAYOR, *NEIGHBORS IN CONFLICT: THE IRISH, GERMANS, JEWS AND ITALIANS OF NEW YORK CITY, 1929-1941*, Baltimore, MD, John Hopkins University Press, July 20, 1978. 232 pp. \$14.00.

In this study of a seldom-considered period of ethnic interaction, Bayor has provided a well-written and solidly researched appraisal of group conflict in New York City from 1929 to 1941. He has attempted to discover the reasons why conflict erupted between certain groups while others remained quiescent or were resolved. If we can learn from history, this investigation could serve as an important text.

The opening chapter summarizing the situation in 1929 discusses the areas of strength and weakness for each of the four groups under consideration: the German Americans held a generally secure status in the community, but were still smarting from discrimination during World War I; the Irish-Americans, united by a conservative Catholic tradition, dominated the political scene through their control of the Democratic Party, but resented their failure to achieve higher economic positions; the Italian-Americans, lagging behind the others, were seeking improvement in both economic and social conditions, but had maintained a working relationship with other groups; and the Jews who were rising rapidly into the higher paying positions and professions, felt stymied by their lack of political power.

The main focus of the study is the consideration of how local and international events exacerbated some of the potential conflicts between these groups and isolates factors that brought resolution to some and friction to others. Local issues which caused increased friction were the uneven distribution of political and economic power. The dissatisfaction of the Jews and Italians with Irish political dominance was used by Fiorello LaGuardia in his campaigns for Mayor and they gave him the support he needed for his election. As a result, increased numbers of Jews and Italians received political and party positions in the Republican Party, and, in reaction, in the Democratic Party as well. Economic competition, heightened by the Depression, increased the resentment of Irish and Italian groups toward Jews. Of the international events, the rise of Hitler created a potentially serious conflict between the German-American population and the Jews. Love of their native land motivated many Germans to support the Bund during its early years. A similar source of conflict existed between Italians and Jews as anti-Semitism escalated under Mussolini. Fear of Communism led many Irish Americans to support Franco during the Spanish Civil War while Jews were often prominent supporters of the Loyalists.

Given these and other sources of conflict, Bayor analyzes the reasons why conflicts occurred between some groups and not others. The calming of the potentially explosive German-Jewish friction was achieved, he feels, by the leaders of the German-American community who were appalled by the excesses of the Hitler regime and publically withdrew their support of the Bund and other related pro-Nazi groups. Italian Jewish conflict was avoided

because Mussolini's anti-Semitism was not as integral to Fascism as it was to Nazism and because Jews and Italians in New York had maintained a cordial relationship. With the Irish, however, the factors which might have minimized the friction were missing. The strong anti-Communist stance of the Church led many of their leaders to distrust the liberal tendencies of the Jews, thus preventing any outright condemnation of such inflammatory spokesmen as Father Coughlin. As World War II loomed, the anti-British resentment of the Irish ran counter to the anti-German sentiment of the Jews. Not until the war actually broke out did the leadership of the Church take any action to quiet racial tensions.

The political campaigns of the period which began as vehicles for harnessing ethnic ties to gain power ended by becoming polarizing agents themselves. LaGuardia's earliest campaigns encouraged Italians to support their countrymen, and his wooing of the Jews included efforts to denounce anti-Semitism. But with each succeeding campaign his tactics aroused resentments, particularly with the Germans and the Irish that overrode mere political issues. What had started as enlightened self-interest on LaGuardia's part became a potentially serious source of new conflict. Only the war effort kept these factors from surfacing, but racial conflict did explode in a few areas, two of which Bayor spotlights -- in Washington Heights and the South Bronx, both of which involved Jewish-Irish friction.

In his conclusion, Bayor isolates the factors that produce conflict -- a sense of threat plus an explosive issue. Conflict could be avoided if there were any moderating influences. He has presented the situation for the four groups involved and has explained why German and Italian conflicts were more muted than Irish.

In assessing his study, the reviewer faces a peculiar task. Usually the focus should be exclusively on the writer's intentions and how well these are developed. But in this case, there is a nagging question that goes beyond Bayor's stated intention and threatens to overwhelm the validity of the study as it is defined by the author. Is it really possible to discuss ethnic conflict in New York City without any mention of the Black community? The existence of this substantial, clearly suppressed minority against whom all white established structures were in substantial agreement must have had some effect. To write about ethnic conflict in New York without such consideration seems to leave a serious gap. Despite the fine, scholarly work that Bayor has done, this unanswered question limits its usefulness.

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