

(Metropolitan Books, 2004) in which he argues that many people voted against their economic interests in exchange for the cultural recognition George W. Bush offered.

As far as the legacies of the New Left is concerned Gosse is both celebratory and weary. The "battle", he says, "between the New Right, born in the 1960s, and the descendants of the New Left may continue for a long time to come" (38). Gosse is (deliberately) not very precise here – the focus of the book is after all on history, and by opening an inclusive window on the New Left, he widens the interpretative spectrum of its legacies. Thus, by not foregrounding any specific movement, the book certainly lives up to its intention of leaving the reader with a sense of the many issues and aspects both connecting and dividing the various movements. Since a representation of the depth and size of the various movements is extremely difficult, this selection wisely opts for width. This might have the (welcomed) effect, as discussed above, of putting pressure on, or at least calling into question, the notion of a New Left. One aspect of this relates to the sometimes rather blurred lines demarcating a movement from its wider cultural contexts. Gosse argues that "Black Power [and] feminism succeed because it was as much a cultural revolution, a new way of understanding the world, as an organized movement" (32). Yet, despite, or rather because, this collection points in the direction of a questioning of its own basic concepts, the New Left and movements, it is indeed inductive of a discussion of the political dynamics that to a large extent gave – and continues to give – shape to American postwar politics. With this in mind, as well as the concise introduction, headnotes as well as many interesting documents, this book as well as its concept is thus highly recommendable.

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Anthony Dunbar, ed., *Where We Stand: Voices of Southern Dissent*. Montgomery: New South Books, 2004. 234 pages; ISBN 1-5883-8169-2; \$24.95.

Scandinavians have a tendency to see the American South through a prism of stereotypes, most of which are promoted through Hollywood films and other popular media. Now discerning readers have an opportunity to open their minds and challenge their prejudices by meeting Southerners whose politics are similar to what one might find in Madison, Wisconsin; Ann Arbor, Michigan; or Berkeley, California. *Where We Stand* is a collection of twelve in-your-face essays that pull no punches. The authors, all critical thinkers, represent journalists, academics, lawyers and political activists who are unapologetically committed to a liberal America. The writing is clear and accessible to the average person, forsaking the cumbersome and precious *academese* of most professional journals. One might even hope that such a book would become a best seller, reaching a far wider audience than intellectual students of American culture. As fodder for debate, it is outstanding.

All twelve authors write compelling essays with a shared point of view. Their common concern: the future of America. Their common despair: the deepening

chasm that divides the nation between conservative and progressive ideas. From a wide variety of angles, they circle George W. Bush and the current administration, lashing out at policies that sacrifice the interests of the working poor to the interests of the privileged elite. They write about the corrupting power of money and the consequences of using the economy to develop the most powerful military in human history. As descendents of a slave culture and the Confederates of the American Civil War, they are also daughters and sons of the Civil Rights Movement and they insist on racial justice. With almost Biblical-like angst, they cry in the wilderness for the protection of the environment in the face of an oil hungry economy, necessary to support the American lifestyle. The authors worry about *pax-Americana* militarism and preemptive war, evangelical fundamentalist religion, the Patriot Act, greedy capitalists, an unsustainable economy, an ignored environment and the systematic disenfranchisement of African-Americans.

Where We Stand is not a manifesto. Each chapter is an individual expression about the gap between where Americans are and where they should go. With one single exception, none of the essays are glib, but carefully developed and documented. The concept of the book, as well as its title, is an obvious comparison to the 1930 classic, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. In this essential reading for all students of American history, twelve Southern poets, novelists and literary critics railed against northern industrialization and materialism. Today, this campaign rangles with nostalgia. The newer, "*Stand*" moves forward, focusing on the core of what the authors see as essential American values. As historian Dan Carter writes:

"Any illusions I once held that the United States was uniquely virtuous vanished long ago. But through the years I have retained a belief that America's historical experience – the longest of any existing democratic republic – offers people around the world something greater than efficient washing machines and state-of-the-art advertising campaigns. Just as the French Revolution, for all its excesses, held out the promise of a new way of thinking (liberty, equality, fraternity) the American experiment offered other nations a flawed model, but a model nonetheless, of how constant democratic renewal might keep in balance the forces of personal liberation and social responsibility."

In some ways, this statement summarizes the motivation of all twelve authors in *Where We Stand*. They are disappointed Americans. They expect more – much more – from their political leadership. They hope, however, there is still time to reverse the current direction yet few of the writers offer concrete suggestions on how to navigate through the seas of the current Bush administration. The essays were published just prior to the 2004 election, undoubtedly intended to motivate the alienated non-voter. One will never know how effective they were.

South Carolina historian, Dan Carter writes about the war machine; neo-Cons; preemptive war policy based on lies; oil; and Bush's trillion-dollar tax cuts for the wealthy. He laments the lame, passive media under multinationals' corporate control,

which prevents intellectual debate and serious public discourse. He points to unregulated talk-radio that is dumbing down discussion among American voters. He also writes that "the duplicitous justifications for (Bush's) foreign policy are matched by the Orwellian rhetoric at home. Political leaders have always sought to present their policies in ways that appealed to voters, but none have matched the manipulative cynicism of this Administration." Carter cites the efforts to privatize Social Security and Medicare, the under-funding of "reforms" such as "Leave No Child Behind" and the hypocrisy in the policy to change the rules on overtime pay. He also talks about America's negative profile abroad, a theme that is addressed in more depth by Kentucky historian, Charles Bussey.

Bussey, a Fulbright Scholar in Kristiansand, writes in his "postcard from Norway" that the US, clearly motivated by arrogance, is not popular today in Europe. He cites Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright's 1966 book, *The Arrogance of Power* and quotes: "Gradually but unmistakably America is showing signs of that arrogance of power which has afflicted, weakened, and in some cases destroyed great nations in the past. We are not living up to our capacity and promise as a civilized example for the rest of the world." Bussey continues to quote Fulbright: "Power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor." Fulbright was responding to President Lyndon Baines Johnson's escalation of war in Vietnam. Bussey sees George Bush doing the same thing in Iraq and looks to Jimmy Carter as, perhaps, the only President who might have chosen a different path. Carter "understood that greatness has more to do with relationships and service than it has to do with power and prominence."

Tennessee historian, Susan Ford Wiltshire writes about religion and the Bible. In explaining and interpreting Conservative America's resistance to social change, she writes specifically about abstract and absolutist thought and its pre-Christian history in Greek philosophy. Just like Plato's ideal forms, orthodox "truths" are seen to remain unchanged over time because orthodoxy discounts the power of history and place. Consequently, millions of conservative Americans refused to accept racial equality that came through the civil rights movement because it "contradicted" Biblical scripture, i.e., absolutist thought. Similarly, there was deeply rooted resistance to women's liberation and equality between the sexes. More recently and currently is the resistance to legal and social equality for gays and lesbians. Wiltshire writes about the power of imagination and how it is a gift that enables us to perceive something not yet existing; to work towards ends we may never see. Imagination, she says is the enemy of absolutist thinking. Consequently, conservatives are exclusionary and use religion to maintain the status quo. Liberals are inclusionary and use religion to inspire change.

Nine other Southern writers offer equally compelling contributions. Eight of them are scholarly, one margins on kitsch. Law professors, Dan Pollitt and Gene Nichol write respectively about John Ashcroft's experiments with civil liberties and Southern income disparities. University of Virginia historian, Paul M. Gaston writes about the

endangered American dream and the decline of the utopian Alabama community founded by his idealist, progressive grandfather. Alabama's Sheldon Hackney, professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, reminds us that Washington D.C. is a southern town and that white southerners have moved the so-called identity politics of Dixie to the nation's capital. Nashville journalist, John Egerton goes deeper and writes that all America has now been "Southernized."

America locks up its citizens at a greater rate than any other modern industrial nation. While EU member states average 87 prisoners per 100,000 people, the US averages an incredible 685 with an extreme disproportion of African Americans among them. (The US is only 4% of the world's population with 25% of the world's prisoners.) This plus the systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans and other threats to America's democracy are explored by civil rights activist, Connie Curry and ACLU's director of the Voting Rights Project, Laughlin McDonald. Another civil rights activist, Leslic Dunbar writes about consequences of a divided nation and the threat to America's grandest principle: *equality of opportunity*. The US likes to think of itself as the very embodiment of meritocracy: a country where people are judged on their individual abilities rather than their family connections. Dunbar profoundly regrets what he sees as the abandonment of this principle. Environmental activist, Janisse Ray laments America's assault on the planet's natural resources and its unsustainable lifestyle. Of all the essays, Ray's is the least impressive, not because her premise is invalid but because she sounds too much like a retro hippie without a global market perspective. Her critique of corporate capitalism, however, will please like minded thinkers, especially those in the Deep Ecology movement who see the Industrial Growth Society as the enemy of sustainable economies.

Critics of *Where We Stand* never argue their counterpoints debate style. Instead of engaging the reader in verbal ping pong, point by point, they merely dismiss the premise of the essays as irrelevant or unworthy of attention. The essays, they say, are simply the writings of bleeding heart liberals who feel like an embattled minority, which they are. European analysts, however, confirm the validity of many of the authors' claims. *The Economist*, for one example, supports the assertions of Leslie Dunbar: "The United States risks calcifying into a European style class-based society." Social study teachers throughout America could use the kernel arguments in every essay as a departure point for substantive classroom discussions and semester projects. Outside the classroom, Americans and non-Americans alike could benefit from guided discussions in book groups. The American liberal agenda deserves to be examined whether one agrees with it or not. As *The Economist* observed: "the most remarkable feature of the continuing power of America's elite – and its growing grip on the political system – is how little comment it arouses." *Where We Stand* is not just commentary but a loud roar.