

Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

The debate continues between those who take ethnic conflict at face value and those who see it as political and economic contestation dressed up in ethnic garb. Stuart Kaufman sits squarely in the former camp, contending that ethnic warriors, if not necessarily correct in their interpretations or justified in their actions, are, for better or worse, sincere. This supposition informs Kaufman's analysis of the seeds of ethnic violence in *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*.

The starting point for Kaufman is symbolic choice theory, summed up in the proposition that "people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked." (p. 28) The symbols that sustain ethnic animosity can be taken from the battles of ancient history, more recent conflicts, or economic and demographic trends that putatively put populations at risk. For ethnic warfare to erupt, three conditions are necessary: widely circulated myths that justify ethnic hostility; ethnic fears that put the very existence of the group at stake; and opportunities to mobilize and fight, without which ethnic animus normally remains under wraps. When these conditions are present, any number of factors – catalytic events, the emergence of a new leadership – can trigger the start of ethnic violence.

Four case studies are used to illuminate the symbolic politics approach: the Armenian-Azerbaijani imbroglio over Nagorno-Karabagh; conflicts in Georgia that saw Georgians squaring off against both Ossetians and the Abkhaz; violence in the Transnistria region of Moldova between Moldovans and ethnic Russians; and the ethnic wars of the former Yugoslavia. Also considered briefly are several counter-examples – places alike in many respects to the cases studied in detail, but where ethnic differences did not boil over into widespread violence.

Kaufman observes that empirical verification of his thesis poses a considerable challenge: "Measuring the motivations of the followers of chauvinist movements is, of course, difficult. When opinion polls on relevant issues are not available, the best that can be done is to look at what politicians, activists, and the media were saying at the time." (p. 47) In keeping with this strategy, the case studies focus on the events that unfolded as hostilities broke out, the conflicting interpretations of elite and non-elite participants, and the symbolic rhetoric that made these volatile situations erupt into widespread violence.

The case studies are rich in detail and clearly the product of careful and comprehensive research. The author does an admirable job of setting the stage with historical background and description of the principal nationalist myths in circulation, and then capturing the mood of ethnic relations and the motivations of opposing groups as they moved from uneasy co-existence to overt hostility and open warfare. The counter-examples, though brief, are also intriguing,

focussing on establishing that these similarly situated groups lacked one or another of necessary pre-requisites for ethnic war.

To bolster his case, further attention might have been given to the pre-existing social and cultural environments that fostered the escalation of symbolic ethnic politics in certain places but not others. The conclusion presents intriguing recommendations upon which such analysis might be built. In seeking to identify future sites of ethnic conflict, Kaufman argues, we should probe the sociological wellsprings of ethnically charged mythmaking. What are the prevalent themes in the popular cultures of different ethnic groups? What type of history do they teach in their schools? Are myths that justify the murder of ethnic enemies present in either popular culture or classroom teachings? Answers to these useful questions are scattered throughout Kaufman's case studies, but no systematic analysis or comparisons are undertaken. Probing the conditions that facilitate the spread of harmful myth would solidify his case for the relevance of symbolic politics to the mobilization of people in the cause of ethnic violence.

Still, Kaufman marshals considerable evidence in support of his thesis and does allow that other methodological approaches and perspectives are needed to take his work further. It is a solid starting point and a valuable contribution to one of the central debates that preoccupies students of ethnic politics.

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Divine, Robert A. *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2000.

The issues of war and peace are touching ones for Americans. As believers in democracy, Americans like to think of themselves as peaceful people who engage in war only when provoked. It is therefore ironic that virtually every generation of Americans has fought in a war. The purpose of Robert Divine's book is to explain why twentieth-century Americans always sought idealistic goals in order to justify their military conflicts. Divine's thesis is that twentieth-century Americans, by continually demanding that wars serve overly ambitious purposes, were continually disillusioned when peace was inevitably less grandiose and more fragile than their inflated expectations had led them to anticipate.

According to Divine, American exceptionalism is the reason why the United States has sought the high moral ground in conflicts. In other words, America's idealism should make the nation a glowing example to all other nations. These other nations supposedly fight wars "for narrow, selfish reasons – for revenge, for territory, for economic gain, sometimes just out of lust for