

November 2005

Book Review: Southern Political Party Activists: Patterns of Conflict and Change, 1991-2001 by John A. Clark and Charles S. Prysby

John Thielmann

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thielmann, John (2005) "Book Review: Southern Political Party Activists: Patterns of Conflict and Change, 1991-2001 by John A. Clark and Charles S. Prysby," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 33 : No. 1 , Article 8. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol33/iss1/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.

historical circumstances that maximize the unifying, basic myths. Similarly, the author notes that democratic peace proponents have proved that countries based on a contract with their citizens rarely fight each other, but with the caveat that it is too soon to predict that democracy is a growing trend that will somehow end history. He does explore how more democracies might be the eventual result of modernization, or that global institutions might produce more peaceful relations, but he asserts that scholars cannot demonstrate the existence of irreversible trends for a more pacific world.

In his concluding pages, the author again calls for the acceptance of diverse interpretations of international relations, of exploring the contributions of sources as different as Tennyson or Goya. By attempting to understand and explain such portrayals, as well as investigating the vast interplay of civilizations in history, international relations as a discipline can demonstrate that scientific inquiry can only partially answer major questions. True, all scholars construct their own reality, but they can still reasonably expect to create useful analytical tools. The goal of these different approaches is to prepare for, as Puchala states, "as few surprises as possible" in international affairs (49).

Chris Van Aller
Winthrop University

John A. Clark and Charles S. Prysby (eds.), *Southern Political Party Activists: Patterns of Conflict and Change, 1991-2001*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004). 264 pp.

The study of southern politics continues to be a growth industry, as reflected in *Southern Political Party Activists* which builds on an earlier work edited by Charles Hadley and Lewis

Bowman. In doing so it shows the evolution of party politics in the South and further emphasizes the growth of the Republican Party in the region.

Preceded by an overview chapter by Clark and Prysby, the work is divided into three sections. Chapters two through four describe social factors affecting activists. Chapters five through eight cover the political attitudes of party activists. Chapters nine through twelve provide an analysis of the types and level of the involvement of activists. Prysby and Clark address the question of the role of political parties as seen through the role of activists in a concluding chapter. An appendix describes the sampling procedure used and the response rates. The individual chapters provide a view of southern party activists at the turn of the twenty-first century that is quite different from that sketched out by V.O. Key more than fifty years ago. The authors describe a genuine two-party south, albeit one in which the Republican Party plays a dominant role.

If race was the dominant issue in Key's South, religion may be the force that shapes the ideological perspective of activists today. As John Clark points out, activists of both parties are about equal in their involvement with organized religion. Republican activists, however, are becoming increasingly tied to the views of the Christian right, save in Tennessee. The interweaving of Christian right views and southern Republicanism explicit in Clark's chapter is also a subtext in several of the other chapters. The impact of religion continues to be glimpsed in Jay Barth's analysis of the lingering impact of race on southern party activists. Although African Americans continue to be found primarily in the Democratic Party, their religious views are not that far from those of Republican activists. As Barth points out, African American activists tend to be driven by material incentives more than other activists, posing a somewhat problematic future for the Democratic Party in the South. In their chapter, Laurence

Moreland and Robert Steed argue convincingly that in-migration has helped to reinforce existing trends in activist ideology as Democratic in-migrants have tended to be more liberal than residents while their Republican counterparts have reinforced conservative trends in the Republican Party.

The factionalism that was characteristic of southern politics in the past is no longer the case today. John McGlennon shows that the parties are more homogeneous ideologically in 2001 than in 1991, a point reinforced in the chapter by Patrick Cotter and Samuel Fisher. They depict an increasing issue division between the two parties, although the level of commitment to a common ideology within the parties varies from state to state. One consequence of this new ideological situation is, as Jonathan Knuckey points out, an increasing commitment to the party at the level of grassroots activists in both parties. Although ideological agreement can lead to unity, as McGlennon argues, it may also lead to a problem of the past: factions based on personal affiliation rather than ideological differences.

Party activists are not necessarily the voting public. Cotter, Fisher, Barbara Patrick and Stephen Shaffer examine the linkages between activists and the voting public in an analysis that draws primarily on Mississippi and Alabama. They argue that the move to the left by Democratic activists in those states is in danger of leaving their party increasingly out of touch with the voting public. They argue the Democratic Party has moved farther and faster to the left than the Republican Party has moved to the right. At the same time, the liberal-conservative dichotomy no longer provides a complete explanation for the complexity of voter attitudes.

Ideology plays an important role in Charles Prysby's explanation of pragmatism and purism among party activists as well as for James Newman, Stephen Shaffer and David Breux's analysis of the motives for grassroots involvement by party activists. Al-

though the Republican Party is the more purist in orientation, Prysby indicates that ideological pluralism is becoming a thing of the past in both parties. Although race was once a major motivator for many southern activists, Newman, et al. indicate that material incentives are becoming increasingly important, raising the question of where the increasing ideological orientation of southern political parties will lead in the future.

One aspect of partisan activism has always been electoral. Robert Hogan makes the important point that Democratic activists tend to be involved in more campaign activities than are their Republican brethren. This may be a function of a Democratic weakness in numbers, but it can be transformed into strength should southern Republicans become complacent. Grassroots southern party activists are less in control of their parties than in the past. John Bruce and John Clark indicate the increasingly centralized nature of southern party organizations. This orientation may not be purely a southern phenomenon, as grassroots control over the parties is weakening nationally.

The thirteen chapters comprising this volume consider the question of party activism from a comparative rather than state by state perspective. This approach enables the authors to capture an overall regional perspective while emphasizing differences and similarities between the parties. At times, however, the approach loses some of the differences found in individual states. Although the authors take the eleven states of the Confederacy as their subject, Arkansas, Texas, Tennessee and to an extent Louisiana tend to be short-changed by the comparative approach. Readers seeking state by state data may turn to the recent double edition of the *American Review of Politics* (2003). The comparative approach also leads, at times, to some degree of repetition from chapter to chapter as the authors emphasize a few central themes, such as religious orientation and social issues, in constructing their explanations.

These qualifications notwithstanding, this work provides a quite useful analysis of the role of ideology in driving southern party activists and change within the perspectives of activists in both parties. All of the authors agree that the ideological perspectives of the activists of both parties were found nearer the ends of the political spectrum in 2001 than had been the case in 1991. After reading *Southern Political Party Activists* one might ask where are the centrists who can forge governing coalitions?

Prysbey and Clark's concluding chapter examines southern parties from the perspectives of the responsible party thesis and the party renewal thesis. Another perspective, derived from the work of Anthony Downs and the spatial theorists, might also come into question. The increasing polarization of party activists could be explored as it affects candidate selection and the future of the parties in the South and nation. Since the authors agree that activists in both parties are moving farther from the median voter, the relationship of the ideology of voters and activists and what it presages for the future of southern politics could well be a fruitful topic for further exploration.

John Theilmann
Converse College

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). 358 pp.

Using John Stuart Mill as his touchstone, Appiah looks at the ways in which identity impacts the success of our lives, and defends liberalism against communitarian and multicultural critics. Appiah argues that identity precedes culture and that individuality is ethically prior to identity. "My aim is to begin with the interests of individuals and to show how identities give individuals