

O'Brien shuns conclusions on some of the central issues about McCarthy. He simply refers to the "elusive" quality of the senator's "psychological needs." He does not explain where McCarthy got his conservative ideology and, although defining the problem well, he does not take a stand on the question of why McCarthy picked up the communism issue. A comparative perspective on the popular appeal of other senators in the 1950s—notably Estes Kefauver—would have probably broadened his conclusions about McCarthy.

The problem of how a marginal person comes to define the political agenda for a period, however brief, is one that still requires analysis. Any reader of Elizabeth Drew's recent and perceptive analysis of Senator Jesse Helms's marginal nature and his seminal, strategic contribution to contemporary political conservatism cannot help but be reminded of McCarthy. We need to understand better how such people create agendas.

Caveats aside, this is a valuable book.

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Structures of American Social History. By Walter Nugent. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. Pp. xiii, 206. Tables, figures, maps, notes, works cited, index. \$12.95.)

In the past twenty years, historical demographers have reconstructed American population patterns from the earliest colonial times. New information and concepts abound in this emerging field. Walter Nugent, a generalist *par excellence*, here offers a sweeping interpretation of American social and economic history based on these fresh findings. The author's purpose is to explain to nonspecialists how demographic facts have shaped and molded American history; his material, first presented as a public lecture series at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, has been expanded and revised into a more general essay on the demographic basis of social structural change in the United States over three centuries.

Nugent's major thesis is that American history can be divided into three distinct periods based on population "plateaus," in which decadal growth rates remained stable for long periods. Nugent identifies a frontier-rural era (1720-1870), when population growth was 35 percent per decade, a metropolitan period (1920-2020) with growth below 14 percent, and a "conflict-ridden" interim period (1870-1920) when growth was 24 percent. This fifty-year transition era, in which the metropolitan mode challenged and eventually supplanted the

frontier-rural mode, the author designates as the "Great Conjunction," a term borrowed from the *Annales* scholar Fernand Braudel.

Nugent likewise adopts as a theoretical model Braudellian concepts of periodization: events (less than 12 years), conjunctures (12-50 years), and structures (more than 50 years). These concepts, he believes, provide a better way to understand American history than modernization theory, Marxism, the Turner thesis, or Malthusian laws, all of which he discusses at length. Whether the *Annales* concepts are actually superior cannot be determined from Nugent's book, since the various models that are described in the first chapter are not converted into hypotheses and tested against the facts of American demography.

Apart from the stimulating first chapter and the appeal to Braudel, this brief book presents a narrative social and demographic history within the Turnerian, not the Braudellian, mode. The only deviation is that Nugent sees the end of the frontier as a gradual, fifty-year process, rather than as a dramatic change in the 1890s, as Turner did. Also in contrast to Turner, who viewed the twentieth century pessimistically because of the passing of the "free land" frontier, Nugent takes his cue from Malthus and offers a sanguine futuristic picture of the graying of America. The twenty-first century should be "brightly bourgeois again," predicts Nugent, because Americans have "put the brakes on population growth" (p. 144). The author thus concludes his essay with a personal statement of faith in economic self-interest and rationality. Only time will tell us if the stable population trends and high income levels that Nugent envisions will indeed usher in the millennium.

Despite Nugent's increasingly anachronistic beliefs in this age of the demise of liberalism, his substantive discussion of demographic change and its social effects across the sweep of American history is a welcome addition. A paperback edition would make prime supplemental reading in American history courses.

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