



Nelson, Michael

**Resilient America: Electing Nixon in 1968, Channeling Dissent, and Dividing Government**

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas  
342 pp., \$34.95,  
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For some time, historians have viewed the 1968 presidential election as a pivotal moment in post-World War II American history. The election has stood as both an emblem of and the culmination of the sixties: contentious, polarizing, and violent. There is no question that 1968 was one of the most turbulent years in recent American history. The year began with the Tet offensive in Vietnam; then, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated; and, finally, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago degenerated into mayhem, with protestors battling the police on the streets and Democrats battling each other inside the convention hall. The year's turmoil has led many historians, including Rick Perlstein in *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and Fracturing of America* (Scribner, 2008), to conclude that the election, like the decade in which it was contested, left America divided ideologically, racially, and politically. Michael Nelson's *Resilient America: Electing Nixon in 1968, Channeling Dissent, and Dividing Government* challenges this declensionist narrative. Nelson, one of America's leading scholars of the presidency and presidential electioneering, is well suited to reinterpret this important election. As his title suggests, Nelson credits the election with helping to unify America by moderating and channeling potentially destabilizing dissent into conventional and peaceful political channels.

*Resilient America* proceeds chronologically, starting with the 1964 election, which Nelson sees as an early test of the durability of the political system following the assassination of

President John Kennedy. He also uses the election to introduce the remarkable collection of political figures that played prominent roles in both the 1964 and 1968 presidential elections. This group included Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Robert Kennedy, and Eugene McCarthy on the Democratic side; Richard Nixon, George Romney, Nelson Rockefeller, and Ronald Reagan on the Republican side; and third-party candidate George Wallace. Chapters 2 through 4 follow the respective political fortunes of these colorful contenders for the White House through the 1968 primaries. Chapter 5 covers the party conventions, and chapters 6 and 7 the general election. In the final chapter of the book, Nelson returns to and expands on the theme of the resilience of the American political system in light of his narrative.

Although Nelson readily acknowledges the intense political turmoil of 1968, he maintains that the political system managed not simply to withstand it, but to accommodate many of the demands of the dissenters. In the end, Nelson argues, the most popular candidates, Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, won their parties' nominations, and, despite a serious challenge from George Wallace that threatened to throw the election into doubt, Nixon won the election, and an orderly transition took place. Moreover, after the election, politicians from both major parties took significant steps to win back disaffected groups from across the political spectrum. To reduce discontent on the left, Nixon de-escalated American involvement in Vietnam and ended the draft. To appeal to African Americans, congressional Democrats and the courts promoted civil rights policies and social welfare programs. To make the political system more inclusive, the Democratic Party reformed the presidential nominating process. To address the concerns of Wallace voters, Republicans and Democrats both made populist appeals. That the 1968 election also ushered in an era of divided government is problematic for Nelson, but his argument still provides a useful corrective to the standard account of political fracture and social dissolution.

A political scientist by trade, Nelson does some of his best work when he analyzes the formal rules governing presidential selection in 1968. For example, his careful analysis of the tangle of state laws and party rules that determined the presidential nominees of the major parties underscores how important election laws were to the nomination process and how badly the process needed to be reformed. Nelson's story is never dull. He has a knack for choosing just the right juicy quotation to illustrate his point and gives the presidential contenders' out-sized personalities plenty of room to express themselves. Nelson's well-written and solidly researched study of an important election will certainly win admirers among specialists and general readers alike.

MARK NEVIN

Ohio University Lancaster  
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Battat, Erin Royston

**Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left**

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Southern poverty and violence in the wake of the Great Depression generated a series of attempts at escape. Poor whites left rural areas for cities, then left the South entirely for points north and west in hope of finding market-proof jobs. Black southerners left for the same reason, but they were also continuing a broader migration that began in the 1890s, at the onset of Jim Crow segregation, Redeemer voting restrictions, and the insidious convict lease program. Because southern populists were largely responsible for many of those restrictions, the migrations of whites and blacks out of the South in the Great Depression and beyond have been interpreted as two very different events, divided by the racial politics that created the region

they were escaping. Erin Royston Battat's compelling new book, *Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left*, challenges this notion, arguing that the migrations were interconnected, pitting the migrants against racism and capitalism as they fled from the one region that epitomized the failure of both.

Battat is a lecturer in Harvard's history and literature program, and her account of the ties between the Great Migrations is suitably interdisciplinary. She reads the cultural production of the Depression era to demonstrate that its depiction of the migration showed the ties between black rights and radical left-wing politics, if it did not actually create those ties. Battat reads the well-known works of John Steinbeck, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright, but also the works of lesser-known authors of the period, popular songs, and the Depression-era photographs of Dorothea Lange and others, as well as the works of sociologists studying groups of migrants in a contemporary context, all to demonstrate that our picture of the relationship between black America and the white radical left fundamentally changes when we move beyond those well-known works. Far from being antithetical, migration narratives during the Great Depression demonstrated a real belief in the possibility of unity between the two groups. Such a demonstration, however, would always include the caveat that the reality of racial conflict was virtually omnipresent, as migration out of the South showed that racism among the working class was not exclusively a southern phenomenon. Into that breach stepped the radical black left. W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Lorraine Hansberry, for example, proved that coupling white radicals and black cultural production could give birth to a powerful new voice against capitalism and the racial inequalities it spawned.

By exploring the palpable interracial movement against capitalism among writers of the 1930s and 1940s, Battat counters the dominant historical interpretation of the period, which emphasizes a budding black nationalism that saw itself as antithetical to

interracial contact. There were many ways that writers attempted to draw those lines. Battat argues, for example, that they "mobilized the patriotic 'nation of immigrants' trope not only to counter prejudice against minority groups," but also "to advance the rights of workers" (140). That trope compared migration based on financial necessity to immigration for the same purpose, arguing that the country was built on such need-based migratory events.

In the postwar period, the black and white migration narratives would diverge, with African American literature emphasizing communalism within the race and demonstrating a more conciliatory relationship with the South, whereas white literature focused on cultural pluralism among various ethnic groups that would all qualify as effectively white. Still, Battat presents a compelling interdisciplinary case that the American populist left in the generation before the Cold War was a broader tent than often credited, including both African Americans and women and, thus, fundamentally imprinting the postwar rights movements of both groups. *Ain't Got No Home* is an account that would benefit scholars and students of black history, labor history, economic history, and intellectual history, but its easy style and strong case make it palatable for a general adult reading audience, as well.

THOMAS AIELLO

Valdosta State University

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Lees, William B., and Frederick P. Gaske

**Recalling Deeds Immortal: Florida Monuments to the Civil War**  
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If Florida's contribution to the Civil War has been forgotten, it is not for lack of memorials. Almost a hundred monuments dot the state. Although the

United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) placed most of these monuments in the years between the end of Reconstruction and the Great Depression, many have been erected since the Civil War centennial, and more than a dozen have sprouted in the twenty-first century. The majority honor the Confederate dead, but a few commemorate Union soldiers. The impetus that drove Floridians, both natives and postwar immigrants, to place these memorials is explored in *Recalling Deeds Immortal*.

In Florida, the commemoration process began in 1866, when a Union burial detail placed a twelve-foot wooden marker above a mass grave of their fellows on the Olustee battlefield. A granite obelisk was left behind by departing navy officers in Key West that same year. The Reconstruction government of Florida was understandably unenthusiastic about Confederate markers, but, once Reconstruction ended, memorials began appearing on courthouse lawns across the state.

Florida's women were central to these efforts. Having spent the war raising money for the troops, they now turned to decorating graves and commissioning permanent markers. By the late nineteenth century, the Lost Cause school of thought, which held that southerners had not been traitors to the Union but, rather, defenders of constitutional liberties, was printed in schoolbooks and engraved in stone. The UDC was determined that its correct version of southern history be taught, both in the classroom and in public spaces. Florida shared in the spirit of historical defiance that swept the South, and monuments were still being placed around the state even when such commemorations had died out in other areas. Though Confederate markers dominated the landscape, Union soldiers in stone and zinc appeared in places such as Miami, Jacksonville, St. Cloud, and Lynn Haven, where their flesh and blood counterparts had spent their golden years.

The Civil War's one-hundredth anniversary might have seemed a proper time to conclude raising monuments to a lost generation, but the urge to honor the past seems unquenched.

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