

of Alexis de Tocqueville, to rescue him from the pundits who use his name to justify ignoring politics and dismantling the government. While Tocqueville did indeed wax enthusiastic about Americans' fervor for joining associations, he also considered the specifically political association to be the mother of all associations, and thought that legal and political institutions were necessary anchors for the democratic ethos, says Beem.

Similarly, Beem painstakingly shows why Hegel's concept of civil society included a strong state. The state brings together all the disparate, local, particular groups under a common banner; membership in national society bridges differences that local institutions strengthen. Beem's smart and careful argument is that a good democracy requires both the warmth of local, personal, often parochial groups and the universalism of national, political institutions. The civil rights movement's connection to the Voting Rights Act is his paradigmatic case.

Recapturing the term "civil society" might seem to be an arcane exercise in philosophy, but it is not, and the stakes are high: if all American democracy needs is more social capital-building institutions like bowling leagues, we have a very different political agenda from one that gives politics and the state a central role. Against the current of antipolitical zeal, both of these books wonderfully reassert the centrality of politics.

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Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era by Adolph Reed, Jr. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 288 pp. Cloth, \$47.95; paper, \$18.95.

Adolph Reed, Jr. is one of the most prominent scholars of African-American politics writing today. *Stirrings in the Jug* reminds us of why this is so. The book is a collection of previously published articles and a speech. The oldest of the contributions dates to 1986, the most recent to 1999. Despite these origins, there is a commendable coherence to the collection, especially among the first four essays. The three concluding essays include a nice case study of politics in Atlanta, a deeply cranky and well known piece on the myth of the underclass, and a penetrating analysis of the contemporary cultural significance of Malcolm X.

With respect to the first four chapters, Reed's question is basically this: In the wake of the demise of the regime of racial segregation, might African-American politics serve as a vehicle for promoting a populist progressivism that resists "monopoly capitalism," but pursues instead a program for "social justice?" Reed's answer is that black politics has failed to achieve its "emancipatory and egalitarian" potential. Part of the reason, he argues, resides in the inte-

rior dynamics of black politics. On the Right, black politicians and scholars have simply abandoned the goal of social justice. On the Left, black politics has devolved into a concern for ideological purity and manipulative evasion. In the center, the incorporation of blacks into the mainstream of American political life has not engendered the progressive forms of politics that one might have expected.

Why has this been so? One reason is that the working conceptions of politics that were useful and to some degree accurate under Jim Crow are outmoded today. These conceptions include: the “black community” is an organic whole; there is an essential, “authentic” way of being black in the world; and black politics requires mediation by a talented elite. In mainstream politics, some of the practical consequences of these persistent conceptions have been the degradation of a genuinely democratic politics, the suppression of accountability of black officials to black constituents, and the perpetuation of the hegemony of a black petite bourgeoisie, whose members tend to pursue a politics of accommodation and/or self-aggrandizement. Thus, black mayors can end up pursuing strategies of economic development the benefits of which do not trickle down to ordinary black citizens.

The overall picture Reed paints may seem bleak from the perspective of one on the progressive Left, but Reed avoids despair. Agency matters. Even in a space as small as a city there is room for political actors to maneuver, even against an increasingly global capitalism. That space can be effective, however, only if political practices are truly democratic (open to those with few material means) and political ideas reflect social realities (as opposed to worn verities).

Reed is an equal-opportunity combatant who pulls no punches. This is both a strength and a weakness of these essays. One strength is that his aggressive frankness can be disarmingly refreshing. On the down side, however, Reed sometimes surrenders too quickly to his more polemical impulses. I worry, for example, that he overreaches in evaluating the work of Katherine Tate, Carol M. Swain, and Michael Dawson, criticizing them for not doing the kind of scholarship he thinks they should do and attributing positions to them that each would doubtless resist. Also troubling are Reed’s quickness, in ways that seem unfair, to characterize the positions and sometimes the persons of others as being essentially racist or sexist and his glib dismissal of some opponents whose arguments deserve more serious treatment.

These tendencies diminish Reed’s deeper insights into American politics, which are always astute and sometimes profound. This consequence is unfortunate given the important contributions Reed makes to the crucial conversation about the future of the nation in light of its history of racial division and stratification.

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