

Bullock, Charles S. and Ronald Keith Gaddie. 2010. *Georgia Politics in a State of Change*. Boston: Pearson Publishers. pp. 208. \$24.80. ISBN 978-0-20-570685-3

Charles Bullock (University of Georgia) and Keith Gaddie (University of Oklahoma) author this brief but informative text. Professor Bullock is a senior scholar on Georgia and Southern politics, and has written or coauthored numerous articles and books on these subjects. Professor Gaddie goes back to his Georgia roots to coauthor with his mentor Bullock. Gaddie is a familiar face as he is a frequent commentator or author on issues pertaining to Oklahoma politics and his work with the *Almanac of Oklahoma Politics*. His particular areas of expertise are Southern politics, elections and political behavior, and public policy. Gaddie will also author a forthcoming work from the University of Oklahoma Press, *Red State Rising*. The authors have also previously worked together on *The Triumph of Voting Rights in the South*, *Elections to Open Seats in the U.S. House* and *David Duke and the Politics of Race in the South*.

*Georgia Politics in a State of Change* is the kind of text on state politics that would benefit every state and its political science community. It provides an excellent historic context that the reader not steeped in either Southern or Georgia politics needs. The authors' development of the text is well supported by data or case studies, rather than depending

on sweeping generalizations that sometimes plague a text such as this. The book is densely written. The authors manage to provide the reader with a wealth of information and an economy of words.

The strongest portion of the text is its discussion of electoral issues and the root causes of their change. The authors methodically chronicle the upswing of the Republican Party and the decline of the once dominant Democratic Party. The Oklahoma reader will note a great deal of similarity to those changes in our state. The discussion of race and gender is likewise engrossing. The authors are clearly expert and comfortable dealing with race as an issue. Another thing I felt very satisfied with was the way Bullock and Gaddie are able to discuss the electoral geography in a way which the more novice readers can understand and apply to trends. The coverage of institutions of government was sound, especially the historic evolution of the branches to current day issues and conflicts. The authors consistently provide enough detail to for the reader to identify and understand the fault lines of Georgia politics, both past and present.

While this is a superior effort by the authors, it is not without shortcomings. Some readers might find the writing style distracting. While the writing is tersely academic, it is sprinkled with folksy examples and case studies that lighten the otherwise pedantic tone. Like Oklahoma, Georgia has its share of colorful characters, and their inclusion is probably necessary to gain a holistic perspective of Georgia's political landscape; however, at times it appears there is a battle taking place within the narrative between the academic and the homespun.

Another complaint is the paucity of policy analysis. There is one lone chapter on education, and while the discussion is worthwhile there are no other chapters specifically devoted to public policy. Consequently, political scientists and policy analysts are likely to find that the book ends rather abruptly, leaving some readers wanting more. This truncated treatment stands in stark contrast to the smooth transitions that characterize the rest of the book.

As an Oklahoman reading *Georgia Politics in a State of Change* two things stand out. One is that one can place Oklahoma next to Georgia and understand the southern strain apparent in Oklahoma politics, as well as the ways in which Oklahoma and its politics are a hybrid, not just southern. The second is the frank discussion of racial politics and its impact. It is one thing to have a general grasp of race and politics in

Jeff Sharlet. 2008. *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. New York, New York: Harper Collins. pp. 454. \$29.95. ISBN-978-0-06-055979-3

In 2010, Dr. George Alan Rekers became the latest of Christian Conservative leaders to make a very public fall from grace. As one of the leading voices in the movement that aims to bring America back to a strong moral foundation, Dr. Rekers tried to explain his actions, which involved a ten-day European vacation with a male prostitute as his only traveling companion. The doctor has said that he hired the young man, whom he contacted from the website *rentboy*, to carry his luggage for him on the trip and to counsel his companion on the virtues of a healthy heterosexual life. Since then, many of Rekers' associates distanced themselves as his explanations became increasingly untenable. Rekers' *bona fides* as a Christian Conservative clearly show he has been at the forefront of the Christian Conservative movement. A Baptist minister, Rekers co-founded the Family Research Council with James Dobson in 1993. He was also a prominent member of the National Association for Research and Therapy on Homosexuality (NARTH), which advocates therapy on gay teenagers in order to cure them of their sexual orientation, and had been hired as a consultant for Republican office

\*For clarity, references to the book *The Family* will be italics, and references to the actual group "The Family" will be in quotations.

holders on the possibility of converting homosexuals. In the wake of a series of improprieties on part of religious figures such as Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker, and Ted Haggard, the question has arisen as to whether religious conservatism can survive as a plausible influence in American politics.

Jeff Sharlet provides one perspective in his book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. Published in 2008, *The Family*\* is part investigative journalism, part historical thesis, and part political analysis. *The Family* makes an important contribution to understanding how Christian fundamentalism has exerted such significant influence in American culture and politics.

For example, Sharlet writes that scandal does not destroy American fundamentalism, “rather, like a natural fire that purges the forest of overgrowth, it makes the movement stronger” (Sharlet, 2010: 322). The scandal *du jure* at the time of Sharlet’s book was the downfall of Pastor Ted Haggard from Colorado. Haggard, who at the pinnacle of his power talked to President George W. Bush via conference call each Monday, was caught with methamphetamine and a male prostitute. For the believers, this just means that Haggard was doing great work and getting under the Devil’s skin. The more powerful the Christian, the greater the temptation, hence the greater likelihood that sin will befall the devout. To the megachurch activists, these actions show the human frailties that can only be mended by God. However, Sharlet notes that finding the true way of life is not an act of individual discovery but an acceptance to follow the path cleared by trailblazers: the economic and political elites.

Sharlet begins his book with an introduction to “The Family” by describing his own experiences as an intern for this communal organization. Sharlet worked during the day cleaning up the rooms at places called “The Ceders” or “Ivanwald” in northern Virginia or the “C Street House” found in Washington DC. These establishments exist for political leaders to relax and to have Bible study and to also get below-market rent as in the case for the C Street House (Boston, 2009: 175). At night, Sharlet took notes of his observations and conversations with other interns in the Bible studies with members of “The Family,” including the group’s reputed leaders, Doug Coe.

Coe has led the family since 1966. Sharlet describes Coe as a man that advocates a transition to a comfortable, accepting type of “soft

authoritarianism” for the United States. Coe believes the path to this Christian paradise will be built through submission to Jesus and his earthly representatives, such as Coe himself. Once people “soften their hearts to authority,” they will naturally lose interest in democracy, since it only fosters rebelliousness (Sharlet, p. 40). Sharlet documents how attractive this vision has been to conservatives by noting the number of elected officials that have taken up residence Ivanwald.

Anti-democratic religious groups would warrant little concern if they were confined to backwoods America, and remained small and isolated in their membership. Sharlet describes the “The Family” as a powerful, almost sinister group that works behind the scenes as a lobbying organization for many of the world’s most infamous despots. Some of the twentieth century’s best-known *generalissimos* such as Costa e Silva of Brazil, Suharto of Indonesia, and Park Chung Hee of South Korea all used their connections with “The Family” to get funding and military hardware from Washington to strengthen their regimes. Sharlet uses this group’s support for autocrats as for his contention that Christian conservatism of this stripe is less a religion of charity and equality and more a religion of obeisance to the wealthy and powerful.

Sharlet delves into the growth of Christian fundamentalism throughout the text. In the process he answers the question how this segment of Christianity supports the rich and powerful rather than mistrusts them. Any reading of the New Testament would suggest that Christianity would find the excesses of capitalism to be damaging to the soul and harmful to one’s fellow man. However, Sharlet documents how American fundamentalism, a Christian belief that followers should adhere to the “fundamentals” of the faith and avoid sectarian confusion, has evolved from “liberation to authoritarianism”(Sharlet, p. 4).

Sharlet writes that in the 1920s Billy Sunday, the Joel Osteen of his day, preached the prosperity gospel and that God loves the wealthy, setting the stage for the founder of “The Family,” Abraham Vereide. A Norwegian immigrant, Vereide fell in love with the United States and the opportunities it could bring. What he loved most about his newly adopted country were the rich folks. He served as a missionary to them and counseled them not to give up their wealth but to carry the yolk of the powerful and to take care of the poor, much like a *caudillo* would be expected to take care of the peons in Mexico. Sharlet finds the best way to describe Vereide’s world view by using the man’s own

words: “To the big man went strength, to the little man went need. Only the big man was capable of mending the world”(p. 89). Vereide’s family has been helping “big men” govern the world for well over seventy years.

Sharlet’s research hypothesis—that would-be authoritarians are hiding in plain sight in the nation’s capital—should concern anyone who believes in democracy. Such a statement is histrionic for those who believe democracy and pluralism still rule America. But are democracy and pluralism the governing forces of this country because the elites tell us so? As C. Wright Mills writes in his pivotal work *The Power Elite*, “many who believe that there is no elite, or at any rate none of any consequence, rest their argument upon what men of affairs believe about themselves, or at least assert in public” (Mill, 1959: 5). We find from Sharlet’s investigative journalism that the assertions made in private by elites are not so democratic. For political scientists, Sharlet supplements the arguments made within our own research community that democracy is not in control of this country (Winters and Page, 2009: 744).

Of even greater concern for democrats in Oklahoma is the fact that so many prominent politicians of this state are active with “The Family.” Former Senator Nickles and Senators Inhofe and Coburn have strong ties to Doug Coe and his organization. In fact a former aid of Senator Nickles’ is quoted in *The Family* as pining for the day when a kingdom of believers would be established in America (Sharlet, p. 6). It is always paradoxical for a free country to debate how much freedom should be allowed for those who wish to take away freedom. Following Madison’s admonition in *Federalist 10*, the best way to deal with antidemocrats in a democracy is to shed light on their practices and beliefs. This is Sharlet’s most important contribution. Sharlet does not want this powerful network to be destroyed. That would only cause the group go deeper underground and behind the scenes or it would help the group make the case that its persecution shows how Satan is alive and well in the United States. Instead Sharlet advocates that “The Family” be exposed for what it truly is, which is another lobbying group. For all the handshakes, smiles and Bible studies, “The Family” turns out to be one more interest group with the intent to keep the rich and powerful , more rich and more powerful. Jeff Sharlet’s *The Family* describes the marriage between religion and politics and how the offspring are a privileged lot. This reminds us that preservation of democracy requires

constant vigilance. But democracy cannot be preserved, let alone strengthened, unless the democrats know what they are up against. Sharlet lets us know, and that makes his research vital.

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