

dential obesity. Mencken saw Grover Cleveland's great bulk as indicating a kind of implacable strength. But Taft's girth reflected placidity and inaction, complementing his sedate view of the presidency: "the president cannot make clouds to rain, he cannot make the corn to grow, he cannot make business to be good." Miller rates Taft as the ninth worst, but his tenure in the White House was marked by peace and prosperity.

Warren G. Harding receives the most undeservedly rough treatment of any president examined. From a classical liberal perspective, Harding was arguably the greatest president of the twentieth century. He initiated the largest spending cut in history—a 40 percent reduction from Wilson's last peacetime budget. And Harding's good nature and liberal instincts led him to overrule his political advisers and pardon Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs. Debs had been jailed during Wilson's jihad against opponents of World War I, but Harding turned him and other dissenters loose; "I want [Debs] to eat his Christmas dinner with his wife," he said. The scandals surrounding Harding's administration push him near the top of Miller's hit list. But, as Miller notes, he never took "so much as a nickel" from any of his corrupt cronies.

Despite the author's depressingly conventional perspective on presidential greatness, *Star-Spangled Men* is tremendously enjoyable. Miller can turn a memorable phrase: (for example, he writes that Kissinger "looked like a Bronx Butcher and operated with the cynicism of a Renaissance Cardinal") and has an eye for the kind of detail that makes reading history fun.

Read with the proper attitude, *Star-Spangled Men* inspires reflection on what we should value in a president. □

Gene Healy is a student at the University of Chicago Law School.



Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe

by Vladimir Tismaneanu

Princeton University Press • 1998 • 216 pages
• \$29.95

Reviewed by David L. Prychitko

Communism is dead, but collectivism is quite alive. Vladimir Tismaneanu's book *Fantasies of Salvation* explains why. Tismaneanu, once a Romanian dissident and now professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland, argues that while the centrally planned, socially engineered visions of Marxism-Leninism are dead, the false, utopian hope of emancipation through the state lives on. The myth of socialist internationalism has now been replaced by a new myth, populist nationalism.

Communism declared that its aim was the unification and collective freedom of workers around the world, but the new post-communist vision abandons that myth for a much narrower but equally deadly one. The new political vision in many former socialist regimes is not the Western ideal of individual freedom and civil society. Instead, "the nation" is the focus of attention.

The 1990s are a stubborn and sobering reminder that classical liberalism does not necessarily replace socialism by default. Although there have been success stories—countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia, for example—the 1990s might be better remembered for the Bosnian war, the growing Kosovo crisis, and the return of refugee camps. Who would have thought that the collapse of the Berlin Wall would be followed by the return of ethnic cleansing?

Tismaneanu shows that the problems of post-communism remain because the fight is less about the freedom of individuals and more about the emancipation of the ethnic enclave. Throughout eastern and central Europe "the nation" is paraded as the true center of history, the source of dignity, the subject of sorrow and oppression. The author

demonstrates how this emergent populist-nationalism seeks to destroy individuality, pluralism, and democracy and instead champions unity, stability, and authoritarianism.

Tismaneanu's explanation of why collectivism has re-emerged in many post-communist states is worth quoting at length:

The end of communism has left individuals with a sense of loss: even if they hated their cage, it offered at least the advantage of stability and predictability. Like former prisoners, they now have freedoms but do not know exactly what to do with them. Under these circumstances, they are ready to espouse the rhetoric of the tribe with its emphasis on group identity and community values. The neurosis of the transition period, the collective fear of a general collapse, the closing of the historical horizon and the anger at the new economic barons nourish sentiments of revolt, distress, and intolerance. There is need to find scapegoats, to identify those culpable for the ongoing sorrows. The political myth of lost and reconquered ethnic unity serves precisely this purpose: to explain defeats and alienation and reassure the individual that he or she has a place within the *volkisch* community.

In the face of all this, Tismaneanu remains optimistic over the prospects of the liberal intellectual dissidents in the post-communist countries and their continued resistance against collectivist nationalism. The emergence of classical liberal institutions—a market economy, a fully flourishing civil society, and constitutional democracy—remains critically dependent on them.

I highly recommend this book. Those familiar with Ludwig von Mises's *Nation, State, and Economy: Contributions to the Politics and History of Our Time* will find in Tismaneanu's book a fascinating and probing updating to *our* time. □

David Prychitko studied the former Yugoslav system on a Fulbright grant in 1989, and currently heads the department of economics at Northern Michigan University in Marquette. He is co-editor, with Nevenka Čučković, of a collection of classic articles by Mises and Hayek, translated into Croatian.

Out of Order

by Max Boot

Basic Books • 1998 • 252 pages • \$25.00

Reviewed by George C. Leef

Max Boot is a journalist and editor at the *Wall Street Journal* who has made a name for himself (and a lot of enemies) with his articles exposing the despicable practices of plaintiffs' lawyers who will do almost anything to squeeze money out of "deep pocket" defendants. With *Out of Order*, he turns his considerable writing and reportorial skills toward another facet of our legal system—judges. Once highly respected pillars of the community, the ranks of the black-robed contain, Boot argues, many who have little or no regard for justice. This is a serious problem that has received too little attention. Thus this is a welcome book.

The bad-judge problem has several facets. One that Boot addresses is partisan judges, ones who have an ingrained preference for certain litigants, lawyers, or causes, so that their courtrooms are about as fair as the Stalinist show trials of the 1930s. Plaintiffs' lawyers know who they are and naturally contrive to file suits in their courts. You have probably heard of the multimillion-dollar punitive damage awards in cases where there was truly no harm at all, such as the infamous repainted BMW case in Alabama. But how do these absurd instances of legal plunder ever get to trial at all?

The answer is that some judges—elected with copious amounts of money contributed by lawyers who will have cases before them—are unwilling to serve the interests of justice by dismissing suits that are transparently nothing more than legal extortion. Boot names names and gives the nasty details.

But the harm done by rogues who play favorites is minimal when compared to the harm done by another class of bad judges—those who have aided and abetted in the unconstitutional expansion of power of government. This has mainly been the work of the Supreme Court and the lower federal courts, many of whose members have been chosen