

# POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

**Interpreting Elections.** Stanley Kelley. *Princeton*, \$8.95. This book on political polling fails to live up to its promise, but it makes one intriguing argument: the election of 1980 was a landslide produced by "weakly committed voters." It may be that there was a new conservatism, or a new militarism, or some other overriding concern in the land. But whatever patterns there were were *weak* patterns.

The strength (or weakness) of the relationship between the electorate and the elected can be more important than simple figures on who won, and by how much. After all, even when we confront a landslide for a Reagan, or a Nixon or Johnson, we are really talking about the differences of a few percentage points which, when distributed uniformly across the country, can produce a revolution in House and Senate majorities and a 90 to 95 percent majority of electoral votes. Such apparent landslides can wash away fast where

convictions of voters are weak.

Kelley's data suggest that there has been a steady decline in the strength of voter commitment from Eisenhower's election in 1956 through 1980. In 1952, 7.3 percent of those polled chose candidates in terms of the "lesser evils." By 1976, 20 percent were choosing candidates that way. The victorious Eisenhower had a "credit rating," Kelley writes, of 1.42. The landslide election of 1972 left President Nixon with a credit rating of .53. Carter began his 1977 administration with a credit rating of .29. Although Kelley does not give a similar rating for Reagan after the 1980 election, he implies that voter commitment was no more intense toward him than toward Carter.

—*Theodore Lowi*

**Caveat.** Alexander Haig. *Macmillan*, \$17.95. A valuable antidote to conventional courses in American government that delude students into thinking that the secretary of state is in charge of foreign policy. This book reeks of the reality of Haig's anxiety and sweating palms over what the boys at the White House—mainly, Baker, Deaver, Meese, and later Clark—were doing behind his back and his continuing doubt as to whether he was really in control or not.

—*Charles Peters*

**Democracy.** Joan Didion. *Simon and Schuster*, \$13.95. Didion's point that liberal "do-gooders" are to blame for the problems in the Third World and that sensible conservative patriots like Reagan are merely acting to bail them out is not new. It is a message that you may or may not agree with. The real problem is that it hardly matters as most of this novel is simply *beside* the point. What's good about *Democracy* is that Didion has the precious cultural pretensions of the upper-middle classes down to a tee in her portrayals of Harry Victor, the Kennedysque liberal senator who wants to be

president, and his lovely, fragile wife Inez Victor, whose life of privilege has so robbed her of imagination she has "come to view most occasions as photo opportunities."

Read *Democracy* for Inez. Read it for the travel tips. If Inez went there you know it must be divine. But don't read it expecting any revelations about democracy.

—*Mairi N. Morrison*

**Marrying Up: An American Dream & Reality Why Some Make It Into the Inner Circle and Others Never Will.** Joanna T. Steichen. *Rawson*, \$13.95. The title of this book is a tease. There is actually very little advice on how to marry up, and Steichen, a psychotherapist and widow of photographer Edward Steichen, has an edge of disdain for anyone who makes marrying up a quest.

After references to Jane Austen and Henry James to establish her serious intent, Steichen spends most of the book explaining at dull length how "marrying up" means different things to different people and describing the style of living various degrees of wealth offer.

Her hardcore gold-digging advice consists of suggestions such as, attend horse shows, or hang around the dock at private marinas. She also recommends finding the richest person at school or work and giving that person compliments: "You do such wonderful things with a simple scarf," or "That flower arrangement comes from the palette of an angel." If this doesn't send you barreling down the aisle with a Rockefeller, Steichen offers instructive case histories of people who have married up written in a sort of Cosmo-with-a-Ph.D. style.

In the end she does provide some common sense ideas about marrying—namely stop worrying about marrying up and get involved in a job you like, do



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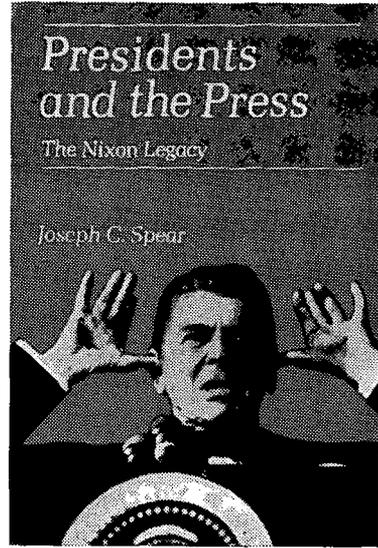
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## The Spot

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Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates

This lively history of the short political commercial that has become the dominant form of persuasion in America's political campaigns covers the launching of John Glenn, Ike, Nixon's "Checkers," "Johnson's infamous "Daisy" spot; Gerald Ford's "Feelin' Good About America" series; the "Lifestyle Campaign"; "Prime-Time President," and much more.

Diamond and Bates interview the chief media practitioners and political marketers, noting the effects of their handiwork on the outcome of candidates' efforts. Scores of storyboards and illustrations from key campaigns are analyzed according to the authors' original classification of polispot techniques.  
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