

cacy of staying the course. Robert Kagan and William Kristol explain in their own terms the reasons why the United States is involved in fighting in the Middle East. Norman Podhoretz expansively argues that war on terror represents a new paradigm in international relations comparable to World War II or the Cold War. Charles Krauthammer builds on his earlier works about unipolar moment and defends the world view he calls democratic realism. Other authors challenge the neoconservative agenda and assumptions. Fouad Ajami writes about the likely failure of the democracy-building project in Mesopotamia while Francis Fukuyama suggests his own alternative of a mix of American interests and values. Realists have their say in the words of Henry Kissinger, who questions the feasibility and desirability as a foreign policy goal of nation-building efforts in the Middle East. Columnist George Will calls on the Bush administration to return to the true principles of conservatism. The paleoconservative point of view is presented by Patrick Buchanan, who poses uncomfortable questions about the goals of the ongoing war.

Strictly speaking, "The Right War" does not bring any new information about or analysis of the intellectual debate on the Iraq War in America as it, in fact, consists of reprints that could eventually be obtained elsewhere. Neither does it address the impact these writings had on the decision-making processes in Washington, D.C., as the Bush administration contemplated further course of action in the Middle East. However, its foremost contribution lies in the fact that it offers an overview of the main ideological groups within the conservative movement along with concrete examples of their products in a concise and well-organized form. Rosen, Harvard-educated managing director of the Commentary magazine, managed to compile a truly resourceful book for any student of modern American foreign and national security policy.

Jiří Skoupy

Simon Schama, **The American Future: A History from the Founding Fathers to Barack Obama**. London: Vintage, 2009. 416 pp. ISBN 978-0099520399

Simon Schama is a renowned British historian who lives in the United States since the beginning of the 1980s. In 2008, he produced a documentary series for the BBC, which analyzed American history in the light of the then upcoming elections. His research for the TV series became the starting point for his book *The American Future*.

The author explores the idea that Americans, when making decisions concerning the future of their country, are often influenced by their interpretations of history. The biggest asset of the book is its focus on micro-historical episodes, which Schama introduces in the context of their own age as well as in their origin and effect on the current dilemmas. This is not a book that would try to forecast the future. It is a highly selective and in many cases strongly simplified interpretation of history, which doesn't strive for objectivity, but provides arguments. His main argument is that it is impossible to cut history out of the context of current discourse. History according to Schama is a living organism, not an objective reality.

The prologue leaves little mystery about Schama's political inclinations. Under the title *Iowa waltz*, the author reports about Barack Obama's victory in Iowa's democratic primaries as a day "when American democracy came back from the death." The first chapter titled "American war" shows the conflicted roles that the American army played and continues to play in the US. The vehicle for Schama's craft fully carved story telling is the Meigs family. One of its members, Montgomery Meigs, led the logistics of Union army during the Civil war. His systematic approach is described as one of the strategic advantages of the Union and his engineering skills as one of the pivots of the development of Washington, D.C. Schama here argues that besides the expansionist tradition, there is also a constructive, practical role for the American army.

The following part, titled "American Fervor," also tries to set a progressive light on an institution much more connected with conservatism. Here, the author stresses the positive role that the organized religion had in promoting religious tolerance, in a time span that covers the Founding fathers as well as the Civil rights era. The most interesting parts cover the role of black churches in opposing slavery and supporting social cohesion. The analysis, however, ends with the late 1960s and unfortunately doesn't deal with the current role of Christianity on politics. The third chapter asserts that nativism and xenophobia have been parts of the American society since its beginnings. It also, however, shows an idealistic and inclusive idea of American identity.

The last chapter is less consistent, trying to deal with the history of Native American forced resettlement and the problems of managing natural resources. The example of relocation of the Cherokee Indians shows the tragedy of the Trail of Tears in the light of the economic pressures to use the natural resources in their territory. Then the story jumps into the 1930s, when precisely the area in Oklahoma, where the Cherokees were relocated to, became the Dustbowl, where soil overuse led to catastrophic dust storms. Furthermore, Schama introduces current Las Vegas as an efficient system of water management.

Simon Schama's book *The American Future* is to some point limited by the atmosphere of presidential campaign in 2008, by precisely that kind of "new beginning" excitement, which led Barack Obama to victory. However, it is not a book that would become irrelevant within two years. It is an interesting exercise in the use of material from private archives. The strong appeal of this book comes from the connections made between personal stories and a specific understanding of the development of some current issues. The fact that Schama presents a strong opinion on each of these issues is not harming the book. It is neither meant for academic audience neither as a text book. It is more of a polemic essay, which convinces the reader of the importance of history and the power of its different interpretations.

Kristýna Pašková