IKE AND DICK

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The President and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952–1961
by Irwin F. Gellman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015)

Professor Gellman's jumbo tome (791 pages, including notes, bibliography, and index) is intended as the definitive revisionist history of the Eisenhower administration, with special emphasis on the relationship between the president and his vice president, Richard Nixon. Gellman claims that most of the writing about that relationship has been wrong and biased. Liberal historians, political scientists, and journalists could not forgive Eisenhower for twice defeating their idol, Adlai Stevenson, and so have dismissed him as a dull, inarticulate, and ineffectual president. But their real vitriol has been directed against Nixon, who was more aggressively partisan and—worse yet—one of those most responsible for exposing Alger Hiss as a communist spy.

Gellman has worked on this topic for twenty years and has previously published a book on Nixon that was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In his research he consulted the Nixon Presidential Library, the Eisenhower archives, the Truman and Johnson presidential libraries, the National Archives, several college libraries, and the papers of various people involved with Eisenhower and Nixon between 1952 and 1961.

Gellman's main concern is to dispel the common notion that Eisenhower disliked and distrusted Nixon and gave him few responsibilities as vice president. He rejects the claims that Ike wanted someone other than Nixon as his running mate in 1952, and also in 1956. True, the discovery by Democrats of a secret fund set up by wealthy Nixon supporters to defray his campaign expenses did jeopardize his selection in 1952, but his powerful self-defense in a television speech impressed Eisenhower with his courage and secured his place on the ticket.

It is also true that in 1956 Eisenhower urged Nixon to accept a cabinet appointment as secretary of defense, rather than continue as vice president. But, Gellman argues, that was because Ike was grooming him to be his successor and thought that running an executive department would give him more "depth." When Nixon turned down the suggestion because he thought it would look like a demotion, Ike accepted the decision and kept him as his running mate.

The President and the Apprentice is chiefly devoted to showing that Nixon had "more responsibility and more authority than any vice president before him." Eisenhower had been so shocked by how unprepared Harry S. Truman had been to assume the presidency after Franklin D. Roosevelt's death that he was determined to keep Nixon informed of most of the decisions made in the White House. Nixon attended weekly meetings of the cabinet and the National Security Council and chaired them when Eisenhower was absent. He also met with foreign dignitar-

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ies when Ike couldn't attend and went on fact-finding trips to East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. According to Gellman, those trips turned Nixon into a valued consultant on foreign policy for Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, the secretary of state.

Furthermore, because Ike disliked politics and politicians, Nixon was delegated to deal with congressmen and party officials. At campaign time it was Nixon who barnstormed around the country, attacking the Democrats and generating enthusiasm among the GOP base while Ike stayed "above it all." Ike would not trade insults with a demagogic bully like Senator Joseph McCarthy, so it was up to Nixon to work behind the scenes and eventually bring McCarthy down.

Similarly, it was Nixon who did the most to line up Republican support in Congress for the 1957 Civil Rights Act that created the Civil Rights Commission and a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department to enforce African American voting rights. Gellman devotes considerable space to dismissing claims that the Act's passage was due largely to Lyndon Johnson's work as Democrat Majority Leader. Johnson's main contribution, he says, was to get the Southern Democrats to go along by convincing them that *some* bill had to pass and making it palatable for them by watering down the enforcement clauses.

Because he so disdained politics, Ike wanted to run the executive branch as he had run the army. He would make the big policy decisions, which then would be carried out by loyal subordinates in his cabinet. The cabinet was filled with successful corporation executives, however, whose expert opinions he solicited in weekly meetings. In brief, the administration's style was managerial, with emphasis on cooperation and teamwork. Its policy style was "middle of the road" or nonideological. There would be no all-out assault on popular New Deal programs like Social Security, yet there was no desire to expand the welfare state either.

Spending had to be kept under control in order to fight the inflation that Truman left behind. Even defense spending had to be rolled back once the Korean War ended. In the beginning, the administration depended on threats of "massive retaliation" to contain Soviet expansionism and rely less on maintaining expensive ground forces; but as time went on, "coexistence" began to replace "containment" as the watchword. There was more emphasis on giving foreign aid to developing countries, to help stabilize them and to prevent communist infiltration.

Civil rights, which became an important issue in the 1950s, got a big boost with the Warren Court, whose chief justice was an Eisenhower appointee. When Arkansas governor Orval Faubus defied a federal court's order to desegregate Little Rock's schools, Eisenhower sent in troops to enforce the decree. Ike also ordered the desegregation of all the District of Columbia's hotels and restaurants, set up a President's Committee on Government Contracts to encourage minority hiring, and ordered a more rigorous enforcement of Truman's 1948 executive order to desegregate the armed forces. And, as noted above, there was the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which Gellman calls the first law of its kind since 1875. Liberal critics have alleged that Ike did little for civil rights and was, perhaps, secretly racist; but Gellman insists, more than once, that he did more for civil rights than either FDR or Truman.

Being "above politics" meant that Ike's personal popularity failed to rub off on the Republican Party. He came to the presidency in 1952 with a Republican majority in both houses of Congress, but the Democrats regained the House and Senate in 1954 and

kept them thereafter. Even Ike's huge victory over Stevenson in 1956 failed to provide "coattails" for the GOP. Then, in 1958, came what Gellman calls "the implosion": the Republicans' worst defeat—in terms of races for Congress, governorships, and state legislatures—since the Roosevelt landslide of 1936. "Middle of the road" politics failed to attract any southern Democrat defectors while it alienated right-wing Republicans of the Taft and McCarthy factions.

While pocketing their gains under Eisenhower, African Americans were angry at his refusal to use the presidential bully pulpit to demand more. Nixon's mediation of a crippling steel strike in 1959 left neither management nor labor fully satisfied. The administration's insistence on tight money and balanced budgets was ill-received during the recessions of 1954, 1958, and 1960 by a public that included many people with memories of the Great Depression. Finally, the public was panicked when, in October 1957, the Soviet Union sent its Sputnik satellite into space. And when the U.S. failed to launch its own satellite from Cape Canaveral that December, the Democrats accused Eisenhower of letting the Russians achieve military and technological superiority by his penny-pinching on scientific education and research.

Although Nixon performed many important duties for the administration, he and Eisenhower were never on intimate terms. For example, he always addressed Eisenhower as "Mr. President," never as "Ike." After all, Eisenhower was old enough to be his father, and so acted more like a benevolent mentor than as a bosom buddy. Nevertheless, Gellman found abundant evidence for Ike's high regard for his apprentice. He reports that Ike's diary contains many entries that record his view of Nixon as a loyal, bright, and energetic member of the administration.

He especially was appreciative of the competent way that Nixon conducted the government in his place when Ike was hospitalized in 1955 (heart attack), 1956 (intestinal blockage), and 1957 (mild stroke). On recovering from the last of these, he wrote Nixon to express his gratitude "for your understanding and help," and in a letter he wrote to Nixon near the end of 1959 he acknowledged "a debt . . . that I can never repay but which I shall always remember." At a White House press conference on November 5, 1958, he told reporters that Nixon had been "party to every principal governmental committee or organization that we have and, therefore, is not only kept informed of what is going on, but is in a very special position to contribute his thinking. . . . I don't know how his role in the Executive Branch could be greater."

Despite these earlier accolades, Ike did little to help Nixon when the latter ran for the presidency in 1960 against John F. Kennedy. Indeed, he may have been instrumental in his "apprentice's" defeat. One of Nixon's main campaign themes was his supposed superior policy-formulating experience as Eisenhower's vice president. Naturally, the press wanted more details from Ike on that claim; but when asked at an August 24 press conference whether Nixon had ever influenced a decision of his, Eisenhower at first refused to answer and finally snapped back: "If you give me a week, I might think of one. I don't remember." It was a fatal remark and, although Ike later apologized to Nixon for it, the Democrats used it as a club.

Gellman claims that authors have distorted that incident by leaving out the fact that Eisenhower was not feeling well and was preparing to leave the podium. He insists that Ike meant to say that he would answer the question at next week's press conference, although in fact none was held and Ike

never clarified his remarks. We have only Gellman's assertion to go on. More puzzling still is how little space Gellman gives in this extensive tome to Eisenhower's relationship with Nixon during that presidential campaign, even though the book's title would seem to cover that period.

Stephen Ambrose, one of Gellman's alleged falsifiers, provides more context about the 1960 race. Even before the August 24 conference, Eisenhower had refused to give Nixon the strong endorsement he needed. Every time he was asked about Nixon's role in presidential decision-making, Ike would insist that he alone made all the decisions, based on his own judgment. Yes, Nixon voiced his opinion at meetings, but only the president had "the decisive power." Ambrose suggests that Eisenhower may have been miffed by Nixon's refusal to take his advice about avoiding a television debate with Kennedy. In my opinion, though, Ike's thoughtless remarks to the press reflected his top-down managerial style. He was annoyed by the reporters' insinuations that anyone could share decision-making authority with the commander in chief. An apprentice, however apt, was still an apprentice.

THE POST-PROTESTANT MOMENT?

Patrick J. Deneen

An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America
by Joseph Bottum (New York: Image, 2014)

In *An Anxious Age*, Joseph "Jody" Bottum offers a capacious, unfailingly generous, always lively, and often correct if ultimately insufficient account of the course of American Christianity over the past half century. His book joins other important recent works that attempt to account for a perceptible change in our national character, notably *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* by George Marsden (a Protestant version of Jody's study; see Kenneth Grasso's review on page 46) and *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christianity* by Kevin Kruse (a skeptic's account).

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Bottum's book focuses on two related developments: the collapse of Mainline Protestantism as a moral force in American public life that took place roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s, and the rapid rise and equally rapid fall of Catholicism as a potential replacement in that role, which Bottum dates from 1987 to 2002. Ours is an "anxious age," he writes, because any semblance of an American consensus—once formed on a stable tripod consisting of democracy, capitalism, and Protestantism—is now missing one leg, leaving a highly unstable bipod (democracy and capitalism) whose contradictions become increasingly evident.

Arguably, as the legs of the stool have been reduced from three to two legs, our politics have moved from the possibility of