

public utility transformed more gradually in the nineteenth century. It took time for policy makers to accept that individual liberty and the common good could be mutually reinforcing objectives, and that government action could enhance both. Political scientists who see development as the interplay of multiple orders, or as a layering process, will be familiar with this approach.

While the main payoff of the book comes from its synthesis of important trends, plenty of “smaller” moments stand out. The Illinois Railroad and Warehouse Commission Act (1871) was notable for declaring railways to be “public highways,” which enabled the state to set maximum rates for passengers and freight, prohibit unjust rate discrimination, and investigate possible violations. Several states followed Illinois’s lead, and they helped to pave the way for the federal Interstate Commerce Act (1887). On a related note, the book does a very good job of showing how concerns about natural monopolies, like municipal utilities, later informed how reformers dealt with private/artificial monopolies. Novak demonstrates that the famous *Lochner* case (1905), long a symbol of laissez-faire constitutionalism, was actually an exception; courts during this era usually accepted a greater role for government. And scholars who see connections between contemporary social policy and criminal justice policy (e.g., the poverty to prison pipeline) will find the two domains were closely connected in the early twentieth century.

Of course, no book is perfect. In my opinion, the author’s characterization of political science as a discipline where state and society are treated as distinct entities feels a bit dated (pp. 8–11). The chapter on citizenship focuses too much on the antebellum era and says too little about immigration restrictions and the fight for women’s suffrage. Although Novak is very good about conveying the interrelatedness of ideas and events, more clarity about timing and sequence would have helped. At times it appears that theory was trying to catch up with practice—that leading thinkers were working hard to rationalize policy changes that had already been adopted at the state and local levels (e.g., pp. 94–101, 167–79). In other words, I am not sure when these thinkers were truly the architects of the modern American state and when they acted more like building inspectors.

With a book this ambitious and rewarding, it is not difficult to imagine how future research could extend or challenge Novak’s core arguments. One might contend that transformations in governance are defined less by ideas and laws and more by the tangible impact on society. In that case, we would want to know how much companies and individuals were affected by new laws, regulations, and court decisions. Were these innovations largely symbolic gestures, or did they have substantial effects?

Finally, for all the talk of “revolution” (e.g., pp. 2, 69, 148, 186, 235), there was not much resistance from

those who wanted to preserve the status quo. With the notable exception of democratic administration, the wheels of change in this book did not encounter much friction. The chapter on citizenship includes a brief section describing pervasive efforts to constrict the rights of Black Americans after Reconstruction. The analysis of public utility and antimonopoly does not tell us much about how businesses or conservative thinkers tried to push back against the tide of government expansion. In short, politics in *New Democracy* is more about solving problems than struggling for power. This is certainly a valid way to think about politics, but other scholars may want to investigate the battles when studying this crucial period in US history.

**Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States.** By

Gene Zubovich. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022.

408p. \$45.00 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S1537592722003383

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In recent decades, the scholarship on religion and politics in the United States has emphasized the influence of evangelical Protestants (and their tendency toward conservatism and at times Christian nationalism), as well as the increasing percentage of Americans with no religious affiliation. However, scholars have probably underemphasized understanding the views of the roughly one seventh of the population that belongs to mainline Protestant denominations. This is all the more surprising because, as recently as the 1970s, mainline Protestants were the largest religious group in the United States and exerted an outsized influence on American social and political life. Gene Zubovich’s *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (2022) is an exhaustive profile of how mainline Protestant theology influenced views on diverse issues including human rights, segregation, and economic policy in the period from the 1920s through the early 1960s. Although not without shortcomings, the book is a thorough account of how mainline Protestant theology influenced US and world events during the mid-twentieth century.

The book is organized around a narrative of the emergence and decline of a distinctive ecumenical Protestant political theology in the mid-twentieth century. Part I (chaps. 1–5), titled “One World,” describes the evolution in ecumenical Protestant theology and activism from the 1920s through the 1940s. Zubovich writes, “[i]n the 1920s, [ecumenical] Protestants began viewing the world as an interconnected whole, tied ever closer together by the spread of modernity and the Christian gospel” (p. 87). This viewpoint further evolved during the World Order movement of the mid-1940s, in which ecumenical

Protestants took strong stances in favor of human rights in general and the United Nations in particular. In addition, Zubovich asserts that this liberal, global outlook led ecumenical Protestants to examine the implications of their domestic policy views, leading them to take increasingly liberal positions on issues like segregation and economic policy. Part II of the book (chaps. 6–9), titled “Two Worlds,” describes how a series of controversies over the Cold War (including diplomatic recognition of China), efforts to end segregation, and economic policy led to increasingly severe disagreement between ecumenical Protestant clergy, as well as widening differences of opinion between the clergy and the laity. In the epilogue, Zubovich argues that these tensions contributed to the decline of ecumenical Protestant influence starting in the 1960s and helped to pave the way for the growing influence of evangelical Protestants in the second half of the twentieth century.

The book’s greatest strength and most direct contribution to the scholarly literature is its thorough documentation of the theological trends and political activism within ecumenical Protestant churches in the mid-twentieth century. A notable theme is how church-sanctioned commissions and conferences created reports that summarized the group’s theological and political values and, at times, explained how those values would translate to concrete policy commitments. In particular, Zubovich places much emphasis on the Federal Council of Churches’ Commission on a Just and Durable Peace (also known as “the Dulles Commission”), which met in Delaware, Ohio, in 1942 and endorsed proposals supporting world government, liberal ideas on economic policy, and opposing racism. Zubovich makes a compelling case that the Dulles Commission and the many similar conferences and committees demonstrate the liberal turn among ecumenical Protestant intellectuals and clergy during the World War II era.

The book also contributes to our understanding of why the religious left in the United States has been weaker than the New Christian Right movement that began in the late 1960s and 1970s, by documenting the conflict between the political preferences of ecumenical Protestant clergy and laity. Zubovich devotes substantial space in the latter half of the book to the divide between the relatively more liberal ecumenical Protestant clergy and the more conservative, disproportionately wealthy laity on issues including racism and segregation (chaps. 7 and 8) and economic policy (chap. 9). In particular, in chapter 9 Zubovich shows how Sun Oil president J. Howard Pew tried to use his fortune to push the National Council of Churches in a more conservative direction, before eventually using his financial resources to bankroll key New Christian Right institutions. This discussion highlights an important difference between the ecumenical Protestant movement described in the book and the New Christian Right: while

the political influence of ecumenical Protestants in the mid-twentieth century was constrained by the divide between liberal-leaning clergy and a more conservative laity, the New Christian Right was advantaged by conservative activists like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Ralph Reed mobilizing conservative voters on divisive, highly emotional cultural issues (see, for example, William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, 1996).

Despite the reference to polarization in the title, the book is less convincing in its efforts to document the relationship between this liberal ecumenical Protestant movement and political polarization, in part because the selected timeline excludes important changes in American religious politics during the late twentieth century. To the author’s credit, a recurrent subplot throughout the book is the conflict between ecumenical Protestants and their evangelical Protestant counterparts over understandings of human rights (p. 116), communism and China policy (p. 209), economic policy and labor unions (p. 297), and other issues. However, Zubovich’s choice to cut off the analysis in the early 1960s misses an important opportunity to extend the analysis into the “culture wars” over issues like abortion, church and state, and LGBTQA+ rights that began in the 1960s and 1970s. Zubovich only references issues like abortion and the appointment of LGBT clergy in broad strokes during the 10-page epilogue, but as James Davison Hunter documents in *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991), these and similar controversies have been a major source of division in American religion for decades. Expanding the coverage to encompass the 1970s and including more discussion of the early “culture wars” might have yielded additional insights regarding the durability of the liberal ecumenical Protestant approach to politics that the author describes, and might have provided further opportunity to explore divides between ecumenical Protestant intellectuals, clergy, and laity, as well as the patterns of conflict between mainline and evangelical Protestants.

In sum, then, *Before the Religious Right* is best thought of as an exhaustive history of the political and social activism of ecumenical Protestant elites in the period from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Zubovich is largely successful in his aim of showing that “[a] generation of ecumenical Protestant leaders came of age and traveled abroad in the 1920s, rose to power in the 1930s, mobilized during World War II, came under attack during the early Cold War, and shaped the movements of the 1960s” (p. 302). As such, the book provides important background for understanding the political and social activism of the mainline Protestant establishment during the mid-twentieth century, as well as the factors that contributed to mainline Protestantism’s decline in the latter half of the twentieth century.