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Ira Katznelson. Reviewed by Marguerite Rosenthal.**

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Book Reviews

Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*. Liveright Pub. Co. (W. W. Norton) (2013). \$29.95 (hardcover).

Fear Itself, an exhaustive political history of the New Deal [hereafter, ND] era has been much praised and deservedly so. Katznelson's purpose is, among many related subtopics, to examine the meaning of the term "fear," famously used in FDR's phrase, "Nothing to fear but fear itself," and the ways in which fear—from economic collapse domestically to threats from totalitarian governments abroad—influenced American political culture and political institutions in the 1930s and subsequently. And, while the term "New Deal" generally refers to domestic policy, Katznelson's focus extends to foreign and "defense" policies. The book, organized in 4 parts of 3 chapters each plus an Epilogue, is far-ranging, insightful and provocative. It draws from extensive research with a Notes section of 172 pages.

Katznelson dates the ND era as extending from FDR's inauguration to Eisenhower's, and he describes the period as one that reflected "an unrelenting sense of fragility" (p. 38), contrasting his interpretation to the common one that portrays it as triumphal. High unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation that threatened to destroy agriculture, labor unrest, and the rise of Fascist and Communist governments in Europe and Japan, followed at the end of WWII by the cold war and arms race with the USSR, all contributed to a continuing sense of dread.

Two major themes of the book are: (1) the nature of democracy in a time of fear associated with tension between the desire for a strong executive and the commitment to democratic principles that require an active legislature; and (2) the singular importance of Southern Democratic Congressmen to the ND project, Congressmen who were racists and whose

power rested on the continued exclusion and exploitation of Blacks. Thus, in the second chapter of Part I, *Fight Against Fear*, Katznelson details the surprising degree to which Italian fascism and to a lesser degree, Soviet communism—each based on dictatorial powers and seen as efficient ways to deal with economic crisis—had popular appeal in the U.S. Italo Balbo, an Italian Fascist aviator who made a 1933 whirlwind tour of several U.S. cities and was greeted by thousands, is paired with Theodore Bilbo, a U.S. Senator from Mississippi who is described as a populist champion of liberal New Deal programs and “the Senate’s most furious racist, a proud member of the Ku Klux Klan” (p. 83).

Part II, *Southern Cage*, examines in often gruesome detail the exclusion of and extensive, brutal attacks on African Americans in the South of the 1930s. While the Democrats held sway in Congress in a sometimes uneasy marriage between southerners who represented a region that was still predominantly agricultural and northerners who represented the industrial, urbanized part of the country, it was the southern faction, who held most of the important committee chairs, upon whom FDR relied. Thus, Katznelson challenges the generally held view that it was Northern progressives, responding to the growing labor movement and the mobilizing of the unemployed, who were the leaders in developing the alphabet programs that characterized ND domestic policy-making. Roosevelt was apparently quite comfortable with many southern Democratic leaders, and he remained aloof from supporting civil rights legislation, such as an anti-lynching bill introduced in 1934 (there were 28 lynchings in 1933, and 1,886 between 1900 and 1930, p. 141), because he needed southern Congressmen’s support for his legislative proposals and could not afford to alienate them. Since African Americans were universally excluded from voting, FDR had nothing to lose politically by ignoring their plight—and he did.

The South, still under-developed when the Depression hit, was a big beneficiary of ND programs, including among others the Tennessee Valley Authority, (segregated) CCC programs, and price supports under the Agricultural Adjustment Act that primarily benefited farmers with large holdings. And, while the administration and Congress responded to the demands of the increasingly powerful labor movement in the mid-1930s,

key statutes, including the Fair Labor Standards Act that established the minimum wage, the National Recovery Act, and the Social Security Act, were written so as to exclude from protection farm laborers and domestic workers, both composed primarily of Black workers. Thus, exploitation of African Americans upon whom the South's economy and Southern elites' profits and comforts depended would continue.

An important exploration in *Fear Itself* is the changing nature and balance of power between the nation's executive and legislative branches of government, especially focused on in Parts III, "Emergency," and IV, "Democracy's Price." Katznelson concludes that, as concerns the responses to the economic crisis of the Depression and in contrast to Europe's dictatorships, democracy was maintained, and capitalism was "recast" through "a surge of statutes, not executive command" (p. 251).

The looming world war, its prosecution, and its aftermath were another matter. Katznelson analyzes in extensive detail Roosevelt's accretion of power as he sought to gain support for engaging the country in war and in its prosecution. Again, it was southern Democrats, desirous of selling cotton to England and, concomitantly, lowering tariffs, who were FDR's initial allies, while northern Republicans, preferring to protect their industrial base with tariffs, remained isolationist until Germany began its assault on England. The U.S. war effort was fought on a segregated basis, and southerners saw little contradiction in their continued racism and the Germans' treatment of the Jews. Japanese-Americans were interned, and the FBI, whose power and influence expanded greatly during this period, continuously scrutinized African Americans—particularly journalists—for disloyalty. Censorship was widely practiced.

Katznelson documents that Roosevelt made more extensive use of executive war powers than had any previous president. He devotes considerable attention to the development of atomic, later nuclear, weaponry, the secrecy that accompanied it, and the overwhelming tensions of the Cold War and its related Red Scare (this after FDR's having made pacts with the USSR to fight Nazi Germany). The result was more generalized fear and the advent of the surveillance state that presaged what the U.S. has become today.

Returning to an examination of domestic policy in the post-War period, Katznelson details the Congressional attack on organized labor that was fashioned to, among other things, deter labor organizing by African Americans as industry moved South. Ultimately, the Democratic Party's uneasy North-South marriage ended with the Civil Rights movement and the realignment of the political parties.

Concluding with a discussion of the nature of contemporary American democracy, a democracy that was born in the ND and the post-War period that gave rise to an expansionist foreign policy that has too often supported harsh dictatorial governments, Katznelson employs the image of Janus to describe a two-faced arrangement whereby a procedural democracy exists in the domestic sphere while a covert undemocratic foreign policy goes unchallenged. This two-sided state, a state characterized by democratic advantages yet marked by antidemocratic pathologies, continues to constitute the world Americans inhabit. This, ultimately, is the legacy of the New Deal's southern cage (p. 485).

Fear Itself examines an enormity of important topics that have only been suggested in this review. It uncovers important cultural and historical bases of the American polity that deserve the attention of any academic who is interested in understanding aspects of recent U.S. history that have previously remained unexplored.

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Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*. Temple University Press (2013). \$34.95 (paperback).

The intense stresses on Americans as a result of long hours of labor have been a prominent theme in recent sociological work, such as Juliet Schor's *Overworked American*, Arlie Hochschild's *The Time Bind*, and *The Time Divide* by Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson. Rather than a future of leisure and widespread prosperity, "time famine" exists amid inequitably distributed material excess. Long hours of work in the pursuit of endless GDP growth are widely seen to be the only realistic economic option. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt's *Free Time: The*