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In 1980 Church was swept aside in the upheaval that sent Ronald Reagan to the White House and gave the Republicans control of the Senate. In 1984, at age 59, he died from pancreatic cancer. Thanks to this fine biography, Church's story has been well told, thereby ensuring him a respected place in the history of American liberalism.

WILLIAM C. BERMAN
University of Toronto

CURTIS PEEBLES. *Watch the Skies! A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution. 1994. Pp. x, 342. \$24.95.

Curtis Peebles has written a devastating and at times hilarious account of the human penchant for stubbornly embracing lies and enriching those who peddle them, a study that may suggest to readers important parallels between the relatively harmless flying saucer myth and far more mischievous fantasies involving political and racial conspiracies.

Peebles traces the history of the UFO myth from a March 1945 story in the science fiction pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* through the Air Force investigations of the "classic" sightings and on to the development of a UFO industry that has persisted—even thrived—to the present. The reader comes to understand how the universal human craving for meaning and wonder can be perverted into error and nonsense when it is exploited by entrepreneurs adept at extracting profit from ignorance and credulity.

Peebles also shows the quandary of official government agencies when they investigated rumors of UFO sightings (reported by, among others, Jimmy Carter and Louis Farrakhan). If they released their studies, the mere fact that official attention was paid to the sightings would be taken as proof that these baseless rumors were worthy of having attention paid, lending the bizarre enterprise a stamp of legitimacy. Yet if the authorities withheld their reports so as not to contribute to the delusion, they were accused of a "cover-up," tantamount to an admission that the sightings were real and that the government, perhaps acting in concert with the aliens, had malign motives for keeping the public in the dark.

Peebles's efforts to discover parallels between national and world events and the waxing and waning fortunes of the UFO myth are, for me, less successful. Instead, his analysis seems to reveal how misinformation can be elaborated into a complex meaning system until it attains a fascinating and self-sustaining critical mass as the initiated iron out inconsistencies and promiscuously absorb all manner of nonsense into an exciting and soul-satisfying tissue of lies. Peebles has exhaustively read the official, unofficial, and "anti-official" sources, and has provided a marvelous case study—because it is of a phenomenon that has little moral or emotional resonance for most non-devotees—helping to explain how more noxious historical and racial conspiracy theories take on lives

of their own. I left the book unconvinced that either historical events or the psychological make-up of the converts explain the growth of these delusions. Rather, conspiracy theories are so intrinsically interesting—they are soul-snarers *par excellence*—that out of a multitude who gaze at them out of idle curiosity, a small percentage will become addicted. If only all of these lunacies were as harmless as UFO spotting.

This is the definitive book on a delusion that is paradigmatic of organized ignorance in modern times. If the Smithsonian Institution Press puts this insightful book out in paperback, it will be an ideal reading for courses on twentieth-century American history, communications, popular culture, and political theory.

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WILLIAM C. BERMAN. *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Bush*. (The American Moment.) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1994. Pp. x, 192. Cloth \$38.95, paper \$12.95.

Anyone who teaches American history will find William C. Berman's book a useful source in preparing lectures on the politics of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Few people will feel moved to read it from cover to cover, however, since it is mainly a summary of political events, electoral trends, and voter alignments. It reads in places like a vast compilation of *Washington Post* headlines from the last three decades, spiced up only by the apothegms of political scientists.

Berman's central theme is that the Democratic electoral coalition, dominant from the 1930s into the 1960s, broke up because liberals such as George McGovern and Jesse Jackson associated it too closely with unpopular reforms. As a result the Democrats lost vital voter groups that had assured their political supremacy since Franklin D. Roosevelt: blue-collar workers, urban Catholics, and white southerners. Berman demonstrates that supporting busing, affirmative action, feminism, abortion rights, and gay rights were all costly errors for the Democrats. In purely electoral terms they would have done better to stay away from these symbolically loaded issues, of which the Republicans took advantage in becoming the majority party.

Berman's evidence demonstrates, I think, a marked level of consistency in voters' behavior from the 1950s through the 1980s. America has not really "turned right" but has rather remained true to a few core principles, and voted for whichever party seemed best to represent them. In the 1950s and early 1960s the Democrats championed a fierce anticommunist foreign policy and soft-pedaled the "rights" issue so as to preserve their diverse electoral base. They opposed high taxes, intrusive big government, and any hint that their leaders connived at immorality or sloth. From the voters' point of view, Kennedy Democrats