Review

Reviewed Work(s): God, Country and Self-Interest: A Social History of the World War II Rank and File by Toby Terrar

Review by: Dean Bailey


Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790522

Accessed: 17-03-2018 16:37 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://about.jstor.org/terms
liberal and permissive clergy and culture did to the laity in the 1960s and 1970s can be undone by a more authoritarian clergy in the new millennium. But not if the laity effected this revolution themselves.

Because Greeley relies on social surveys to mark these changes, he cannot provide a full narrative that tracks and fully explains the transformation in lay attitudes and behavior. He uses a 1963 survey of Catholic college graduates that he conducted for a study of Catholics and education as a baseline against which to compare Catholic attitudes in later surveys. He finds lay Catholics in 1963 to be little changed in their religious behaviors and attitudes from those of a decade earlier, despite their dramatically increased education levels. By the time of the next survey, 1974, sharp changes in religious attitudes and behavior were evident. Catholics attended mass less frequently, changed their attitudes toward sex (and their attitudes toward the church's role in shaping their opinions toward sex) dramatically, altered their attitude toward church authority significantly, and donated far less of their incomes to the church. Greeley concludes that a revolution took place in that decade, and later pinpoints the change even further to the years immediately following the Council's conclusion (1966–1972). All subsequent surveys confirm that the laity have not reversed their course, despite hierarchical efforts to roll back the revolution.

That American Catholics underwent dramatic changes from 1963 to 1974 is clear. What is less clear is whether that change began before 1963. (The Catholic Digest conducted a survey of American Catholics in 1952, but the data cards cannot be found.) If the changes began before the Second Vatican Council, the revolution would be better understood as beginning from below—a revolution more in keeping with our notions of political transformations and one highlighting lay agency even further. But if it truly began in 1966, then the Council would justly be identified as its source. This issue cannot be resolved with the existing social surveys, and must be approached in other ways.

Andrew Greeley's sociological history of Catholics in the twentieth century's second half establishes clearly that lay Catholics revolutionized their religious beliefs and behaviors since World War II. He notes some of those significant changes well, documents their lasting impact persuasively, and identifies the Second Vatican Council as the revolution's source. Whether the Council began the revolution or joined one already underway remains unsettled, however. For this, we await a study of 1950s Catholics that relies on other sources.

Saint Vincent College

Timothy Kelly


Ed and Hazel Terrar live a few miles from the National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., which was dedicated on May 29, 2004. They did not attend the dedication. Despite both being veterans of World War II, they do not view
it as “their” war. This is the substance of their just-published biography God, Country and Self-Interest: A Social History of the World War II Rank and File. It studies the beliefs of those in the ranks by looking in depth at two who were there.

God, Country and Self-Interest was written by Toby Terrar, one of the Terrar’s sons, who teaches in the Department of History, City University of Los Angeles. His scholarly interest in their history grew out of his own generation’s conflict in Vietnam. The work incorporates 350 letters written between the Terrars during the war, official military records, interviews, diaries of squadron and unit members, and 100 photos, maps, and illustrations.

The book might better be titled God, Country and Imperialism. Historian Daniel Hallin found in his study of the media coverage of the Vietnam War that the word “imperialism” was forbidden. Dissatisfaction with certain policies or incumbent politicians was allowed but no questioning of basic assumptions about the character of the American political system and the American role in world politics. As Hallin put it, the media, like the clergy, the educators and the politicians were part of the “system” and had no interest in questioning its core beliefs. They defended the war in Vietnam as a replay of World War II: a struggle to defend democracy against aggression. The rank and file in Vietnam that did the fighting knew different. What God, Country and Self-Interest reminds us is that the World War II rank and file also knew different.

Various government studies done during World War II concluded that those in the ranks viewed the war as a bad but unavoidable thing, brought on by their country’s imperialism. The closer to the “real business of war,” the more worthless it was felt. Those with wives and children had a particular hatred. Political attempts at making them internalize the war as their own responsibility or adopt imperialist beliefs were not successful. Typical was the comment that the anti-labor war correspondent Robert Sherrod voiced in 1944:

My third trip back to the United States since the war began was a letdown. I had imagined that everybody, after two years, would realize the seriousness of the war and the necessity of working as hard as possible toward ending it. But I found a nation wallowing in unprecedented prosperity. There was a steel strike going on, and a railroad strike was threatened. Men lobbying for special privilege swarmed around a Congress which appeared afraid to tax the people’s newfound, inflationary wealth. Justice Byrnes cautioned a group of news people that we might expect a half million casualties within a few months—and got an editorial spanking for it. A “high military spokesperson,” generally identified as General Marshall said bitterly that labor strikes played into the hands of enemy propagandists. Labor leaders got furious at that.

For Ed and Hazel, the positive side of the war included a doubling and tripling of their pre-war income. It meant travel, new, life-long friends, marriage, parenthood, settling in California and a G.I. Bill that helped them buy a house and obtain higher education.

God, Country and Self-Interest gives a human face to the agrarian and industrial working class origins of America’s anti-imperialism. Ed was from Coffeyville, Kansas. Hazel was from Dalzell, South Carolina. Ed’s father was a coal
miner and Welsh immigrant. Reflecting his politics was John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers. Mineworkers had little respect for FDR’s imperialism, which as the Roosevelt’s administration’s own Harry Dexter White put it in June 1941, in discussing Asia, aimed at “minor trade objectives and small national advantages.” There was nothing in it for America’s working people. Miners held to the trickle-up theory of value. They produced value by their labor deep underground. They had to fight against the corporate parasites up top and imperialism abroad to retain the value they produced.

Rank-and-file families had direct experience with imperialism in World War I. Ed’s father returned from that war bitter and determined not to let the same happen to his own children. By the 1930s Ed’s father was a commander of Coffeyville’s American Legion post. The Legion repeatedly condemned American imperialism, as at their 1935, 1937 and 1939 conventions where they endorsed the removal of profit making from war and sought to embargo American trade in belligerent parts of the world. Labeled as isolationists by the imperialists, they wanted to follow Thomas Jefferson’s example in stopping trade in order to deflake the “rendezvous with destiny” that FDR had in mind for America’s youth. Their presidential candidate in 1940 was the anti-war Wendell Willkie, who had lived in Coffeyville early in his career. He obtained 24 million votes against FDR’s 27 million.

After their efforts to prevent it failed, working people in uniform and out of uniform turned the war into a tool which they used against the corporate imperialists. As John L. Lewis summarized in 1943, “Congress can’t condone a policy in this country that fattens industry and starves labor, and then call upon labor patriotically to starve.” That Ed, Hazel and the rest of America’s working people succeeded in promoting their own interests can be gauged by the unending complaints voiced by the imperialists.

Just as the defeat of imperialism in Vietnam was no defeat for the American working people who fought there, so what in fact was a defeat for American imperialism in World War II (they lost China) was no loss to those who fought there. As an aviator, Ed saw first hand that air power, including the nuclear bombs, mattered little. The Japanese imperialists, like their America counterparts, were willing to fight to the last worker’s life. What ended the war, as both the Japanese leadership and Harry Truman stated at the time, was the entry into the war of the Soviets against the Japanese. By August 13, 1945 the Red Army after only a week of fighting had overrun Japan’s crack Kwangtung Army in Manchukuo and were set for an August 25 invasion of the homeland. What the imperialists feared far more than defeat was a communist revolution. In surrendering to their American counterparts, they lost nothing. By 1947 America was even working to have Japan recreate its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere to thwart communism’s advance.

To my way of thinking, the memorial to those studied in God, Country and Self-Interest is not on the Mall in Washington, D.C., but in the spirit of their descendants who are fighting against imperialism’s perpetual war to extend home industry—the fight against the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the WTO, the 500 big transnational companies that control 80 percent of world production and trade, the stock markets that speculate in the commodities that working people depend upon, and the terrible material, spiritual and social con-
sequences of this for tens of millions of working people in the United States and throughout the world.

Silver Spring, Maryland

Dean Bailey

ENDNOTES

1. Toby Terrar’s God, Country and Self-Interest: A Social History of the World War II Rank and File (Silver Spring, Maryland 2004) (420 pages, 120 illustrations, index, bibliography, maps) is available (cloth: $16.95, paper $9.95) from CWP at 15405 Short Ridge Court, Silver Spring, Maryland 20906 [telephone (301) 598-5427] or on line at Cath-Wkr@aol.com.


This is a blockbuster of a book. To a topic—Brazilian race relations—historically fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and disagreement, it brings clarity, logic, and lucidity, not to mention several truckloads of data. The result is the most important work on race in Brazil since Gilberto Freyre’s seminal The Masters and the Slaves (1933).

Telles begins by confronting the core contradiction in Brazil’s racial order: high (by US standards) levels of interracial sociability (expressed in cross-racial social contact, friendships, and even marriage) co-existing with equally high (by any standard) levels of racial inequality in education, earnings, vocational achievement, life expectancy, and other areas. Telles labels these the horizontal (sociability) and vertical (material achievement) dimensions of Brazilian race relations. Previous authors, he argues, have tended to focus on one dimension to the exclusion of the other, and have thus lined up in two opposing camps, one seeing Brazil as a hopeful instance of racial harmony and egalitarianism, the other as a case of extreme inequality and exclusion.

The achievement of this book is to acknowledge both dimensions, fully document them, and then ask how they are related to each other. In answering that question, Telles does not shrink from the multiple complexities he finds along the way, beginning with the vexing question of racial classification: how do Brazilians define who and what they are, racially? He finds that Brazilians do not identify themselves “racially,” in the sense of belonging to a collective racial