

sevelt and helped lay the groundwork for the postwar liberal order—are particularly interesting, as is his treatment of the science administrator Vannevar Bush, whose work under Roosevelt during World War II laid the foundation for later U.S. preeminence in science and technology. But in most cases, the important subject areas these discussions open up do not reappear. Dismissive of doctrines, Zoellick points instead to five enduring “traditions” that should guide U.S. policymakers: the need for U.S. dominance in North America, the importance of trade and technology to national security and the economy, the value of alliances, the influence of public opinion and Congress on policymaking, and Washington’s special leadership role in the world.

Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present

BY RUTH BEN-GHIAT. Norton, 2020, 384 pp.

The protagonists of this illuminating study of authoritarian rulers range from early-twentieth-century fascists such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, to postcolonial strongmen in Iraq, Libya, and Uganda, to modern autocrats who rode elections into office in Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines, Russia, Turkey, and, yes, the United States. It is disturbing how comfortably U.S. President Donald Trump fits into this lineup. From his dark inauguration speech to his wild attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, much of Trump’s behavior—including his inability to conceive of his own failure—makes perfect sense according to Ben-Ghiat’s authoritarian playbook. Her closing warning that “strongmen do not vanish with their

exits from power, but . . . remain as traces within the body of their people” could not be more timely.

Western Europe

Andrew Moravcsik

Quo vadis Hungaria? (Where Is Hungary Heading?): Foreign Policy Dilemmas and Strategic Vision

BY ISTVAN SZENT-IVANYI.

TRANSLATED BY ANDY CLARK.

Republikon Intezet, 2020, 180 pp.

Szent-Ivanyi, a Hungarian opposition politician and top diplomat, delivers a devastating critique of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s approach to foreign policy. He claims that Orban has sold Hungary out to authoritarians such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The author blasts this turn as “a completely wrong direction,” inconsistent with Hungarian identity and long-term interests, and advocates a restoration of “the unequivocal western orientation of our homeland.” He clearly demonstrates how Orban and his allies cynically use nationalist ideology to promote one-off economic and political deals that provide some short-term benefit to Hungary but will harm it in the long run. He hints that such deals also aid Orban’s personal electoral fortunes and line the pockets of his corrupt associates. A transactional foreign policy of this kind, the book contends, is condemned to be “incoherent,

confusing, and unsuccessful”—as some might see Orban’s recent surrender to the Council of the EU on legal disputes. Although such insider critiques of one’s country’s foreign policy are commonplace in the United Kingdom and the United States, this sophisticated account is a pathbreaking exception in central Europe and worthy of a wide readership.

Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism

BY NICK TIMOTHY. Polity Press, 2020, 224 pp.

Timothy, the top political adviser to former British Prime Minister Theresa May, pleads for a reorientation of the British Conservative Party toward a new centrist ideology. The fundamental problem facing the Tories—much like what their Republican cousins across the pond are facing—is the unpopularity of the neoliberal agenda of lower taxes and economic deregulation that the party has espoused since the election of Margaret Thatcher 40 years ago. The consequent rise in inequality, social exclusion, regional blight, environmental degradation, substandard schooling, and rocky race relations has bred cynicism about government. Tory evangelizing about Brexit and nationalist identity politics generated some blue-collar support in national elections in 2019, but what now? Timothy seems sure about what the Tories should oppose: he lambasts stereotypical liberal “elites” who combine free-market economics with pro-immigrant identity politics. Yet he struggles to find an alternative. He proposes a new “communitarian” capitalism, combining a traditionally left-wing agenda of higher taxes, stricter regulation, and worker co-management

of firms with stricter controls on immigration and a general (if vague) respect for “the ethnic and cultural identities of white Britons.” How current Conservatives would accept and enact this odd mix remains a mystery.

A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century

BY DAVID TODD. Princeton University Press, 2021, 368 pp.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, European imperial powers preferred to control certain colonial territories by indirect means: they sought to co-opt local economic and cultural elites rather than establish full territorial control. This strategy of “informal imperialism” required far fewer resources than direct rule and allowed the imperialists to focus on economic exploitation rather than governance. The more formal “scramble for Africa” in the 1880s only intensified when imperial powers began bumping up against one another. British informal imperialism is well studied, but Todd examines its less well-known French counterpart, which took shape especially in North Africa. Whereas London enjoyed unmatched competitiveness in cotton textiles, ironwork, transport, and financial services, Paris dominated in luxury goods such as silk and velvet, women’s couture and cosmetics, home furnishings, and fine food and drink. The French also took advantage of their strong legal services sector and state-supported banks. The luxury trade was profitable enough that, contrary to what one often reads, neither France nor the United Kingdom was willing to risk war with the other late in the nineteenth century in an attempt to

extend its possessions—leaving open the question of why governments established formal colonies at all.

Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music

BY ALEX ROSS. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020, 784 pp.

Richard Wagner was Europe's most influential artist of the nineteenth century. His virulent anti-Semitism and Adolf Hitler's obsessive love for his operas have led many to treat him simply as a bombastic proto-Nazi—a view that Ross, a music critic at *The New Yorker*, challenges. Wagner, he observes, was in fact the most left-wing and antimilitaristic of the great composers. Exiled from Germany for nearly two decades after he manned the revolutionary barricades of 1848 as an anarchist, he produced a string of operas that belie his typical association with right-wing politics, including his four-opera *Ring* cycle, a socialist morality play about the triumph of love over power, and his final work, *Parsifal*, a thinly disguised meditation on Buddhism. Ross focuses especially on the transformative impact that Wagnerian opera had not just on musicians but also on generations of leading painters, poets, theater directors, choreographers, philosophers, classicists, psychologists, and filmmakers—not to mention feminists, environmentalists, gay rights activists, Zionists, African American intellectuals, and elected politicians—most of whom were on the left. Wagner's art allowed them all to unlock their own creativity because his operas let each listener take away something different and profound.

Scandinavian Noir: In Pursuit of a Mystery

BY WENDY LESSER. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020, 288 pp.

One of Europe's oddest cultural exports in recent decades has been "Scandinavian noir" crime fiction. Lesser, a bicoastal American writer and critic who has followed these novels, TV shows, and movies since the 1980s, uses them (and a trip to Scandinavia) as a bridge to understanding contemporary Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Readers undeterred by self-consciously ironic narrators who describe themselves in the third person may find this frothy mix of travelogue, literary criticism, and autobiography engaging. Spoiler alert: in the end, the book's premise explodes. Fictional Scandinavian detectives closely resemble their counterparts anywhere else. Overwhelmingly male, they resist dull middle-class lives, chafe under stifling bureaucracies, feel alienated in cities full of strangers, express ambivalence about strong women, drink too much, and fail to vanquish the evil rot at the core of society. Their real-world counterparts are nothing like this. Instead, the author encounters enlightened and fair-minded professionals—many of them women—working closely with social workers to employ international best practices in societies where the rate of violent crime is a fraction of that in an average American city.

Hitler: Downfall, 1939–1945

BY VOLKER ULLRICH.

TRANSLATED BY JEFFERSON
CHASE. Knopf, 2020, 848 pp.

Few figures have been more thoroughly debated and dissected than Adolf Hitler. Today, one can only hope to retell his tale in clear prose, striking a proper balance between argument and narrative while citing the most vivid evidence. Ullrich, a German journalist, does this as well as any. In his account, Hitler was above all a high-stakes gambler convinced that those with the strongest political will were destined to prevail—or to die trying. This conviction was at once a strength and an inherent flaw. No matter how much Hitler won, he continued to take greater risks in a quest for world domination. It is easy to mistake such obsessive evil for insanity. And it is true that Hitler, like many politicians, was at times overconfident, holding dubious views about the world around him and firing those who told him differently. But he was also a tactical genius who trusted his own gut instincts. He knew exactly what he was risking and why—and came dangerously close to succeeding. In the end, he was willing to die for his beliefs—staging his own demise in the manner he thought most likely to serve as a heroic inspiration to future generations. Fortunately, that final effort failed utterly.

Western Hemisphere

Richard Feinberg

*Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants
Saved the American City*

BY A. K. SANDOVAL-STRAUSZ. Basic
Books, 2019, 416 pp.

Sandoval-Strausz, a historian, offers a timely antidote to the toxic rhetoric in the United States that characterizes Latino immigrants as criminals and welfare scroungers. He frames Latino history in the country as a narrative of renewal and striving. As white Americans began to flee U.S. cities in the 1960s, purposeful Mexican immigrants moved into vacant houses and opened small businesses in abandoned storefronts. New community organizations rose up that enriched American civic life. Latino urban culture transformed cityscapes with populous plazas and dynamic street life. Contrary to stereotypes prevalent in the media and political discourse, crime rates in immigrant neighborhoods have been lower than in comparable white neighborhoods. Sandoval-Strausz shows how immigrants repeatedly encountered virulent nativism; nevertheless, Latinos did not suffer the degree of discrimination that Black Americans had to face, most notably in access to home mortgages. The author laments that second-generation Latinos often abandon their distinct cultures, choosing, for example, to live a suburban lifestyle dependent on cars rather than staying in more walkable—and sociable—urban neigh-