

the United States was open to immigration and sought to promote social and economic liberalization around the world. Hahn looks through a different lens at a parallel illiberal tradition that runs through this same history. Whether espoused by the left or the right, this tradition is usually marked by a belief in fixed hierarchies defined by race, ethnicity, religion, or gender. Its proponents have recognized violence as a legitimate means for acquiring and exercising power. These illiberal values do not merely erupt periodically at the margins of American society but have been “central fields of political and cultural force” since the very beginning of the country. Appreciating this history puts recent divisiveness and the upending of long-standing norms since the political rise of Donald Trump in valuable perspective; the current upheaval has deep and broad roots.

Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

Keir Starmer: The Biography

BY TOM BALDWIN. William Collins, 2024, 448 pp.

With a general election looming in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party enjoys a steady 20-point lead in polls. Yet the presumptive prime minister, Keir Starmer, has impressed few people, coming off instead as awkward and rather dull. This engaging biography, written with Starmer's cooperation, adds some personal details to a mostly

familiar story. Born into a small-town working-class family, he studied at Oxford and became a human rights lawyer, eventually serving as the United Kingdom's top criminal prosecutor. After entering Parliament in 2015, he climbed swiftly, rising to the shadow cabinet within a year and becoming party leader just four years later. Since then, he has taken ruthless and controversial steps to push the party to the center, including purging far-left candidates and adopting many fiscally conservative positions. Like many modern politicians, he is sports-obsessed and “hates losing,” yet he dismisses the performative side of politics, such as the antics of the prime minister's question time in Parliament, as “shallow” tribalism. The next British government is likely to test whether an intelligent and committed but uncharismatic politician who just wants to get on with practical problem-solving can succeed in the modern world.

Centrist Antiestablishment Parties and Their Struggle for Survival

BY SARAH ENGLER. Oxford University Press, 2024, 224 pp.

In Europe today, new political parties rise to prominence by portraying themselves as outsiders and mobilizing citizens to cast protest votes against corrupt political elites. Many of these parties, such as Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia in Italy and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National in France, can be found on the populist fringes of the extreme right and left. Yet some of these upstart parties initially emerge from the political center. This study argues that when such centrist antiestablishment parties

emerge, they confront a dilemma: How can they maintain their antiestablishment credentials from the middle of the political spectrum? Most fail the test and collapse, as did the Free Party in Estonia, while the few that survive do so by moving to the extremes and, ironically, by adopting the corrupt clientelism of the predecessors they once criticized, as the Law and Justice Party did in Poland a decade ago. Europe's traditional Christian democratic, liberal, and social democratic parties may thus face less centrist competition than they have in recent years. At the same time, the conditions that enabled innovative new parties that bolstered centrist politics, such as Renaissance in France and ANO in the Czech Republic, may no longer obtain.

Remembering Peasants: A Personal History of a Vanished World

BY PATRICK JOYCE. Scribner, 2024, 400 pp.

For 8,000 years, the great majority of Europeans were peasants. Yet over the past two centuries, these people have either moved away or died out, leaving the countryside increasingly depopulated and silent. The social historian Patrick Joyce describes this vanished world and the worldview, lifestyle, and rites of its inhabitants. He focuses on Poland, Italy, and the country where his father was born a peasant, Ireland. Since peasants produced few written records, the book describes their world using eyewitness accounts, legal records, and the peasants' unremittingly bitter and melancholy songs. The author treats his subjects with respect and affection,

but he does not romanticize their lot. Most peasants worked, it was often said, "like beasts," going out before dawn and returning after dark, doing repetitive hard labor without mechanical assistance. Life was a precarious struggle to produce above bare subsistence levels and to avoid taxes, conscription, epidemics, famine, and oppressive landlords. Peasants were keen judges of weather, farming, and markets, but they nonetheless approached life with a dogged and stoic attitude bordering on fatalism.

Big Caesars and Little Caesars: How They Rise and Fall—From Julius Caesar to Boris Johnson

BY FERDINAND MOUNT.
Bloomsbury, 2023, 304 pp.

Mount insists that this is an era of charismatic "little" Caesars, such as former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and former U.S. President Donald Trump. In some ways, these figures resemble historical "big" Caesars, such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, and Julius himself. All abuse power—telling propagandistic lies, breaking the law, rigging political institutions, empowering cronies, and unleashing violence—to achieve political dominance. The difference is a matter of degree: historical figures sought power on "a limitless scale," while their diminutive modern-day imitators simply do what is needed to prevail in the next election. No matter how spicy the writing, such sweeping comparisons between modern demagogues and world-historical figures can come across as clever rather than deep. Mount's faith that courts, constitutions,

and common sense will ultimately defeat the authoritarian turn may not convince everyone. The book nonetheless provides a useful reminder of the tools populist leaders have always employed and the remarkable willingness of people to defer to them.

*The Invention of Terrorism
in France, 1904–1939*

BY CHRIS MILLINGTON. Stanford University Press, 2023, 304 pp.

Terrorism is notoriously difficult to define: one person's terrorist, the cliché goes, is another's freedom fighter. For this reason and others, government responses to terrorist violence are often disproportionate to the threat. Terrorism has declined since the remarkably bloody 1970s and 1980s, when the German Baader-Meinhof Gang and the Italian Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari were active, but policymakers have become even more forceful in trying to stamp it out. Millington's history goes further back to France in the first four decades of the twentieth century—a period in which attempts by both anarchist leftists and extreme rightists to assassinate top political figures were numerous and often successful. The author argues that both the public and the elites at the time harbored a fundamentally nineteenth-century view that terrorists were all radical leftists from foreign countries. This assumption overlooked how French the terrorist threat actually was. Moreover, it often explained the threat in a way that played to commonplace xenophobic, antiparliamentarian, sexist, and imperialist stereotypes.

Western Hemisphere

RICHARD FEINBERG

*Colonial Reckoning: Race and
Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*

BY LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR. Duke University Press, 2023, 288 pp.

*Covert City: The Cold War and the
Making of Miami*

BY VINCE HOUGHTON AND ERIC DRIGGS. PublicAffairs, 2024, 256 pp.

Two books chart the tumult in Cuba and the Caribbean in the last two centuries, highlighting how race shapes the region's politics. An accomplished historian, Pérez shows that Cuba's heroic mythology of national liberation often omits the messy fact that many Cubans—white and Black—aligned with the colonialists, first from Spain and later from the United States. In the bloody and destructive nineteenth-century wars of independence, wealthy Cubans often fought alongside Spain, which they saw as the best guarantor of social order and their slave-dependent sugar plantations. The Haitian Revolution in the early nineteenth century and its slaughter of whites shaped the Cuban political landscape; many whites saw the drive for sovereignty as synonymous with Black ascendancy. Impoverished mercenary collaborators, including many free Blacks, also fought with Spain, devising cunning guerrilla tactics to entrap pro-independence insurgents. Eventually, many upper-class Cubans welcomed the 1898 U.S. intervention; they saw the United States as the best