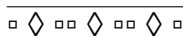


time reading books or lengthy articles”. Beyond these audiences, *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book* will be of interest to activists and educators interested in supplementing and expanding traditional literacies through the incorporation of graphic narrative.

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State Power and Democracy: Before and During the Presidency of George W. Bush

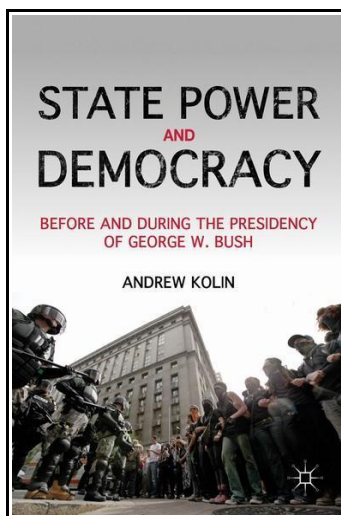
Kolin, Andrew.

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 262 pages.)

Reviewed by—G.G. Preparata,
Pontifical Gregorian University, April 2013

In roughly 200 pages, A. Kolin's *State Power and Democracy* is designed to offer a supple chronological account of the process that has—gradually but steadily—transformed America's early colonial commonwealth into a full-blown technocratic and authoritarian (and, one might add, nightmarish) system.

The book's simple thesis is reiterated, chapter after chapter, by showing how, from the outset, America was conceived as



an elitist structure whose constitutional concern was, *de facto*, to render the crucial governing mechanisms of the newly-founded, and vibrant, "democracy" (in name only), as stringently undemocratic as possible. In other words, the thesis seems to imply that the United States has always been a (nasty) monarchy in disguise, and that the deceit has become irremediably patent with the advent and post-9/11 politics and policies of George W. Bush (2000-2008): under this king, Bush II, it so seems that the child could thus be heard crying 'the democracy has no clothes, long live the President'.

The initial chapter details how, in the minds of the (aristocratic) framers of the republic, political representation was diluted and made as indirect and roundabout as institutionally feasible so as to shield the sacredness of property from whatever sort of populist land-grabbing menace, all the while no (genocidal and larcenous) effort was spared to despoil entirely the Natives of any possession the Anglo-Saxon Whites could have naturally exploited to their advantage and behoof.

The argumentation is subsequently compounded by an itemized discussion of the slew of patriotic acts that have accompanied America ever since her eventual, and fateful, imperial initiation in the late nineteenth century with the manufactured provocations against Spain in Cuba and the Philippines. There and then also began the Yankee tradition of torture and gratuitous deeds of ferocity perpetrated by American troops against indigenous populations—the precursors, so to speak, to the notorious and widely-publicized slaughters of Vietnam and the more recent, pornographic abuses of Abu Ghraib and Gitmo. All of which goes into making the book's narrative a synopsis of America's: 1) elite-inspired anti-democratic bills—cravenly approved by an ever-more delegitimized House of cowering Representatives; 2) viciously centralizing executive; 3) sadistic use of violence upon weaker, colonized "others"; 4) avowed and aggressive imperialism in concomitance with foul-play in the arena of international law; and 5) tightening surveillance chokehold on the nation's privacy.

In this connection, Hoover's FBI receives brief but diligent mention, as do, e.g., the NSA, the CIA, the School of the Americas (now more verbosely named Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), and all those other sinister US gov-

ernment agencies that have come to be ominously featured in works of alarmed dissent such as this one.

The virtual effacement of the democratic process is recounted through the defining phases of the nation's recent history, from the olden days of anarchism (1880s-1920s) to the late War on Terror (2001 to the present) against Islamism and all other "rogue" formations, by way of the various authoritarian, "fascistic" "national security" acts passed during the tantalizing occasions of the Cold War (viz. the Red Scare; McCarthyism and the House of Un-American Activities Committee; the shadow of the "military-industrial complex"; or the tough confrontation between Nixon's executive and revolutionaries of the Counter-culture). The ambivalent, post-Soviet beginning of terrorism's second wave, itself split as it was between the putative skullduggery of Islamism (the 1993 attack at the World Trade Center) and the no less enigmatic, yet short-lived, skirmish opposing federal agencies (the ATF etc.) to America's very own Right-wing militias (which culminated in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995), is another important segment of this story, which the book does not omit.

Particular attention is devoted to the tenure of Bush Jr., which the author, quite evidently, considers exceptional in point of boldness, far-reaching transformation, unscrupulousness, and, in an important sense, in point of candor—as the nation's last-standing vestiges of "freedom": freedom from arbitrary intrusion, seizure, silencing, and incarceration—were, according to the author, shamelessly crushed by the executive of Bush II in a state of anti-terrorist exception.

Noticing, moreover, that under President Barack Obama, despite his grandiloquent oath to reform the government, no reversal of what appears to be a most potent and unambiguous push for the creation of an all-perfect "police State" has taken place, the author cannot but entertain pessimistic conclusions. According to Kolin, the only hope to see this catastrophic process hindered and eventually defeated would hinge on the ability of the American people to re-appropriate somehow the institution of due process and re-establish this key, democratic practice, by bringing to justice, first of all, the very members of Bush II's, *de facto* criminal, executive.

Pious wish.

In sum, Kolin's *State Power and Democracy* is a standard (leftist) recital of America's anti-democratic pedigree. To remind—even in the stenographic and somewhat too notional manner of this primer—newer generations of students of the ways in which brutality and the cult of violence insinuate themselves in the institutional vicissitudes of a country is good and proper. Compassion is to be nurtured also by exposing how the logic of prevarication, of injustice and racism, crystallizes over time, and the peculiar social and cultural conditions under which it does so. There are already a great many books like this one on the shelves (say, à la Chomsky or Zinn): one more does not add significantly to our feeling and understanding of the spiritual perils which the dominance of the USA, in its present countenance, poses for the world at large, but it certainly does no harm—quite the opposite, in fact.

The problem lies elsewhere. On a more general level, the structure of the book, terse as it is, affords no opportunity to seize on any kind of "law" governing this disquieting transformation. In other words, all the information presented in this particular sequence and format does not enable one to understand anything more about the evolution of politics and society in America as a result of this pressure on the part of the elite to shield its privilege.

One could ask, for instance: who/what was Edgar Hoover, truly? And why did he come in power when he did, and in the way he did (i.e., hounding European anarchist expatriates)? Alternatively, there is no sense whatever of how the relentless reinforcement of America's police's apparatus affected, or was affected in turn, by the crime dynamics of the country in the last 110 years or so. And how does the industrial-military complex fit in in all this? Is this a question of empire or proletarian control? Consider the episode of the Cold War: was it devised to strengthen the elite, or did the latter just exploit it to its own proprietary ends? Was there actual "communism" in the USA? Or was it a mere façade which inquisitors used to pursue political enemies? And if so, who were these "enemies"? Dissenters? What kinds? Foreign or domestic, rich or poor? Where there (elite) factions at play? Why, say, was McCarthy's witch-hunt stopped quite suddenly after a spectacular launch? Or, to return to Bush Jr.: if, indeed, conspicuous seeds of a fully militarized

police-regime had been planted by his Democrat predecessor, Bill Clinton, what could account, under Bush, for such a stark contrast in the “air” one breathed in America after 9/11? What of *Zeitgeist*?

These are not idle questions, because knowing events in succession helps only insofar as these events punctuate a particular plot, a particular story. So, beyond the stereotypical account of a leadership jealous of its prerogatives, what is the actual story behind America’s hardening of authoritarian resolve? The book does not say. For, in the end, being told that a regime, which is assumed to be intrinsically monarchic, has been issuing tyrannical, undemocratic edicts for more than a century is hardly a revelation. What is interesting, instead, is to discern and explain the trajectory of a particular nation in time, as a socio-cultural whole: the problem is not that of relaying history in the form of a chronicle with which to mark the putative stages of a viciously anti-democratic process, but rather that of understanding how a society possessed of such a cult of privilege and violence, like America’s, comes to shape its own history.

And this—i.e. the “true visage” of history—is the crucial aspect of the problem, because a US patriot could very well retort that, deeply unfortunate or sinister as all these developments might have been for the civil liberties and rights of the average American citizen, they were all painfully necessary in order to protect and safeguard the collectivity. And couched in these terms, the patriotic apologia is unbreachable. If anarchists, militias, terrorists, Soviets, and Islamists are believed to be (more or less) dangerously “real,” as much as the patriot believes them to be, then, there is only room, if any, to quibble on the actual range to which the government may legitimately extend the radius of intrusion upon the life of its residents. And, in this case, the residual impression of a book’s like Kolin’s is that, in all times and circumstances, the US government has brooked on this issue (namely, the discretionary extent of its purview to guarantee “national security”) no debate whatsoever. Unfortunate indeed, but the overarching intimation seems to be that it has been for the best of us all: State authority, so runs the patriotic adage, might have occasionally acted roughly and questionably, but in the vast majority of cases it did so in our collective interest. Posited thus, the issue can only be, at best, moot,

and, as a result, the labor of denunciation of the unskeptical leftist, at worst, nugatory.

It is only when dissenting scholars will have conclusively and extensively shown that, to this day, these predatory and criminal elites have been fabricating, as a matter of routine, these foes and these crises with a view to implement their liberticidal ploys; it is only then that academic denunciations such as Kolin's will acquire proper relief (Kolin acknowledges the mendacious, conspiratorial trigger of the Spanish-American and Vietnam wars, as well as the grand little show prior to the second Iraq invasion of 2003—yet these are hardly controversial; they're in the historiographical mainstream—and appears to take everything else at face value). Because without such a convincing and widely-disseminated proof, the defenders of the regime will always be able to justify any crime or reprisal—even the most indescribable, such as, e.g., the 500,000 Iraqi children killed by the regime of UN sanctions in the early 1990s—by agitating the token specter (in the above instance, the need to oppose the “evil” of Saddam Hussein and suffer these deaths as a tough “price to pay”—we all remember Madeleine Albright's unforgettable declaration) and mute the credulous critics thereby.

So, in the end, the bulk of the work still remains to be done, and the hardest questions to be answered. Again: what was the Cold War? Was it really this alleged East-West contraposition? Who/what role was Edgar Hoover supposed to play and to what end? And McCarthy? Was there ever a threat from Afghanistan? Have we been told the truth about 9/11? Etc.

And once we will have found the answers to these questions, we will be able to interpret with precision the actual drift, timing and duration of the various institutional steps and phases sedulously undertaken by the elites to obliterate systematically any left-over margin from which one may attempt to manifest (non-violent) opposition to their barbarous rule.

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Rome, Italy, 23 April

