

Skrentny here unveils the bureaucratic processes within the national government that rapidly turned what began as civil rights for African Americans into "minority rights" for women, Latinos, Native Americans, and the disabled, but not for white ethnics, gays, or lesbians. Once the long black struggle against legalized discrimination reached its climax in the mass demonstrations and landmark legislation of the 1960s, extension to other groups, he asserts, "came quietly, to the notice of very few and resistance of almost none, in behind-the-scenes bureaucratic rulings, initiatives, and decisions" (p. 211). "It is not clear," Skrentny concludes, pointing particularly to federal support for bilingual education, "that lobbying, protest, and movement leadership were important or necessary for inclusion in the minority rights revolution," a revolution that "took place while no one was watching" (pp. 306, 249).

More important than movements, Skrentny argues, were the new governmental agencies that issued forms and regulations and the "meaning entrepreneurs" who promoted a vision of America as a bastion of equality and focused attention on ethnic and gender, rather than on class, discrimination (p. 11). Practicing "anticipatory politics" (p. 142), bureaucrats and associated politicians decided, first, that the nation had to end discrimination against blacks in order to appeal to world opinion during the Cold War and, second, that some groups, but not others, were sufficiently analogous to blacks to deserve protection—protection that might win their votes. In assessing why only certain types of people succeeded in crowding under the black umbrella, Skrentny discounts the most obvious explanation, that some suffered from discrimination more than others did, because he assumes that "political life is not based on reality, but on perceptions of reality" (p. 309).

Skrentny's internalist history largely ignores civil rights campaigns before 1960 and those not directly connected with the federal government, does not measure the effects of minority rights policies, and excludes voting rights and the integration of schools and housing. Scholars who study longer periods or other civil rights issues, focus less on small-

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Extending his 1996 book, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, the cultural sociologist John D.

scale governmental actions, or avoid culturalist assumptions may challenge Skrentny's conclusions that pressure groups were irrelevant, that policy reforms mostly reflected changing cultural norms, and that the consequences of policies were not publicly vetted before adoption.

Within his central, if limited, arena, Skrentny is thorough and insightful, treating not only the evolution of affirmative action in employment, higher education, and government contracting but also the 1965 repeal of national origins discrimination in immigration laws and the passage in 1972 of two obscure but potent laws: Title IX of the Education Act Amendments, which mandated educational equality for women, especially in sports, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which required extensive changes throughout society to accommodate the disabled.

As the U.S. Supreme Court's 2003 decisions in the University of Michigan admissions cases and the Texas sodomy case remind us, controversy over minority rights of all sorts remains bitter. Scholars interested in such issues must read Skrentny's thoughtful and well-written book, even if, in the end, they remain dubious about some of its interpretations.

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