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Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace

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In the concluding section of the book, Barrass offers ten pages of comments on the role of intelligence. He offers numerous sound observations, particularly on Soviet intelligence, but they are only loosely related to his account. On only one point do I disagree with his observation: a judgment that the Soviet foreign intelligence service provided better intelligence reporting than the Soviet Foreign Ministry, a judgment not supported by his own account or by a more fully researched comparison. He rightly criticizes Soviet intelligence analysis and assessments in general, but he does not explicitly evaluate the Western counterpart.

The Great Cold War does not answer all questions about its vast subject, but it helps to answer some and to raise others, and that makes it a useful contribution to Cold War studies.



Kristin L. Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008. 280 pp. \$42.50.

Reviewed by Erez Manela, Harvard University

The field of Cold War history has been undergoing a salutary expansion recently, as more scholars have explored themes, regions, and topics that until recently had been relegated to the margins of the literature. One aspect of this expansion has been the increasing attention paid to countries and regions in the global South, with the most prominent recent example of this trend being Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Another facet, related to the first, is the growth of international development and modernization programs as a topic of study well summarized recently in a special issue of *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (June 2009), especially in the opening essay by David C. Engerman and Corinna R. Unger, "Introduction: Toward a Global History of Modernization" (pp. 3–21). This shift has meant that we have slowly but surely been evolving from a view of Cold War history as one that unfolded primarily along an East-West axis—with the United States and the Soviet Union at either end and Europe firmly at its center—toward a multifaceted perspective that accords increasing importance to North-South interactions.

Kristin Ahlberg's new book makes a useful contribution to this literature. Her topic is the history of the U.S. international food aid program, which first emerged under Dwight D. Eisenhower and reached its peak during the administration of Lyndon Johnson. The book makes two main points. First, it outlines how international food aid, codified in 1954 in U.S. Public Law 480, evolved from a program driven primarily by domestic pressures to dispose of surplus agricultural production to one that became, by the mid-1960s, a conscious and important component of U.S. foreign policy. The second point concerns the complexity of the motivations of U.S. officials, particularly of Johnson himself. As Ahlberg convincingly shows, Johnson's

support for the Food for Peace program was shaped by a humanitarian desire to globalize the Great Society and fight hunger worldwide and, at the same time, by a hard-nosed if usually unsuccessful effort to use food aid to influence the policies of recipient countries.

Ahlberg proceeds methodically, opening with three chapters that trace the development of U.S. food aid from its origins in the 1950s as a program to unload surplus grains through the maturation of the program in the 1960s under John F. Kennedy (who renamed the program Food for Peace) and especially under Johnson, as it became a full-fledged component of U.S. foreign policy. Having established this general framework, she then proceeds to explore the diverse contexts and uses of the program in three case study chapters, looking at the role of the Food for Peace program in U.S. relations with India, Israel, and South Vietnam from 1964 to 1968. Motivations and results, she finds, varied considerably across these cases. In India, Johnson sought to use the program to alleviate hunger but also kept food aid on a “short tether” in a largely futile attempt to influence Indian foreign policy in America’s favor. Israel presents another picture entirely. U.S. food aid to Israel had no humanitarian justification and served instead as a form of indirect military assistance, freeing Israeli funds for arms purchases. South Vietnam was different yet again, with food aid serving as an important part of the failed U.S. effort to win the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people.

In focusing on international development and U.S. policy in the Third World, *Transplanting the Great Society* sits at the cutting edge of current trends in Cold War history. In other ways, however, the book hews to a more traditional path. The scope of its interest is essentially limited to tracing the formation of U.S. policy, and its research, though prodigious, is largely confined to U.S. official documents. Thus, readers can learn quite a bit about the details of the legislative and political maneuvers that shaped food aid policy, but relatively little about how that policy was implemented on the ground or precisely what difference it made in the lives of the people it was intended to help. This perspective detracts relatively little from the book’s central thesis, though the limitations of the Washington-centered approach become apparent when, for example, Ahlberg contends that Johnson’s “short tether” policy on food aid to India helped promote the “green revolution” in Indian agriculture. This is a plausible argument but not one that can be convincingly made without venturing beyond U.S. sources.

With this book, Ahlberg has illuminated a neglected aspect of U.S. foreign policy under Johnson and made an important contribution to the history of international development in the 1960s. One suspects, however, that this book will spur at least some readers to wonder what the history of international food aid might look like if one ventured beyond the confines of Pennsylvania Avenue and more thoroughly examined the roles of actors other than Washington officials, whether they be other governments, international bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (which Ahlberg briefly mentions), non-governmental activists and organizations, or the impoverished individuals who were on the receiving end of U.S. aid. The challenges of

attempting such a fully international history of food aid are substantial, but the payoff may be equally so. Cold War historians should commend Ahlberg on her achievement. Then, one hopes, they will pick up where she leaves off.



James MacGregor Burns. *Running Alone: Presidential Leadership from JFK to Bush II: Why It Has Failed and How We Can Fix It*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 278 pp. \$26.00.

Reviewed by James V. Koch, Old Dominion University.

James MacGregor Burns is a distinguished and well-published student of the American presidency and leadership. The more than twenty books he has authored have been careful, largely non-polemical, and well received. He received both a Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1971 for his *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

In *Running Alone*, Burns returns to these familiar topics. However, this effort more avowedly reflects Burns's distinctive political sentiments, experiences, and subjective judgments. Although the title suggests that all nine of the U.S. presidents who occupied that office from 1961 through 2007 are analyzed and given consideration, the coverage in fact is highly uneven, with 35 percent of the 199 pages of text devoted solely to John Kennedy and only 1 percent to Gerald Ford. Despite the sparse accomplishments of the tragically abbreviated Kennedy presidency, Burns's attention to Kennedy leaves no doubt that he is enamored with the man, that political era, and the milieu. It is never difficult to ascertain where Burns's heart lies.

This is much less a book about transformational leadership versus transactional leadership (a subject on which Burns's contributions have been seminal) and much more a treatise about the plight and proposed future of today's Democratic Party. Leadership is about the effective exercise of power, but the well-known 1959 essay by John R. P. French and Bertram Raven on the sources of power and similar scholarly literature are not the centerpiece here. Instead, the focus is on each president's decision-making and whether he "ran alone" (p. 4); that is, whether he ran as a real or perceived outsider independent of the political and economic establishments.

Burns forthrightly asserts that running alone and governing alone are recipes for presidential failure. Rather, the secret to success is to imitate Franklin Roosevelt—use the established party apparatus, advocate a partisan platform that can be easily contrasted to that of the opposition, and appeal to masses of potential voters who otherwise might choose to stay home on Election Day.

In Burns's view, every president from Kennedy to George W. Bush too often has run alone or governed alone and therefore has underperformed or failed. If Burns sees an exception, it appears to be Ronald Reagan, whose rhetoric often suggested running alone, but who nevertheless heavily used Republican Party structures and personnel,