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John F. Kennedy and the Missile Gap.

By Christopher A. Preble (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), xi + 244 pp. \$32.00 cloth.

There are uncanny parallels between the presidencies of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and George W. Bush 40 years later, both of which emerged from questionable circumstances. There are the “gross exaggerations” of national peril by partisan pundits, the inflammatory testimonies of disaffected retired generals, the mad scientists, the well-heeled academic apologists, the in-house pollsters, the ambitious congressional toadies. During both presidencies defense contractors profited from orchestrated national panic to the detriment of doctrines of moderation, and with similar consequences: “prolonged” Cold War and “disastrous” third world interventions. Above all, both presidencies were driven by a Big Lie: in Kennedy’s case, the “missile gap.”

Just as the attack on 9/11 shocked Americans out of a sense of complacency, so did *Sputnik* and the Soviet ICBM tests. And just as the crumbling Twin Towers occasioned transference of America’s own complicity in international violence onto a fantasy of monstrous proportions—Islamo-fascism—so did the USSR’s early successes in rocketry. These events seemed to confirm that the world really was divided into polar opposites: us, reputed Champions of Liberty, and them, COMINTERN, the Evil Empire. More pointedly, just as exposure of the Big Lie has resulted in back-peddling by Bush’s handlers, so too with Kennedy’s “Whiz Kids.” “Visible irritation” was followed by denials that any such thing was said, then implied admissions that it had, and finally “quiet internment” of the phrase. This process is so common as to have the status of a universal commandment in politics: first try to muzzle internal dissent. If this fails then call for an investigation into “poor intelligence.” As a last resort, redefine the entire issue as an “intelligence gap.”

Christopher A. Preble shows how in free capitalist societies economic resources are channeled toward military ends during times of peace: not through central command, but by the competitive marketing of defense hardware to procurers and the proffering government contracts. The latter in turn drive the economies of the local communities represented by Congress which, naturally, votes for ever larger military outlays. The resulting tax burdens are legitimized with platitudes like “ask not what your country can do for you . . .” and “bear any burden.” In sum, says Preble, the military–industrial complex was not a conspiracy against the will of the people; “It *was* the will of the people.”

The balance of Preble’s book details Kennedy’s campaign speeches state-by-state and analyzes the TV debates with Richard Nixon. Here, oddly, the phrase “missile gap” was invoked only five times. Even the author admits that it “may not have been singularly significant” in the election outcome. Why, then, did Kennedy win? I still think it had to do with Nixon’s weasel-eyes and five o’clock shadow counter-posed to Kennedy’s urbane, square-jawed, lanky athleticism.

This easily read, well-documented study is recommended for all undergraduate libraries.

JAMES AHO
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Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism.

By Alexander Stille (New York: Picador, 2003), 365 pp. \$15.00 paper.

Alexander Stille is an eclectic journalist, who specializes in Italian political culture and history. His book *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (first published in 1991) provides a fascinating introduction to the history of the Jews in Italy

for new concepts sometimes blinds them to their limitations.

JEFF NOONAN
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John Ruskin: Selected Writings. Edited by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xxxviii + 324 pp. \$13.95/£8.99 paper.

Anybody who teaches aesthetic and cultural criticism, as well as intellectual and Victorian history, will be glad to learn of Oxford University Press's accessible and affordable publication of these selected works by John Ruskin. The paperback volume, in the World's Classics series, contains selections from the full range of Ruskin's career (including *Modern Painters*, *The Stones of Venice*, and *Unto This Last*), as well as notes and an introduction by Dinah Birch.

Birch situates Ruskin's work in the context of his life and career more generally. She begins by making the case for continuing to read him: "It is not possible to trace the development of nineteenth-century culture, or its legacies, without knowledge of his work" (ix). She then briefly sketches Ruskin's educational, religious, and aesthetic upbringing, before discussing the themes and works that comprised the three major phases of his adult life. Particularly striking, both in this introduction and in the essays that follow, is the centrality of issues that animate so many classroom discussions and academic debates today: gender, science, imperialism, and environmentalism are present here alongside the more familiar themes of artistic and social criticism in the context of industrialization and urbanization. Birch's introduction focuses primarily on Ruskin's personal and intellectual life, but it is complemented by a timeline that sets his work alongside broader historical and cultural developments as well.

Birch writes that, as both a teacher and a critic, Ruskin strove to help his students and readers to *see*, an ambition realized in "The Work of Iron" (among others). He delivered this lecture to an audience at Tunbridge Wells in 1858, and it was published in *The Two Paths* the following year—the same

year as Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. He begins by acknowledging that his audience is probably inclined to view rusted iron as spoiled iron, before turning to assert that, in fact, iron only rusts because it has breathed: "Nay, in a certain sense, and almost a literal one, we may say that iron rusted is Living; but when pure or polished, Dead" (106). Far from the residue of a ruined metal, in Ruskin's handling oxidized iron becomes the agent that provides color and vitality to the rocks of England, the granite of Egypt, and the summits of the Alps; iron railings, however, come in for harsher treatment: "Your iron railing always means thieves outside, or Bedlam inside;—it can mean nothing else than that" (116). Through a series of such turns Ruskin takes his musings on an unlovely metal as an opportunity to consider the beauty of the countryside and the life it sustains, and he is doing so at a moment when both seem to him to be under threat from the cruelty, oppression, and exploitation that follow the pursuit of wealth. Ruskin, in other words, has helped us to *see*, and it is thanks to Dinah Birch and Oxford University Press that he can continue to do so for another generation of teachers and critics.

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Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires. By Alexander J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 163 pp. \$35.00/£23.50 paper.

This slim book absorbs the author's professional interest as a political scientist in the collapse of the former Soviet Union into a structural explanation for the decline and fall of empires in general. In potential terms, the aim is ambitious; in the event, Alexander Motyl is much more specific in his interest. The question that drives the more abstract and generalizing features of the book is a single one: what can the political scientist who equips himself with a theory of the collapse of empires predict (without succumbing to the temptation to promote a theory of everything) about the aftermath of the Soviet Union?