and its allies to maintain enough nuclear capability to be able to engage in a second strike that would make the enemy think twice about striking first. He also posited that analysts like himself and his wife were the best to decide matters of nuclear deterrence, insofar as politicians typically vacillated in Hamlet-like fashion in the face of danger and could not be relied on to respond adequately. As he wrote about Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the then prevailing theory of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), “the only way to prevent a nuclear conflagration ‘was by assuring an adversary that not only could you retaliate, but you would retaliate. I think [McNamara] found it hard to think about that after his experience in the [Cuban] Missile Crisis’” (p. 112).

Likewise Albert described another secretary of defense, Harold Brown, as “being another one of those mealy-mouthed politicians who ‘oscillated between the MAD dogma’ and a recognition that the Soviets would never endorse an ‘implicit pact for mutual suicide’” (p. 113).

Robin skillfully tracks the development of the Wohlstetters’ theories, with their emphasis on continual military preparedness and almost fetishistic view of the Soviet Union as the source of all evil, views echoed by their great admirer, Ronald Reagan, who awarded the Wohlstetters a Medal of Honor. Unfortunately, Robin fails to mention the crucial role Albert played in the election of John F. Kennedy when the Wohlstetters and other RAND analysts leaked information about a so called missile gap to the campaign, which became one of Kennedy’s main arguments against Richard Nixon. Neither does Robin mention Albert’s role in convincing the Carter administration to provide surface-to-air missiles to the mujahideen fighting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—some of whom later became America’s deadliest enemy in modern times under the banner of Al Qaeda.

Yet, in spite of the Wohlstetters’ penchant for seeing the same enemy everywhere, there is much to admire about them in this book. Their cosmopolitanism, open-mindedness, and welcoming of new ideas stand in sharp contrast to the obscurantist, eschatological approach of former President Donald Trump and many of his advisers, who bluntly predicted a clash of civilizations—and seemed intent on bringing it about on their watch. Finally, it should be said that some people do still remember Albert, and presumably Roberta as well. Albert’s name is safely affixed to one of the main halls in that bastion of neoconservatism, the American Enterprise Institute.


Reviewed by Natasha Zaretsky, University of Alabama at Birmingham

As a child who came of age in a leftist family in the 1970s, I was aware of the spirited woman from New York City with the big floppy hat who had entered politics to
shake things up. She was the icon Bella Abzug and is the subject of Leandra Zarnow’s magisterial political biography, Battling Bella: The Protest Politics of Bella Abzug. A product of the Popular Front left-liberal progressive world of the 1930s, Abzug was a socialist Zionist, a unionist, an anti-racist, a pacifist, and a women’s rights activist who sought to bring the protest energies of the 1960s into the arena of electoral politics. In 1970, she did just that when she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where she was part of a new generation of women legislators (among them, Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan, and Patsy Mink) who sought to expand the ranks of the Democratic Party and transform it from within.

Although nearly 25 years have passed since Abzug’s death, this biography feels timely. In 1971, Abzug observed that the country—not unlike today—was “in serious crisis, it’s bursting at the seams, it has the opportunity for social change like never since the 1930s. It can go in either direction” (p. 146). For Abzug, the era’s political and economic upheavals demanded that the Democratic Party move in an unapologetically social democratic direction by creating a coalition of workers, women, racial minorities, and progressives that would form the leftwing equivalent of the Goldwater coalition on the right. Historians of the 1970s tend to lament the mass exodus of white male voters from the Democratic Party and interpret it (reductively and teleologically) as a run-up to the Reagan revolution. But through reconstruction of Abzug’s work as an “inside agitator,” Zarnow reminds us that the first half of the 1970s was a period of intense political contestation over the future of the Democratic Party. Would the party go in the direction of neoliberalism and American exceptionalism, or would it carve out a path that permanently broke with Cold War militarism and championed worker’s rights, women’s rights, and social equality? By the end of the decade, the party’s move toward the center had become increasingly obvious. But in the early 1970s, the jury was still out, and Abzug sought to bring her instinctive radicalism to the fight over the party’s future.

This was not an easy task, in part because Abzug encountered tremendous sexism and anti-Semitism along the way. But her story also illuminates the long reach of strident McCarthy-era Cold War anti-Communism well into the 1970s. Her political opponents decried her as a “dirty communist whore,” shamelessly relying on the smear tactics employed in the 1950s by Senator Joseph McCarthy and others. For Abzug, too, the darkest days of the Cold War were never far from her mind. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, she had shown bravery by continuing to work with members of the Communist Party and championing First Amendment rights. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) took notice, placing her under surveillance in the 1950s and 1960s. Abzug was intimately familiar with the ways political dissenters could be targeted in the name of national security. Zarnow makes a strong case that the postwar Red Scare loomed large over the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate congressional debates about intelligence abuses and state surveillance, debates in which Abzug played a major role and which for her were deeply personal. “Players on both sides of the Red Scare,” Zarnow writes, “still had a stake in an unsettled debate about whether to prioritize privacy or security” (p. 202).
Like the best political biographers, Zarnow uses the life of her subject to offer new ways of thinking about the era in which Abzug lived, and readers will come away with many exciting, fresh interpretations of the political history of the 1970s. But this is also a soulful, judicious portrait of a complicated, imperfect human being who made mistakes. With the benefit of historical hindsight, two of Abzug’s political miscalculations stand out. First, even though she championed racial equality, she was overly optimistic in her belief that the defeat of the Jim Crow system was inevitable. At key moments, her optimism about the country’s racial future compelled her to emphasize issues such as women’s rights and pacifism over civil rights. Second, Abzug believed that if women were conscripted en masse into U.S. politics, they would inevitably constitute a progressive voting bloc. But even at the time, there was ample evidence that there was nothing inherently progressive about women’s politics (with Phyllis Schlafly, Abzug’s foil, providing the most famous counterexample). Above all, though, one comes away from this biography with a deep appreciation for the spirit of resistance and conviction that Abzug brought to electoral politics. The epigraph to the book’s introduction captures that spirit well. Recalling her early origins in the peace and women’s rights movements, Abzug reflected “They thought I was a lunatic. Now these causes are being supported by a majority of the people. I’ve been out front. Everybody’s caught up” (p. 1). Zarnow’s wonderful book reminds us of our collective debt to the fighters, the contrarians, the hotheads, and the lunatics.


**Reviewed by Gary R. Hess, Bowling Green State University (emeritus)**

Randall B. Woods has written a remarkably comprehensive and insightful biography of Lyndon B. Johnson, one that compares favorably with Robert Dallek’s five-volume biography of Johnson. Woods, a Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Arkansas and a past president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, is respected for his scholarship, especially his lengthy study of the career of Senator J. William Fulbright. *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* is based on extensive research in Johnson’s papers and other relevant primary sources as well as the large body of secondary material on the subject.

Woods is at his best in examining the complex and tormented Johnson, a man whose ambition, vision, and political acumen were undermined by insecurity, pettiness, and intellectual limitations. In his pursuit of power, Johnson played many roles—Johnson the Humble, Johnson the Warrior, Johnson the Crusader, Johnson the Magnanimous, Johnson the Vindictive, among others—and his behavior was at once charming and attentive, uncouth and vulgar. Johnson craved approval and could not understand why others questioned his purposes and judgments. As the war in