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Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974 by
Kevin M. Kruse, Julian E. Zelizer (review)

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Book Reviews

including most recently *The Men and the Moment: The Election of 1968 and the Rise of Partisan Politics in America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974. By Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019. Pp. 428. \$28.95 cloth)

Teaching the course “America since 1945” grows more expansive and difficult each year with its constantly advancing end point. While most textbooks give a cursory review of the post-2000 years, Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer’s *Fault Lines* provides another option by offering detailed historical analysis of the issues dividing American society through the 2016 election. Thus, college teachers can use this book to divide a post-1945 course into two parts, or for a standalone course, which apparently the authors do at Princeton University.

Kruse and Zelizer argue that understanding today’s polarized political and cultural landscape can best be accomplished by going back to 1974. The fallout from Watergate led to seemingly permanent alterations in American society: distrust of the government, a stampede of investigative journalists, shifts in the Republican Party favoring the New Right, new legislation allowing congressional oversight over the executive branch, and a cycle of increasing outrage and cynicism. The authors then move mostly chronologically through the political cycles, scandals, and high-profile debates from the 1970s through the present. They identify economic, racial, political, and gender/sexuality issues as the most prominent “fault lines” and argue that these divisions have been furthered by an increasingly fractured media, including talk radio, cable television, blogs, and social media.

This approach is partially successful in that it demonstrates how one political confrontation or scandal gave rise to more extreme hyperbole and maneuvering—and hypocrisy—during the next one. For example, Kruse and Zelizer show how liberal organizing torpedoed Robert Bork’s nomination to the Supreme Court, a success that motivated them to “out-Bork Bork” in a failed attempt to prevent Clarence Thomas’s court appointment on the basis that he had sexually harassed his colleague Anita Hill at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. But when Republicans leveled even more serious accusations against Bill Clinton, Democratic women rallied around him. (And, of course, this background played a role in the 2016 election, and in Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearings to the Supreme

Court). The authors draw heavily from Bruce Schulman's *The Seventies* and to a lesser degree Robert M. Collins's *The Eighties*, two of the best treatments for understanding political and cultural trends in their respective decades, in the first half of their book.

However, *Fault Lines* falls prey to its own kind of scandal fatigue, and with each chapter recounting the most dramatic confrontations of any particular administration, feels increasingly like a bad trip down memory lane. That they rely, perhaps by necessity, much more on journalistic sources for the second half of the book compounds this vibe.

They may have been able to temper this problem by more strongly analyzing the demographic shifts that accompanied the fault lines. In other words, liberal and conservative viewpoints and voters have themselves changed over the last four decades and have not always stood on predictable sides of any given debate. A more deliberate attempt to understand why Ronald Reagan attracted Democrats or Donald Trump attracted independents, for example, would have countered the somewhat tiring liberal versus conservative narrative Kruse and Zelizer put forth. As it is, the reader does not get a clear picture of who a conservative was in 1980 versus 2000, for example, or why someone who may have leaned left in the 2000s might be leaning right in the 2010s.

Their analysis of the 2016 election, again, is only partially successful. Kruse and Zelizer do not demonize Trump; they present his electoral victory as the outcome of the fault lines themselves, largely by demonstrating his abilities to excite the media and to tap into economic and cultural alienation. Still, the authors do not convey Hillary Clinton's deep flaws as a candidate, attributing her loss primarily to disproportionate media coverage of Trump, disaffected Bernie Sanders supporters, and her "basket of deplorables" characterization of Trump voters as being taken out of context (which is a stretch by any standard). This gives the impression that Clinton's loss fell largely outside her control. Remarkably, while purportedly walking readers through the biggest political confrontations of the post-Watergate era, Kruse and Zelizer never discuss how Clinton's polarizing actions as first lady in the 1990s and as secretary of state in the Obama administration made her vulnerable to Sanders's and Trump's critiques. Nor do they discuss the level of corruption the Clinton machine brought to the Democratic Party, all of which played directly into Trump's victory.

Fault Lines ends with a hopeful tone, noting that the 2016 election brought forth new waves of engagement from previously disaffected and marginalized groups and predicting the rise of new mechanisms for compromising. Since the book's publication, Americans have endured

the partisan Kavanaugh hearings and a presidential impeachment trial. The fault lines will likely harden before a breakthrough is achieved.

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Downriver: Into the Future of Water in the West. By Heather Hansman. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. 248. \$25.00 cloth; \$18.00 ebook)

“Water, for me, and for most people I’ve met on the trip isn’t something I can think about passively” (p. 149). Those are the words of environmental journalist Heather Hansman who has written a valuable and informative travelogue of her 730-mile journey down the Green River to its junction with the Colorado River. *Downriver* contains her commentary on the state of the river, sprinkled with useful information on the laws that control the river, federal water regulations, and studies that address contemporary issues such as endangered species and climate change. *Downriver* is largely based upon her personal observations coupled with interviews of river stakeholders encountered along the way, including ranchers, farmers, miners, municipalities, river managers, scientists, Indian tribes, and recreational users.

The strength of the book is its river’s eye view of the largest tributary of the Colorado River, the Green, from its source in the Wind River Range of Wyoming to its confluence with the Colorado River in Utah’s Canyonlands National Park. Hansman is particularly focused on examining how the river impacts local citizens and how humans have shaped the river over time. Above all, she is concerned about the river’s future. Hansman is particularly adept at explaining technical information in layman’s terms. For example, *Downriver* offers clear general information on current technical/scientific subjects such as endangered fish and how climate change is impacting the river. The public often wonders why it is important to maintain critical river habitat for the maintenance of endangered fish such as the Humpback Chub and Razorback Sucker, both native fish, but never in the sights of fishing enthusiasts. She visits Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, home of a U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service’s endangered species fish hatchery and explains the many challenges the wildlife biologists face in implementing this