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*The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War
Washington* by Gregg Herken (review)

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(Review)

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were, essentially, a fusion of the period's cultural panics. The fear of the Soviet Union brought to the surface anxieties regarding various social issues: that women, as mothers, were becoming overly dominant in both the domestic and the political spheres (i.e., Momism); that the populace had become detached from its Judeo-Christian moorings; that tough, plain-speaking, working-class yeomen had become supplanted by effete, upper-class, overeducated weaklings. This "masculinity crisis" resulted in the stabilization of the traditional masculine trope in both national cinema industries.

Although Starck shows that Anglo-American Cold War cinematography was linked in terms of the themes directors explored, she is also careful to observe the differences between the two allies. Despite being bound together in their struggle against the Communist threat, the two countries approached this threat from contrasting angles. British films tended to be less overtly anti-Communist, displayed less of a sense of the Red Scare hysteria, and did not glorify the military-industrial complex to the same extent. Finally, when compared to Hollywood, British features tended to be less anti-intellectual. Because British cinema tended to downplay the Cold War or treat it subtly, the British screen ultimately never produced a full-blown Cold Warrior prototype à la John Wayne in *Big Jim McLean*.

Scholars interested in the cultural politics of the early Cold War era will find Starck's monograph illuminating. Her case studies are instructive, and her analysis is thought-provoking.



Gregg Herken, *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014. 494 pp. \$17.95.

Reviewed by Lee Lukoff, University of Georgia

Gregg Herken's *The Georgetown Set* sheds light on a bygone era of Washington politics when the most important political and policy decisions of the day were discussed and decided at fancy dinner parties hosted by an elite group of blue-blooded New England-bred and -educated white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men with close political ties to all of the major levers of power in Washington. Herken, a professor of history emeritus at the University of California, paints a rich portrait of a social scene that spanned eight presidential administrations and endured through all the major national crises that confronted the United States from the rise of the Soviet Union through the fall of the Berlin Wall. Herken paints the Georgetown dinner parties as transactional summits where Washington's most powerful politicians, administration officials, journalists, foreign dignitaries, intelligence officers, and their spouses would socialize and debate the latest political and policy issues of the day. The dinner parties were strictly formal and premised on the norms of Anne Squire's *Social Washington*, a social etiquette manual similar to *Roberts Rules of Order* (p. 20). Herken reveals that the guests at the parties would customarily drink dry martinis, eat dishes of leek pie,

and terrapin soup, and then split into gender-segregated groups (where the men would smoke cigars and drink scotch), before departing exactly on the dot at 11 pm.

The Georgetown dinner parties oftentimes were hosted by syndicated political columnist, and founder of *Matter of Fact*, Joseph Alsop. They were regularly attended by a tight-knit group of politically connected friends and confidants. These individuals included Frank Wisner (an operations officer with the Central Intelligence Agency), Phil Graham and Kay Graham (owners of *The Washington Post*), Chip Bohlen (a Soviet expert at the State Department), George Kennan (a diplomat and author of the containment doctrine), Llewellyn Thompson (former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union), and Alsop's junior writer (and brother) Stewart Alsop. Herken does an exemplary job of tracing the careers of each of these individuals throughout the duration of the Cold War. He is careful not to lionize some of the more notable regulars on the Georgetown set and places a great deal of emphasis on highlighting the character flaws of each of the main protagonists in the book. Among the more notable names making appearances on the Georgetown set over the years are John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and the philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin.

Herken devotes a large portion of his book to developing the character of Joseph Alsop, born to the niece of Theodore Roosevelt and educated at Groton and Harvard. His familial and political connections propelled him into a career in journalism that began in earnest when he became a syndicated columnist for *The New York Herald Tribune*. Alsop was a firm believer in American exceptionalism. He genuinely cared about the prestige and influence of the United States during the Cold War. He volunteered his services to sway media coverage in favor of the intelligence agencies' preferred candidate, Ramon Magsaysay, in the 1953 presidential elections in the Philippines (p.178). Alsop was so worried about the prospects of U.S. failure in Vietnam that he confronted Lyndon Johnson in person and urged him to escalate the war in mid-June 1964 in order to avoid defeat (p. 298). Alsop's biggest flaw was that he was deeply wedded to his beliefs on the Vietnam War. Herken reveals that Alsop "admits to a fellow journalist that Vietnam cost him his health, figure and reputation" (p. 374). Alsop's fall from grace was swift, his last column written on 30 December 1974. His final years were spent as a broken man, a shell of the person he once was when his dining room was the epicenter of Washington high society.

The conversations that took place at Georgetown dinner parties were of great interest to actors both foreign and domestic. "The KGB infiltrated the social circuit through an ex-Roosevelt Administration official named Lauchlin Currie (code name Page) who served as a source in Joe Alsop's columns on Chinese affairs" (p. 64). J. Edgar Hoover and even Richard Nixon took an interest in infiltrating the Georgetown set. Hoover was deeply skeptical of Alsop for publishing military secrets from anonymous sources and for his strident criticism of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's role in the firing of State Department officials for alleged disloyalty (p. 115). Hoover also possessed a file with pictures of Alsop engaged in sexual intercourse with a male Soviet agent in Moscow and debated sending it to Alsop's enemies. Herken does an excellent job discussing the conundrum Alsop faced when he thought of

pre-emptively coming out of the closet in order to blunt the potential impact of a public outing by Hoover. Ultimately, the documents were never published, and Alsop went to his grave having dodged a bullet that could have ruined his career.

Alsop forged an unlikely political alliance with Nixon, who saw the columnist as a useful tool to advance his Vietnam policy in the media. Nixon also used Alsop as a source to keep tabs on the political dealings of his Democratic rivals who frequented Alsop's dinner parties. In return, Alsop was fed classified information from the White House to use in his columns. He also received privileged access to military leaders and foreign dignitaries on his trips abroad. The most valuable source Alsop cultivated in the Nixon administration was Kissinger. A long-time staple of the Georgetown set, Kissinger was seen by the Nixon administration as a gatherer of information on Democrats who were deeply invested in undermining its policies. Kissinger's views and actions during this period are cited from primary sources, and Herken's discussion of Kissinger's relationship with Alsop and other members of the Georgetown set could have been improved had he interviewed the former secretary of state.

The Georgetown Set describes in intimate detail the true nature of the intersectionality of politics, policy, and the media in elite social settings in Cold War Washington. The book gives the reader a behind-closed-doors view of a bygone era where elite social culture played a pivotal role in shaping political affairs in Washington. Alsop was one of the most important political journalists of the Cold War because of the close personal relationships he cultivated at his dinner parties with many of the most notable political figures of the twentieth century. His close friendships with elite decision-makers allowed him to become one of the best-informed foreign policy columnists of the Cold War. I strongly recommend this book to any scholar interested in learning more about the nexus of journalism and politics during the Cold War from the eyes of the most important political elites of the period.



Jamie Miller, *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 464 pp. \$74.00.

Reviewed by Philip E. Muehlenbeck, George Washington University

Jamie Miller's *An African Volk: The Apartheid Regime and Its Search for Survival* is an ambitious project that integrates aspects of South Africa's social, economic, political, domestic, and foreign policy histories. Miller places his work "at the nexus of African, decolonization, and Cold War history" (p. 1). Drawing on primary source materials from fifteen archives and five countries, it is a comprehensively researched book.

Miller does an exemplary job of blending discussion of South Africa's international relations with the domestic political situation facing the government of John Vorster. The domestic angle, and in particular Miller's focus on the personal and ideological rivalries within the South African government, provides much needed nuance