Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*
Liveright: New York 2013, $29.95, hardback
706 pp, 978 0 87140 450 3

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SOUTHERN QUESTIONS

Is there anything new to be said about the New Deal? As Ira Katznelson observes at the beginning of *Fear Itself*, 'we possess hundreds of thematic histories, countless studies of public affairs and abundant biographies of key persons during this time of great historical density'; so 'why present another portrait?', he asks. Part of the answer lies in a resurgence of interest in the 1930s in the US—especially among left-liberal scholars who, in search of Depression-era lessons for the present, are constantly drawn to comparisons between Obama and Roosevelt (usually unflattering to the former). Katznelson himself finds justification in a more refined source, citing Henry James's 1882 essay on Venice: although the city has been 'painted and described many thousands of times', wrote James, 'it is not forbidden to speak of familiar things' when a writer 'is himself in love with his theme'.

Katznelson's admiration for the New Deal is plain: in an opening section larded with references to Tocqueville, he puts its achievements 'on a par with the French Revolution', and describes it as 'not merely an important event in the history of the United States, but the most important twentieth-century testing ground for representative democracy in an age of mass politics'. In his view, the Roosevelt administration 'reconsidered and rebuilt the country's long-established political order', 'successfully defining and securing liberal democracy' in the process. He also insists, however, that 'esteem for the New Deal paradoxically should draw attention to its most profound imperfections'. *Fear Itself* seeks to shed new light on the period by dwelling on the anxiety and uncertainty that pervaded it, and especially on the close

relationship between Roosevelt's reforms and the racialized social order of the Southern states.

A professor of political science at Columbia and head of the Social Science Research Council, Katznelson is well positioned to provide what is likely to become the new standard account of the period. Educated in the 1960s at the same institution where he now teaches, Katznelson was exposed both to the most intellectually powerful statements of Cold War liberalism—Richard Hofstadter and David Truman were among his teachers, and he recalls being profoundly influenced by Hannah Arendt's lectures at the New School—and to the American New Left: C. Wright Mills had a particularly strong impact. At the confluence of these very different intellectual currents, he has produced a large body of work devoted to two main areas: studies of the American labour movement and political theory. Katznelson's scholarship in these fields has developed across three phases: an early cycle of texts on class formation, in close conversation with Marxism, followed by work broadly devoted to liberal political theory, and a more recent batch of writing on the New Deal, which in important respects integrates the concerns of the first two phases. Katznelson first gained renown with his 1981 book *City Trenches*, which provided an original answer to the perennial question of 'why no socialism in the United States?' Eschewing explanations rooted either in generalized affluence, such as that of Sombart, or in claims of cultural uniqueness, he instead focused on the spatial separation of work from residence in the US. On this account, the key to the distinctive formation of the American working class was the restriction of class-consciousness to the workplace. He followed up this analysis in 1992 with *Marxism and the City*, an appreciative but critical examination of Marxist urban studies, from Engels to Lefebvre to Harvey.

By the mid-1990s, under the influence of Communism's collapse in Eastern Europe, the scope of Katznelson's work had widened, and he seems to have shifted quite sharply to the right. *Liberalism's Crooked Circle: Letters to Adam Michnik* (1996) fully shared in the common illusion of the time that the fall of the Soviet bloc would open up the possibility of a more robust American liberalism. *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism and the Holocaust* (2003) was an admiring group portrait of Hannah Arendt, Robert Dahl, Richard Hofstadter, Harold Laswell, Karl Polanyi and David Truman, all grouped under the rubric of 'the political studies enlightenment'. In the most recent phase of his work, which began with *When Affirmative Action Was White* (2005) and could be seen as culminating in *Fear Itself*, Katznelson gives particular attention to the decisive influence of the South on the nascent American welfare state. However, this last book breaks almost entirely with the intellectual openness and original argumentation that characterized Katznelson's best earlier work. Indeed,

what *Fear Itself* actually offers is a highly politicized celebration of the New Deal and the early Cold War, based on problematic historical claims.

Fear Itself hammers home one very important point: it shows extremely clearly that Southern politicians, far from being a fly in the social-democratic ointment of the New Deal, were instead a central part of the coalition that supported it, and actively shaped its agenda. In that sense, Katznelson offers a bracing corrective to the widespread nostalgia for the Roosevelt years among self-styled American 'progressives' (a term that the book also does much to demystify). But while it undermines some myths, *Fear Itself* also contributes to others. Across 700 pages, Katznelson insists again and again on the historical connection between the preservation of the Jim Crow South during the 1930s and the relative stability of American political institutions through the Great Depression, Second World War and beyond. His main thesis is that the Roosevelt administration's political alliance with the Dixiecrats was a condition for the survival of American democracy as such through the 1930s, 40s and early 50s. 'If there is a lesson', he writes, 'it is not one of retrospective judgement, as if the possibility then existed to rescue liberal democracy and pursue racial justice simultaneously'. Instead, 'liberal democracy prospered *as a result* [my emphasis] of an accommodation with racial humiliation and its system of lawful exclusion and principled terror. Each constituted the other like "the united double nature of soul and body" in Goethe's *Faust*.' In short, the alliance with the Jim Crow South was, as the title of the book's final section puts it, 'Democracy's Price'.

Katznelson's account differs from previous histories of the New Deal—standard works such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr's three-volume *Age of Roosevelt* (1957–60), for example, or William Leuchtenburg's *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (1963)—in several notable respects. One is in its periodization, which stretches beyond the usual end-marker of 1945, through the Truman presidency and right up to the start of Eisenhower's. Another is Katznelson's insistence on placing US developments in a global context, finding earlier scholarship to have been 'too insular and too limited'. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of *Fear Itself*, however—as its title would suggest—is its relentless emphasis on a climate of heightened anxiety which he claims pervaded the US in the 1930s and beyond. Katznelson argues that the New Deal was in fact a product of fear, a psychological state resulting from the 'un-measurable uncertainty' caused by 'economic collapse, total war, genocide, atomic weapons and postwar struggles with Communism'. With no reliable guides for how to respond to such challenges, political leaders of the time sought to turn boundless 'uncertainty' into 'measurable risk', and to that end were willing to consider 'a very wide repertoire of policies'. The institutional and legislative creativity of the New Deal was the outcome of this basically conservative impulse: an attempt to maintain rather than

transform the existing social order. Katznelson identifies three main fears, which underpin his narrative: firstly, the fear that, in the conjuncture of the 1930s, 'the globe's leading liberal democracies could not compete successfully with the dictatorships'; second, the fear produced by 'exponential growth in existing weaponry', culminating after 1945 in the atomic threat; and third, the racial structure of the South, 'a source of worry for both its defenders and its adversaries'.

The book is organized into four parts. The first, 'Fight Against Fear', sets the scene by arguing that the 1930s should be understood as a period of 'competition' between 'the constitutional democracies in Europe and North America' and 'a wide variety of authoritarian alternatives'. Katznelson shows that at this time, states frequently borrowed policies from each other. One of the most striking passages in this section describes how the Roosevelt administration sent a commission to fascist Italy in 1937, 'to study how Benito Mussolini's government had organized Fascism's administration'; the Brownlow Committee 'then used what they found to make extensive recommendations for the reorganization of America's national government'. Katznelson further evokes the illiberal temper of the times through pen portraits of three figures—the Italian pilot and notorious *squadrista* Italo Balbo, the Soviet Nuremberg Tribunal judge Iona Nikitchenko, and Mississipi Democratic senator and 'proud member of the Ku Klux Klan' Theodore Bilbo—all categorized as 'servants of an authoritarian regime'; a surprising juxtaposition that, as we will see, serves a decidedly ideological purpose.

The second—and arguably most powerful—section, 'Southern Cage', centres on the distinctiveness of the former Confederacy and its crucial role in the legislative history of the 1930s. Well into the twentieth century, Katznelson argues, a third of the land mass of the US still languished under a brutally reactionary, pre-capitalist agrarian regime whose ruling elite was deeply entrenched in the federal state. As late as 1938, average Southern income was little more than half that of the nation as a whole, pellagra and malaria were rampant, and barely three per cent of Southern houses had bathrooms with running water. For Katznelson, these singular features were ultimately rooted in race. The one-party political system was designed to reproduce white racial supremacy: the tight constraints on black suffrage helped to ensure that the region returned Democrats to the House and Senate virtually unopposed for decades. The South's poverty and backwardness, too—strikingly documented in a 1938 government report—was largely a product of its 'racial order'. Lynching, 'the least civilized means the white South used to protect its racial hegemony', was still widespread, as Katznelson powerfully underlines: between 1900 and 1930 there were 2,000 lynchings in the South, and in 1933, the first year of the New Deal,

there were another 28—including the brutal slaying of Lloyd Warner, who was burned alive in front of a massed crowd in Maryland.

Ardent support for Jim Crow was often combined with a demand for activist government. An early manifestation of this was the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, a progressive Democrat who supported expanding the regulatory capacity of the US state while also backing Jim Crow legislation to the hilt; Wilson famously screened *The Birth of a Nation* at the White House, and scuttled language condemning racial inequality in the Treaty of Versailles. Such affiliations were shared by a broader group of Southern progressives. During the twenties, it was an alliance between 'western Republican progressives' and Southern Democrats that pushed through progressive income-tax legislation and the Maternity and Infancy Welfare Act of 1921, and this axis continued to be a crucial political force into the New Deal itself. The Roosevelt administration took full advantage of this group—for example, the flamboyant racist Theodor Bilbo was a staunch New Dealer. In two striking scatterplots, Katznelson shows the softening, although not disappearance, of partisan alignment, and the rise of the Southern Democrats as a swing vote in Congress between 1933 and 1952. The evidence powerfully documents the evolving pattern of relations between Southern congressmen and the Roosevelt administration—solid support in 1933–36 sliding into increasing opposition in FDR's second and third terms.

In the third section, 'Emergency', Katznelson presents a narrative of the New Deal period as conventionally understood, from 1933–45. The main thrust of his argument here is that Southern support in the first two years of the New Deal made possible its initial radical moment, as embodied by the National Recovery Act. However, the wave of labour organizing that followed the Wagner Act of 1935 eventually pushed the Southern legislative bloc away from Roosevelt, because of the threat labour posed to the Jim Crow system. In Katznelson's view, a second phase of radicalism began only with World War Two, which revived the planning ambitions of the early New Deal, as an alphabet soup of powerful new government agencies emerged: the War Production Board (WPB), Office of Price Administration (OPA), the Defense Plant Corporation (DPC), and so on. By the end of the war, Katznelson claims, 'the federal government owned fully 40 per cent of the country's capital assets'.

The book's final section is in some respects the most unusual. Chronologically, it tracks back to the 1940s to sketch the background to the Taft–Hartley Act of 1947, which effectively gutted the Wagner Act. But Katznelson also extends his analysis forwards to the early 1950s, to explain the development of the National Security State. He argues, firstly, that Taft–Hartley produced a pattern of domestic politics characterized by

two features: on the one hand, government intervention in the economy was now restricted exclusively to Keynesian macroeconomic management, while corporatist projects were definitively sidelined; on the other, labour emerged as an interest group rather than a class. This configuration, according to Katznelson, is best understood as 'interest-group pluralism', the gelatinous domestic political scene celebrated by scholars such as David Truman. Yet during the same period, Katznelson contends, a second face of the US state emerged alongside this 'procedural' internal orientation: 'a crusading state that would campaign—virtually without limit—on behalf of liberal democracy'. Institutionally, this outward-looking state was located in a new crop of executive branch agencies that emerged in the late forties and early fifties: the Department of Defense, the CIA, the Strategic Air Command (SAC), and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Ideologically, it was held together by a rhetorical contrast between 'freedom' and 'slavery', as outlined in NSC–68.

Katznelson argues that Southern legislators shaped both the emergence of domestic 'interest-group pluralism', through their support for Taft–Hartley, and the construction of the externally oriented crusading state, by backing the legislation that established the national security apparatus. The South was therefore crucial in creating a state that fused democratic legitimacy with geopolitical toughness: a felicitous combination of force and consent. As he puts it, 'without garrisons, the country would not have had the time or freedom to protect its constitutional practices and address its pressing problems through democratic institutions and norms'. Equally, 'without its representative political order, America's global forcefulness could not have earned the necessary popular suspension of disbelief'. In sum, it was the South that provided the necessary backbone to protect American democracy in a time of troubles, as well as laying the foundations for its pluralist political system.

Such is the argument of *Fear Itself*. How should it be evaluated? Perhaps the place to begin is with the book's central notion, fear. The resonant phrase of the title derives, of course, from Roosevelt's 1933 inauguration speech, but the idea of a pervasive anxiety has long been a recurrent trope in histories of the period: Leuchtenburg referred to a 'winter of despair' gripping the land, while Schlesinger variously evoked a 'contagion of fear', 'a fog of despair' and so on. According to Katznelson, however, 'in these and in a great many other, estimable histories, fear and uncertainty drop out too soon'. In a move perhaps influenced by his teacher Richard Hofstadter—author, after all, of *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*—Katznelson seeks to restore them to a dominating role over the period. Fear is, of course, a subjective attitude, not necessarily linked closely to real historical circumstances. Threats, on the other hand, usually refer to circumstances that may or may not be feared

by the relevant parties. Katznelson never seems to register fully this basic distinction, constantly eliding the two, as in the following formulation:

> Faced with desolation, the New Deal proceeded in an anguish-filled environment. In such a world, the most constant features of American political life continually threatened to become unstable, if not unhinged. The ability of leaders to cope with menacing economic, ideological, and military threats never could seem quite sure.

This framing produces serious analytic problems, because it disconnects fear from any determinant historical circumstances. Katznelson offers no systematic discussion of who was fearful, what they were fearful of, or to what degree these fears were in fact justified. Instead, fear assumes an ethereal quality, specified variously as 'a context . . . for thought and action', a 'pervasive . . . presence', 'an unremitting sense', an 'ambit'. Such conceptual vagueness necessarily results in muddiness—as, for example, when Katznelson treats the fears of Southern blacks and Jim Crow legislators as analytically equivalent, writing that 'the racial structure of the South generated the era's third pervasive fear, a source of worry for both its defenders and its adversaries'.

This indeterminacy is not accidental. Katznelson's blurring of the boundary between fear and threat serves to bolster two highly questionable historical arguments. As we have seen, *Fear Itself* claims that in the 1930s and 40s, American political leaders faced a set of international and domestic threats to liberal democracy that could be confronted only by scuttling the equally serious threat to Southern white supremacy. Racial justice was sacrificed to the higher aim of preserving the constitution, through the construction of the Janus-faced 'procedural' or 'garrison' state. To what extent does the historical record justify these claims? At the very least Katznelson must show that there were real threats to both liberal democracy and to the Southern racial order.

The theme of an authoritarian threat is a constant in Katznelson's book. The United States in 1933 'faced a night sky illuminated by barbarism'; during that decade, the country apparently 'possessed many of the same features that Hannah Arendt was soon to associate with totalitarianism'; Roosevelt was 'confronted' by 'dictatorships' as soon as he took power. For Katznelson, New Deal America was an embattled democracy, and it was 'the South [that] helped the United States respond to the gibes of the dictatorships that liberal democracies could not restore an effective capitalism or manage class conflict'. Perhaps the first point to make is that the US political elite seems not to have viewed the situation in these terms. As Katznelson's own analysis makes clear, American politicians of the time viewed Mussolini as a congenial figure; they studied fascism as a model of organization, and Congress

and the President even awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross to Balbo. Moreover, Roosevelt and Congress—like the leaderships of other Western liberal democracies—actively took steps to cut off the flow of arms to the Spanish loyalists, doing their part in handing the country to Franco. In short, there is very little evidence of any fear of threats from the generic category of 'dictatorships'—probably because fascist regimes, far from threatening US interests, were generally compatible with them until the late 1930s.

Katznelson's portrayal of the Second World War as a struggle to 'advance the well-being of liberal democracy across the globe', and his description of the national security state that emerged in the 1940s as 'a crusading state that would campaign—virtually without limits—on behalf of liberal democracy' also sit oddly with the facts. Constitutional niceties, as the historical record clearly shows, were always subordinated to economic considerations where the two conflicted. Whenever democracy threatened to issue in a serious challenge to private ownership—as in Spain in 1936, Greece in 1945 or Italy in 1948—the US actively undermined it.

The picture *Fear Itself* offers of the geopolitical position of the US at mid-century is thus unpersuasive. Throughout the entire period under discussion, the US never faced any real threat to its mainland. Even the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, which its architect immediately understood to be a disaster for the Empire, was in fact a desperate defensive move prompted by the US oil embargo; the assault was designed to create the conditions for a drive through Southeast Asia to seize raw materials. It is also highly debatable whether Hitler ever had any ambitions to attack the US. Meanwhile nuclear weapons, as it soon enough became clear, could never be used in any strategic way once the US monopoly had been broken. The notion that the US was a liberal democratic citadel under siege is unconvincing.

If the historical record is fairly unequivocal about the absence of international threats to American liberal democracy, what about domestic ones? These are even more nebulous in Katznelson's account. The scene-setting analogy he makes between Balbo, Nikitchenko and Bilbo is a piece of rhetorical legerdemain—giving the impression that Southern politicians constituted a domestic authoritarian threat in some way analogous to Italian fascism and Soviet communism, rather than being a constitutive component of the US power bloc. *Fear Itself* also sketches Charles Lindbergh's absurd flirtations with the fascist powers, and then tries, implausibly, to present the latter-day Southern populism of Huey Long, Strom Thurmond and George Wallace as a political movement with 'a family resemblance to European fascism', again showing the influence of Hofstadter. But Katznelson's only evidence for this similarity is that these men attempted to mobilize poor white farmers, lambasted their political opponents and criticized Wall Street. It is hard to see how any of this amounted to much

of a threat to liberal democracy in the US. The plain fact is that the country lacked virtually all of the preconditions for fascism, not to mention communism. It faced no serious revolutionary threat from the left nor an enormous mass of demobilized war veterans, and had no thwarted imperial ambitions. Perhaps most importantly, the interests of all the major segments of its social elite were deeply interlocked with the preservation, rather than transformation, of existing constitutional relations. Contrary to Katznelson's portrayal of the period, then, there was no discernible threat to liberal democracy in the US from either foreign or domestic sources at any time between 1933 and 1953.

The second main 'threat' Katznelson analyses is one posed to the racial order of the South. The idea that American politics was constrained by a 'Southern cage' is compelling as far as it goes, and Katznelson's articulation of this point, as noted earlier, is valuable. But *Fear Itself* goes a step further, claiming that the rising opposition to the New Deal among Southern politicians was primarily motivated by their desire to defend white rule. For instance, Katznelson maintains that Southern resistance to the inclusion of maids and farm labourers in the Social Security Act, and to their being granted the protections provided for by the Wagner Act, was an attempt to defend Southern 'racial arrangements'. He argues that regional exceptions to the Fair Labor Standards Act 'starkly demonstrated the dangers the New Deal faced when it dared stray beyond the tolerance of the white South, especially when challenges to the racial system, generating white racial anxieties, were beginning to increase'. He interprets Southern opposition to the establishment of a federal United States Employment Service (USES) as the result of apprehension 'about the implications of federal government control over labour policy for race relations'. Of the National Recovery Administration, he states that, 'facing an emerging set of challenges to their racial order, Southern Democrats became increasingly reluctant to empower efforts like the NRA that enhanced economic power and reduced regional autonomy'. More generally, he suggests that Southern representatives were 'able to confine policies about capitalism and labour to the limited options consistent with their racial preferences'.

Katznelson sees his emphasis on the South's racial order as one of his most distinctive contributions. Since the 1930s, he suggests, scholarship has euphemized the region's treatment of blacks by focusing on economic indicators. Describing a 1938 report on Southern poverty, he writes that 'this document was compelling but deeply misleading. Without exception, all its data lumped blacks and whites together. The report made no mention whatever of segregation.' The power of this view would seem to be obvious. Who could dispute the idea that the Dixiecrats were racists, and that this placed a massive constraint on what the New Deal could achieve? However,

Katznelson's claim that the primary motivation for this resistance was support for a specifically *Southern* racial order can be queried on two levels: firstly in its understanding of the South, and secondly in its understanding of the New Deal.

The claim that the American South was and is distinctively racist is one of the great fixed ideas of the coastal intelligentsia. Yet Du Bois, for example, was famously sceptical, remarking in 'The Black North', a series of articles published in the *New York Times* in 1901, that 'the Negro problem is not the sole property of the South'. Indeed, as C. Vann Woodward pointed out in 1955 in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*—a text Martin Luther King called 'the historical bible of the civil-rights movement'—residential segregation and political disenfranchisement, perhaps the central features of Jim Crow, were first developed in the cities of the North in the Jacksonian period, and did not characterize the South until well after the end of Reconstruction. Even lynching was far from a peculiarly Southern practice, as Katznelson's own evidence shows: over seven hundred lynchings—more than a third of the total—took place outside the region between 1900 and 1930. In fact, as two British scholars, Desmond King and Stephen Tuck, have shown in an important 2007 essay in *Past and Present*, between 1889 and 1918 the probability of being lynched was higher in the Western states of Wyoming, Oregon and New Mexico than in any of the states of the former Confederacy. Although Katznelson cites this article and describes it as 'an excellent appraisal of national race relations', he does not seem to register its implications for his claims about the South.

What was distinctive to the South was arguably not its 'racial order' but rather how this structure, which was national in scope, interacted with the region's very specific history and agricultural structure. After the Civil War, sharecropping for cash crops such as cotton and tobacco dominated the American South. At the end of the nineteenth century this agrarian order was threatened by a class-based revolt from below, known as Populism, which created an alliance across racial lines. The Jim Crow system emerged across the South in the late 1890s precisely as a reaction to this threat. As legislation designed to split and weaken Populism, its ultimate targets included poor whites as well as blacks. In fact it is arguable, as Katznelson himself points out, that poll taxes kept more poor whites from voting than blacks.

This history turns out to be highly relevant for understanding the 'threat' that Katznelson invokes. For, as a careful reading of the evidence presented in *Fear Itself* makes clear, labour control, rather than a 'racial preference', was the central reason why Southern legislators began to oppose the New Deal. Katznelson's racial framing obscures this fundamental point, as his treatment of key documents reveals. The first involves remarks entered into the Congressional Record by Ezekiel Gathings, a Representative from

Arkansas, in 1946. Katznelson introduces the evidence by stating that 'what most worried Southern members was that new federal powers after the return of employment offices to the states would change the racial situation'. What Gathings actually said, however, in this postwar debate, was: 'we have not forgotten that our labour has been taken away from the agricultural sections of the country and transplanted in the metropolitan areas, leaving farm houses empty and an inadequate supply of labour to harvest the crops'. There is no mention of race, but there is a very clear concern about labour control.

A second example occurs shortly after this when, in a passage on 1948 discussions of the USES, Katznelson writes the following:

> As the Senate again debated a plan to transfer the administration of unemployment compensation to the Department of Labor in March 1948, the Texas Manufacturers Association and the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce vehemently lobbied to oppose the bill as an assault on the South's ability to discriminate on the basis of race. Titled 'News and Views on Legislation: Action Required if FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] by Default is to be Avoided—This Tells How', the letter, entered into the Congressional Record, argued that 'permanent supervisory control over unemployment compensation and employment service functions of the 48 states' by the Department of Labor 'will mean the subjection of State systems to carrying out, indirectly but nevertheless effectively, FEPC policies through the rule-making and purse-string-control powers of the Secretary of Labor.'

Again, as with the evidence drawn from Gathings, there is actually no mention in the document Katznelson cites of the ability to discriminate on the basis of race, even if this can be indirectly inferred from the expression 'FEPC policies'. What is more obviously at stake is the ability of Southern employers to determine the terms on which they would hire labour. The precise interlocking of race and class in the New Deal South is of course a complex problem that far exceeds the bounds of this review. But beyond the strained interpretation of these two documents, Katznelson's exposition does not warrant the conclusion that a threat to the South's racial order was the primary concern of its politicians. What the documents cited in *Fear Itself* do show is that Southern politicians were acutely aware of the risk that New Deal policies posed to established patterns of control over labour.

Katznelson's claim that the Southern racial order was under threat can be challenged for a further reason: namely, there is no substantial evidence that the Roosevelt administration ever had a serious civil-rights agenda, apart from a couple of lame attempts at passing an anti-lynching law. It is anachronistic to treat the New Deal as in any sense a forerunner of the Civil Rights Movement. This becomes obvious when one examines the legislation at issue: Southerners resisted the Fair Labor Standards Act,

they fought the National Labor Relations Board, and they mobilized with northern Republicans to gut the Wagner Act with Taft–Hartley. In sum, both the recorded statements of Southern politicians explicitly reacting to the legislation of the thirties and forties, and the content of those legislative efforts, indicate that Southern legislators were responding to a threat to the regional pattern of class relations, not to the 'racial order' as such.

Fear Itself, then, fails to demonstrate the two key claims upon which the argument rests: that there were serious threats, both domestic and international, to liberal democracy in the US, and that there were strong challenges to the 'Southern racial order'. But were other kinds of danger present? Domestic and international challenges to the interests of large proprietors were certainly high up on the list. Katznelson recognizes that saving capitalism—and here we might add that the Southern agrarian elite was not fully capitalist—was one of the major self-imposed tasks of the New Deal. But he underestimates how central this imperative was in the identification of both foreign and domestic threats. The issue is perhaps most clear-cut in the geopolitical realm. Here, what is most striking about the US foreign policy stance over the whole period from 1933 to 1953 is the consistent subordination of all other concerns to the drive to secure the international interests of the American dominant class, in both its agrarian and industrial wings. The timing of calls for intervention in the European conflict vividly demonstrates this: as Katznelson himself compellingly describes, the Southern-led interventionist bloc only emerged in 1938 and 1939, as Hitler's domination of the Continent began to threaten the South's tobacco and cotton markets. Neither the collapse of democracy in Spain nor the invasion of Ethiopia elicited much reaction in Washington. Indeed, contrary to Katznelson's account, there seems to have been no demonstrable interest in the defence of democracy as such.

The wartime alliance with the Soviet Union fits very much within the same general pattern. It was a temporary expedient, adopted in the full knowledge that it would expand Stalin's influence in Eastern Europe. Katznelson suggests that this 'tough choice'—a 'necessary compromise' with 'evil', in the author's Reaganite terminology—was made to 'ensure a future for Western democracies'; but this is hard to credit since, to repeat, one of the first operations of the newly established CIA was to subvert a democratic election in Italy. After the war, in any case, the US quickly pivoted back to an aggressive anti-Soviet position that had already been a mainstay of its foreign policy in the 1920s. Katznelson fails to acknowledge this, at times seeming to assign exclusive responsibility for the Cold War to the Soviet Union, without even addressing the question of disagreements over Germany. The USSR, as is well known, wanted a 'Finnish solution', a unified but neutral state in the middle of Europe; but the US insisted instead on

breaking the country apart, thereby setting off the Cold War and arguably actively furthering the Stalinization of Eastern Europe in the process.

None of this points to a foreign policy predominantly shaped by the aim of defending democracy—although liberal democratic regimes were to be preferred, as long as their behaviour conformed to American economic interests. Indeed, it is puzzling to see such obvious points glossed over by a scholar of Katznelson's stature. Much the same can be said of his treatment of US domestic politics. Here, the spectre that haunted the New Deal years was not a pervasive totalitarian menace, but rather the fear of the entire American dominant class of a renewed populist alliance—this time, strengthened by a more combative and mature industrial proletariat than had existed in the 1890s. With the CIO's 1946 organizing drive to the South, known as Operation Dixie, it became a real and present danger. This alarming prospect, not the bogeymen of Huey Long and George Wallace, was the threat the Roosevelt administration actually confronted.

If there is little historical evidence for the two central threats Katznelson identifies—to liberal democracy, and to the Southern racial order—what are the implications for the book's main argument: that maintaining the South's racial order was necessary for the preservation of liberal democracy? Since neither danger was real, it is unconvincing to frame the period in terms of a trade-off between them: there was no exchange of racial justice for liberal democracy, and support for Jim Crow and the national security state was in no sense 'democracy's price'. To argue that it was is to promote the sort of conformist fear-mongering that is the stock-in-trade of the Democratic Party and its various European analogues. The present-day relevance of Katznelson's arguments is clear: just as tacit support for Jim Crow supposedly allowed Roosevelt to hold off the perils of Lindbergh and Long, so, *mutatis mutandis*, Obama's drone programme and violations of civil liberties can be justified as the price to pay for clinging to the White House and holding the Tea Party *enragés* at bay; or, alternatively, unstinting support for European technocracy can be presented as the last bulwark against a (mostly imaginary) rising tide of 'right-wing extremism'. In all of these cases, an inflated threat from the right is invoked to discipline critics on the left, and to dignify the self-serving actions of the ruling elite as necessary sacrifices. *Fear Itself* thus provides a narrative that is complacently self-congratulatory in its overall message that the New Deal saved American democracy, but acceptably critical in its condemnation of the racial compromises that accompanied it.

The New Deal was, of course, based on a compromise, even if not the one Katznelson identifies. Its real foundation was an alliance between the interests of Northeastern manufacturing, the new Western industries that were emerging in the 1930s—which became increasingly important when

Eastern finance temporarily withdrew its support from the White House—and Southern planters. In short, although the role of organized labour and Western farmers should not be discounted, the New Deal—like almost all other major political shifts in the US—was predominantly the expression of changing alliances within the dominant class. To secure the domestic and geopolitical interests of these groups, the Roosevelt administration made a series of accommodations, including turning a blind eye to Jim Crow. But none of this had much to do with saving liberal democracy, although the negative consequences for popular politics in the US would seem hard to overstate. It is time, in any case, to break with the myth that Roosevelt saved American democracy from fascism or totalitarianism, and to reject the enervating politics of fear it embodies.