

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIRTH OF NATIONS. By Phillip C. Jessup. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1974. Pp. xiv, 361. \$14.95.

The post-World War II baby boom in the United States lasted about three years, and its products are now reaching adulthood and taking their places in councils of power throughout the country. In the United Nations the baby boom continues, and critical observers can speculate on the degree of maturity or adulthood of some of the nations that have taken places at the seats of power in international affairs. Membership in the United Nations has increased from 50 countries in 1945 to 138 countries in 1974. Recently, within a period of weeks Portugal granted independence to Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, and the last has already joined the United Nations.

Jessup uses an obstetrical theme in *The Birth of Nations* to tell the stories of the struggles for independence of eleven countries, eight of which were ultimately successful. As a United States representative to the United Nations from 1948 to 1953 and as Ambassador at Large from 1949 to 1953, Jessup was directly involved in the attempts at nationhood by all but one of the described countries. He relies on many unpublished documents, correspondence, and his personal recollections to provide us with information about the efforts that went into the public policies of the United States with regard to each of these attempts, producing something of a behind-the-scenes view of the methods by which emerging nations are midwived or aborted by others. Jessup's stated purpose is to ". . . place on record events never previously related and to make contemporary history accessible to later generations"¹

The midwifery image was prompted, according to Jessup, both by D. W. Griffith's film, "Birth of a Nation,"² and by a laudatory speech given in 1950 by Ben Limb, the Korean Foreign Minister.³ Limb analogized Jessup to a "skilled midwife" who attended the "labor of birth" of the Republic of Korea.⁴ Jessup remains true to his theme, producing chapters entitled "Midwife to Korea," "Indonesia is Born," "The Birth of Israel," and "The Abortive Empire of Boa Dia."

Although the author states that the book is not intended to be a history of United States foreign policy, a history of the countries discussed, or an autobiography, it necessarily includes elements of each. The book reveals, directly and indirectly, the extent to which Truman was committed to the success and effectiveness of the United Nations, a commitment that found favor with Jessup because of his own matching commitment. Truman's decentralized approach to foreign policy, with its heavy reliance on the State Department under

¹ JESSUP, *THE BIRTH OF NATIONS* 3 (1974).

² *Id.*, at 19.

³ *Id.*, at 40.

⁴ *Id.*, at 41.

Secretaries George Marshall and Dean Acheson, comes through in Jessup's descriptions of the cumbersome, time-consuming process by which policy decisions evolved from the conflicting views within that department. Jessup endorses this approach, decrying the tendency of some presidents to centralize control over foreign policy in the White House. This tendency is described as inevitably unproductive because it both cuts off the normal processes of inter-departmental bargaining that occur within the government, upon which foreign countries have come to rely in their dealings with us, and ceases to utilize vast resources of the government in decision making.

What Jessup has attempted is to give the reader an appreciation for the unseen bureaucrats who contributed substantially to foreign policy during the Truman Administration. His only criticism of the structure of the State Department is that the assignment of individual officers to certain countries tends to made them view their countries as clients, causing them to lose perspective and occasionally to over-exaggerate the importance of that country's affairs. This defect apparently proves to be a blessing in Jessup's mind, however, when he describes the bureaucratic infighting that ultimately produces informed decisions, taking into account views by advocates of every interested nation.

Jessup's predilection toward a decentralized State Department proves to be closely related to his strong faith in the United Nations as a forum for reconciling international disputes. Perhaps the two ideas are joined ultimately by a sense of empathy with the full-time professional or by his own experiences at the United Nations; but, whatever the cause, he emphasizes the two throughout the book. For example, in the case of Israel Jessup describes the international humiliation of the United States delegates to the United Nations when President Truman made a decision without first consulting the various appropriate divisions of the State Department. Delegates were in the midst of arguing openly for a mediator to be assigned to Israel when they learned that Truman had minutes earlier recognized the state of Israel.⁵ Similarly, he notes that the United Nations did not become involved in the Boa Dia affair and that the United States failed to obtain its objectives, resulting in what he refers to as an "aborted" empire that has since become the Republic of South Vietnam.⁶

The one country with which Jessup had no personal involvement was Manchukuo, the regime created by Japan in Manchuria in 1932 in defiance of the League of Nations. This country was selected for inclusion in the book apparently to carry out the twin themes of reliance on bureaucracy and the viability of international organizations. The country's "bastardization" is attributed by Jessup to the failure of the United States, among others, to recognize its independence.⁷ Manchukuo was later reclaimed by China after World War II. Throughout the chapter Jessup emphasizes the relationship or lack thereof between the United States and the League of Nations.

⁵ *Id.*, at 279-288.

⁶ *Id.*, at 153-206.

⁷ *Id.*, at 305-334.

It should be emphasized that Jessup does not use *The Birth of Nations* as a vehicle for proselytizing on behalf of the State Department or the United Nations. He claims to be doing nothing more than recording, setting the record straight on what was done by experts before world leaders took over their work and made the results public. Nevertheless, as so many recorders of events before him have found, it is impossible to set down information without disclosing opinions or drawing conclusions. Certainly the information is valuable and the book is worthwhile to the researchers and historians to whom it is ostensibly directed. To the general reader it stands as a challenge to draw some conclusions about both international affairs and the internal organization of our own government. In these days of "shuttle diplomacy" it is important that we know how a decentralized policy-making body operates so that we can form respectable conclusions about the desirability of having foreign policy vested almost exclusively in a single individual upon whose personality other nations depend as they once depended upon the bureaucracy of the State Department and the forum of the United Nations. Jessup has provided us with invaluable information from which to speculate on these matters.

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