what he sees as the follies of modern left-
ist thought, especially its concentration on
identity politics at the expense of class ac-
tion and analysis, and urges his readers to
recognise the existence of potential allies
among the many expressions of the secular
and religious humanist tradition.

He ends with a suggestion for 17 points
of discussion to keep the dialogue alive and
to concentrate people’s minds on what may
be to many, unimaginable, solutions so that
a way may be found to implement them.—
Dr Philip Cass is PJR reviews editor.

Disengagement and idiocy

American Democracy, by Andrew Perrin.
ISBN 978-0-7456622-3-9

Perrin’s study of American democ-
   racy is as exhausting as it is exhaustive
in its explanation of how it is supposed to
work. It begins by stating what has become
a commonplace fear in many democra-
cies, that people have become cynical and
distrusting of the democratic system and
that apathy and political disengagement
are widespread. Only multi-millionaires
backed by capitalist corporations with the
deepest pockets can afford to run for office
in the United States and nobody in power
seems to be in any hurry to do anything
about it.

American democracy was a first attempt
to fashion a form of representative govern-
ment that has been rendered unfit for purpose
in recent decades by the greed, corruption
and stupidity of elected officials and the dis-
engagement of large sections of the public.

To outsiders it often seems that the
American parties are simply two groups of
capitalists, with the Democrats being only
left of centre by the merest whisker and the
Republicans apparently consisting of raving
lunatics. It is difficult to believe that any of
the 24 percent of Republicans who Perrin
claims think that Obama is the Antichrist
should be allowed anywhere near a ballot
box, let alone a gun.

Such extremes of disengagement and
idiocy are dangerous precisely because they
silence the voices of those who need to be
heard the most. (Perrin says that African
Americans would probably be far better
off under a Parliamentary system). Such
disengagement from the democratic process
is dangerous, he argues, for the people only
become a political force when they become
a polity, a public with a sense of purpose and power. Citing Bergin (2011) he argues that priority needs to be given to

... preventing radical disengagement ... and to promote political attention and activity among those segments of the population most likely to suffer when disengaged. (p. 185)

Perrin’s book is a useful reminder that democracy can only survive when citizens are fully involved.—Dr Philip Cass

Media representations of global cities


IN Media and the City Myria Georgiou claims ‘global cities’ such as London aren’t just examples of diversity and difference, but are also responsible for creating those very qualities. However, it’s never entirely clear how this is actually achieved.

She suggests the way we feel about urban centres is influenced by the media representations of them we consume as well as our own individual imaginings of what the spaces we inhabit mean to us. If there’s a unifying element to her discussions of ethnic media, the urban poor, street art, bohemian hipsters, protest movements and rioters, then it would be an intentional critique of neoliberal capitalism and an idealised celebration of anything that resembles counterhegemonic resistance to it.

Georgiou does convincingly convey the tensions inherent in any environment where significant disparities between affluence and influence exist; but in prose so dense that as we approach the 20th anniversary of the Sokal hoax it might be timely to reflect on what those who use critical cultural approaches have learned since.

This reviewer would be the first to admit his cognitive abilities might not be up to following the book’s sophisticated arguments. Yet any work which so quickly dismisses the role and relevance of one of the world’s premiere financial districts while lauding the alternative middle-class lifestyles parodied in Portlandia, perhaps deserves to be questioned.—Steve Ellmers is a Unitec tutor.