

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

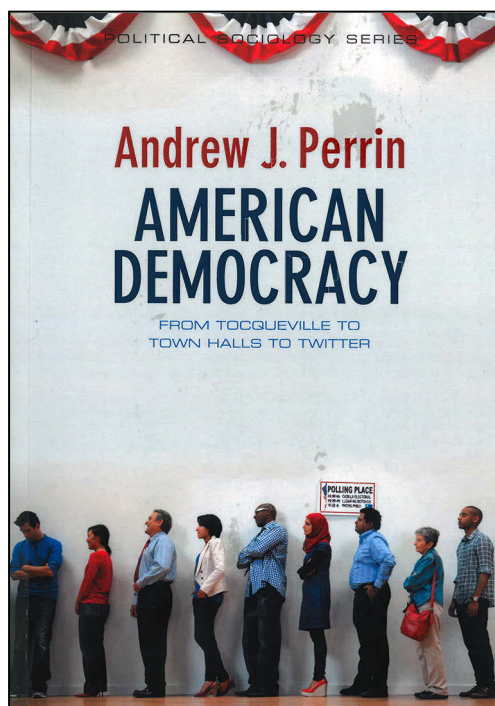
He ends with a suggestion for 17 points of discussion to keep the dialogue alive and to concentrate people's minds on what may be to many, unimaginable, solutions so that a way may be found to implement them.—*Dr Philip Cass is PJR reviews editor.*

Disengagement and idiocy

American Democracy, by Andrew Perrin.
Cambridge: Polity Press. 2014, 228pp.
ISBN 978-0-7456622-32-9

PERRIN'S study of American democracy 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 democracies, 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 government that has been rendered unfit for purpose in recent decades by the greed, corruption and stupidity of elected officials and the disengagement 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)

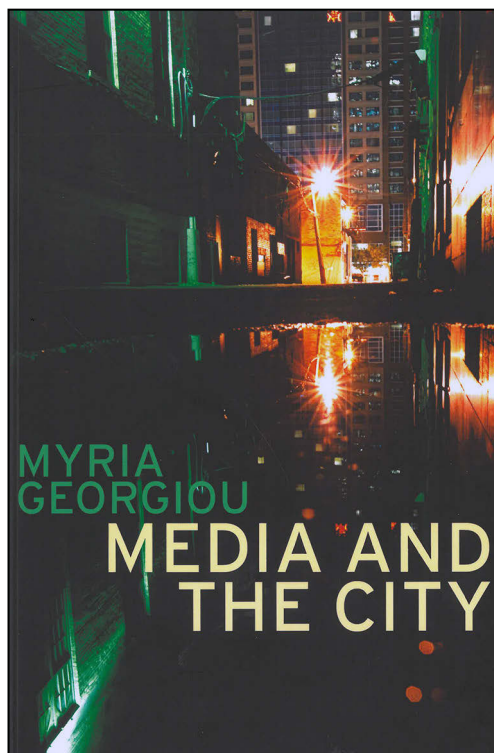
Perrin's book is a useful reminder that democracy can only survive when citizens are fully involved.—*Dr Philip Cass*

Media representations of global cities

Media and the City, by Myria Georgiou. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, 184pp. ISBN: 978-0-7456-4855-2

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.*