

likely to choose colleges closer to home for financial reasons. Radford's interviews elaborate on this finding by revealing that the low-SES valedictorians were more likely to feel that they would have to travel home more frequently because of the turmoil their families faced. Another example of an important insight her interview data yield is that public high schools are doing very little to counteract informational inequalities produced by social class. Radford's valedictorians report getting information on postsecondary options targeted to average students and less relevant to them.

On the other hand, Radford's analysis occasionally comes up against the limits of her methods. Since she is getting retrospective accounts from students (and not parents), she cannot get reliable data on the financial situations of the students when they were in high school. Thus, she uses the valedictorians' subjective class identities to place them in the "low-SES," "mid-SES," and "high-SES" categories (as opposed to the traditional method of using reports of parental income, education, and occupation), although she convincingly argues this is not a serious problem. More important, because she does not have data on the respondents' family finances or on the financial aid packages they would be eligible for if they applied, Radford rightfully does not attempt to make definitive claims that the parents of her low- and mid-SES valedictorians were ignorant of the true feasibility of their child attending a most selective college.

On the whole, though, the book makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge on class inequalities in college destinations. While scholars have recognized that class affects educational transitions even when holding academic performance constant, to my knowledge no one has specifically examined how class affects academically elite students' postsecondary transitions. Radford's book starkly shows these effects exist and are large, informs us of how they happen, and points to ways policy makers can counteract them to increase the representation of high-achieving, low-SES students in selective colleges. Selective colleges in the United States have the mission of developing the talents of the most academically successful students, but Radford's book demonstrates they are failing to fulfill it, making her findings all the more powerful and necessary.

*Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives.* By Amy J. Binder and Kate Wood. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013. Pp. xx+399. \$29.95.

Jeremy Freese  
*Northwestern University*

*Classy.* The word never actually appears in Amy Binder and Kate Wood's book about conservatism on college campuses, *Becoming Right*. Yet I kept thinking about the word as I read the book. Binder and Wood began inter-

viewing students during the Bush administration, which brought us “compassionate conservatism.” A similar feat of alliteration would be to say that *Becoming Right* is a book about class conservatism.

We use “classy” to refer to tasteful, dignified, graceful behavior. Binder and Wood present examples of student activities that most sociologists reading the book will recognize as not merely divergent from their own political views, but also as not classy. Hosting an Affirmative Action Bake Sale in which black students are offered discounts on cupcakes is not classy conservatism. Neither is inviting other students to chase you and calling it Catch an Illegal Alien Day. Nor is walking around wearing empty gun holsters for a week to protest not being able to carry guns on campus.

Readers might regard these actions as tasteless, needlessly hurtful, even juvenile. Binder and Wood interview other conservative students who feel the same way, calling the acts “needlessly belligerent and unthoughtful” (p. 219) and as “not as thinking” (p. 218) as the way they feel politics on campus should be conducted. Here, though, we get to the root of classiness, as of course the “class” in “classy” comes from the idea that good taste and grace are traits that distinguish the elites of society from the mewling masses.

Binder and Wood’s fieldwork compares two different universities. These are referred to only as “Eastern Elite” and “Western Flagship” due to an unfortunate overreach by Elite’s IRB (p. 14). At least one conservative blogger claims to have identified these schools as Harvard University and University of Colorado at Boulder. Whether correct or not, these identities give you the right idea for the differences in stature and student composition that the book describes. One school is the standard-bearer of class in the United States, while the other is a perfectly good public university that also happens to regularly appear on lists of our nation’s top party schools.

Binder and Wood say relatively little about differences in the actual ideological positions held by conservatives at the two schools. Rather, they concentrate on articulating and trying to explain the profound differences they observe in political style. Students at Western Flagship engage in the sorts of tacky provocations described above, while students at Eastern Elite regard such stunts as “well, *beneath* them” (p. 213). The students at Eastern Elite instead concentrate on expressing their conservatism in outlets like the student newspaper and adding to their resumes by working on electoral campaigns. Western Flagship conservatives revel in provoking liberals, while Eastern Elite Republicans hold a popular annual bowling night together with the school’s Democrats (p. 221).

Hosting an Affirmative Action Bake Sale is a scorched-earth interpersonal act, not a gesture you direct toward folks you occasionally bowl with. Binder and Wood highlight many differences between the two campuses toward explaining the divergence in style. Western Flagship students mostly live off campus as juniors and seniors, and any longer-term aspirations they have in politics are consonant with a combatant mentality. In contrast, Eastern Elite students see themselves first as part of their esteemed university

community, which will eventually be running the world someday, as allies and as friendly opponents. The Elite students have both a stronger sense of collegiate community and a stronger sense of a shared future in which their aspirations are not well served by a reputation and Internet trail of incivility.

The book describes within-campus variability in these styles with an admirable complexity that I cannot recount here, but still many differences do seem to turn on a fairly straightforward axis of civility versus combativeness. In this respect, the book resonates with a familiar tension between actors who seek to work within the system toward change and those who favor more dramatic methods. Different here perhaps is the strong sense of students at Elite that they will be “the system” someday, and how it is unclear the extent to which Flagship stunts are about seeking change so much as achieving solidarity through expressing subversion in a college-town environment they experience as slanted against them. Of course, one will also see in the book the seeds of the more basic internal power struggle today between the conservatism of the *Wall Street Journal* and that of talk radio.

What you do not see much of in *Becoming Right* is actual “becoming.” From the interviews, the ideological stance of students seems mostly formed by the time they step on campus, such that Binder and Wood characterize change during college as more of a “fine-tuning” of what sort of conservative these people are (p. 39). The authors contend their study demonstrates that “political actors . . . are *made*, not born” (p. 9), but the book is less clear on how much students develop style over the college years versus straightforwardly adapt to the prevailing culture. Sure, I suspect the authors are probably right that there is something distinctly formative about college, but that is not the same as saying the data in *Becoming Right* are especially persuasive to this end. Binder and Wood spend some time contemplating whether a Western Flagship transfer to Eastern Elite could get his new peers to hold an Affirmative Action Bake Sale (p. 317), but “becoming” is really more whether the Flagship student’s experience out west would cause him to want to try, versus seeing that sort of confrontation as something one leaves behind as part of upward mobility into the cultural elite.

Consequently, *Becoming Right* is less compelling as a study of political socialization than it is as a study of the contrasting conservative cultures that exist on our nation’s college campuses, as well as of the larger institutions and organizations in which these cultures are embedded. In these latter respects, however, the book is masterfully constructed and extensive in its articulation of the styles of young conservatives and how these diverge into political classes that may share many political beliefs but nevertheless seem worlds apart.