

**Sarah Palin. *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith, and Flag.*** London: HarperCollins, 2010. ISBN 0062010964. 304 pages.

For many Western Europeans that have not lived in the United States, it is often difficult to understand or relate to the nation's significant percentage of Americans that identify with or advocate conservative right-wing politics. What is considered to be either "conservative" or "right wing" here is by and large seen as either more centrist or even left-leaning by people like Sarah Palin and her followers. Being born and raised for most of my life in the USA, I am intimately familiar with many American cultures and sub-cultures, which includes what has recently been called the Tea Party Movement (though the beliefs this movement is pushing is nothing new in the USA) that Palin passionately endorses. When people here find out that I am an American during political conversations, on many amusing occasions I am asked the same question, usually with faces painted with genuine feelings of both confusion and mild disgust, "*What is with this Sarah Palin?*"

Thus in one respect I am most grateful to Palin for becoming an author, for now I can point people in the direction of her books rather than try and explain just *what it is* about her, as much as I do enjoy such a challenge. Having read her 2<sup>nd</sup> book, *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith, and Flag*, released in November of last year, I can honestly say that I am not in the least bit shocked or surprised by the contents—it merely further confirmed what I already know. However for those who know little or nothing about the American right or Sarah Palin, reading this book will probably shock and/or surprise you. It is very possible that if you read this book, you will sigh and shake your head, perhaps even shake it with both hands. This is to be expected. This book was not written for you, nor do I think it was written for anyone other than the choir to which Palin loves to preach, to the extent that *America by Heart* epitomizes the proverb.

What is depressing, however—and not just that I am forced to include such a cliché proverb to describe this book—is that the intended audiences that read this book, I am certain most of which will not bother to dig into a more careful and critical analysis of Palin's bold and numerous claims. Tea Party Americans will probably do what Sarah Palin did with the many controversial issues raised in the text, which is to take bare assertions at face value, and accept them as the truth. A possible explanation of such behavior may be found in the culture of the majority of Tea Party people, who are mostly white, male, and wealthier than the general public a

*New York Times* poll found out in April of last year. This is the intended audience, Palin knows it, and the result probably has a good amount of rich, white, men in the USA nodding their heads, saying “Amen!”, and feeling validated in their beliefs after nearly 300 pages of Palin telling them exactly what they want to hear.

Rich, white, American men themselves have become somewhat of a cliché when discussing American culture, but not without good reason. As those who have been firmly in control for the greater part of the history of the USA, their impact has been extremely significant. A deeper evaluation of the lasting effects this dominant group of people had on the nation as a whole is helpful to understanding Palin, who is perhaps their biggest cheerleaders (or “Mama Grizzly” as she likes to be called).

The USA as a capitalist nation—made possible in no small part by the demographic in question—has instilled in many Americans the urge to consume. What would capitalism be without mass consumption? In doing so, great efforts have been made to make consumption as fast and as easy as possible. Indeed, the USA is the birthplace of McDonalds and Ford and many other corporations founded by rich, white, American men that also happened to almost always be Christian. From here, is it really so hard to see how the two doctrines of Capitalism and Christianity started to influence each other, and at the same time influence American culture?

Enter Sarah Palin and the new era of beliefs and politics made fast and easy, built upon the assumptions that both Capitalism and Christianity are both superior and correct. To Palin, there is no heated debate, or so it seems after reading her book—there is no real meaningful dialog or any profound attempts at addressing counter arguments. Palin simply asserts over and over again the truth of Capitalism and Christianity (with a much heavier focus on Christianity), in a style that, while easy to read, struck me very much as a glorified and much lengthier blog or Facebook entry. One particularly relevant example of this is when Palin claims that “so many countries of Western Europe” have traded their “freedom” for “cradle-to-grave government security.” She does not elaborate on what freedoms have been traded or even supply the reader with a definition of freedom, but obviously that is not necessary when your target audience already agrees with you at face value.

When Palin is not offering bare assertions herself—another example being her claim that the Bible is “the most consequential words for human freedom ever written” just ten pages into the book—she often employs rich, white, Christian men such as Republican presidents Calvin Coolidge and Ronald Reagan to do it for her. Coolidge for example, asserts in the quotation Palin included that “no advance, no

progress” can be made beyond the propositions of the US Declaration of Independence, which would make such a document an article of absolute truth. You simply must accept that the Bible and the founding documents of the USA (i.e. the Declaration of Independence and Constitution) are right and true all of the time and forever.

The questions that are begged are too lengthy to address here, and needless to say anyone that is familiar with logical fallacies will soon loose count of Palin’s straw men, *argumentum ad populum*, and red herrings. It is almost as though no one has ever sat Palin down and forced her to support and thoroughly explain her beliefs, and it is certainly not the case that there is no one willing and/or able to challenge her to such an endeavor.

Yet almost as surely as you can count on the sun coming up tomorrow, you can count on Palin never publicly having her book or her beliefs authentically challenged. To do so would undermine her and her supporter’s formula of fast and easy acceptance of the assumptions that are the foundation of their beliefs, which has become an ingrained part of their culture. Never mind that one could even use one of their own fundamental texts, the Bible, *against* some of their most important beliefs. For example, Romans 13:6-7 instructing the reader to obey the government and pay taxes, yet Palin many times calls for smaller government and lower taxes. What about when Jesus told his believers in Mathew 6:6 to pray in private? Palin makes no mention of this in chapter eight, aptly titled “I Hear America Praying” where she lauds President George W. Bush for the use of his faith and prayer during his administration. I will not even dig into Jesus’ pacifism vs. Palin’s warmongering and gun toting (the book even includes color pictures of Palin shooting guns).

No, Palin will stick to her beliefs, however inconsistent or irrational they may be, and without any prospect of questioning them in sight. *America by Heart* is a testament to this, and also to this aspect which influences a large part of American culture, the conservative right wing. *That* is what is with Sarah Palin.

*Cesar Valdez*