Clarion Review

General

Good Intentions
Bob Zeidman
Swiss Creek Publications
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Three Stars (out of Five)

"You work for the good of all," Winston Jones, lead character of Bob Zeidman's political satire, chides a sidewalk rabble-rouser who demands the government lower taxes, cut social programs, and allow people to "keep the loots of [their] favor." Jones, an official government "repudiator," continues the lesson: "You work to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves. You work to uphold the enlightened virtues expounded by our foreparents in the great Constitution of the United States."

In *Good Intentions*, Zeidman has Winston espouse similar noble notions regarding the education and support of groups that have been "oppressed, disenfranchised, bullied or ignored," and then has him do a complete 180-degree turn once he is seduced and suborned by an ultra-conservative underground clique known ironically as the "Freedman Group." The Freedmen's Bureau, created by Congress in the last months of the Civil War in 1865, was tasked with helping resettle, educate, and find jobs for former slaves and war refugees. In Zeidman's universe, these are free-market capitalists who oppose government regulation and intervention and believe people should be "allowed" to fail and to suffer the consequences of such failure unassisted.

As with many works of satire, the author posits a future where "good intentions" have been taken to extremes. In Zeidman's America, a nanny-state government outlaws trans fats (creating a Prohibition-style black market in fatty foods), restricts the use and sale of sugar, and so heavily regulates caffeine that consumers must either get a prescription for it or do shady illegal drug deals with "caffeinators."

Some of Zeidman's characters are very well written, notably the snobbish, manipulative, fabulously wealthy, and very privileged Mitt Romney-esque Rom (for "Romulus") Automatic, whose Automatic Grillers mega-corporation is nothing more than a front for dealing in trans

fats. Rom and Winston have a long history going back to their childhood, and it is Rom and his secretive committee who tap Winston to become the next president of the United States. Rom, oddly enough, is not a member of the Freedman Group but is, in fact, their arch-enemy. The tension in the novel comes from how Rom and the Group's leaders, among them the svelte seductress Alisa Rosenbaum, vie for the soul of Winston Jones in their competing quests for control of the White House and, thus, the country.

Zeidman intentionally takes things beyond their logical conclusion into the realm of the absurd in order to make his point on a number of issues, including immigration, gun control, government regulation, and social programs. Sometimes this is an effective strategy, but not always. His section on "Femlamism," in particular, is all but guaranteed to offend both Muslims and women. In addition, a lengthy paean to the Tea Party, its remnants long since driven underground in Zeidman's world, gives away the author's personal agenda in a way that resembles the kind of rant Winston repudiates. This is in stark contrast to the satire Zeidman employs to present his other views.

Good Intentions is a quick read. It does indeed have its moments, and Zeidman has crafted a few good lines that will bring a smirk to the lips of most readers. The book will undoubtedly offend some, but it also may please others, and that is the risk every political satirist from Aristophanes to Voltaire to Stephen Colbert knowingly takes. Zeidman is not of the caliber of any of the aforementioned creative talents, but he has made a commendable effort here.

Mark McLaughlin