

in a grain of sand." On the other hand, a "place-based" approach to study means that he has to address subjects across a very wide spectrum of specialties. The problem is that he may not be as "accurate" as some specialists demand, while at the same time providing more analysis and details than general readers may want. Here is the real difficulty of doing work like this that is neither heavily documented academic scholarship nor glibly written narrative. Burke addresses both a public and an academic audience, but the result sometimes leaves readers wanting to know his sources.

At its best, writing like Burke's continues the landscape writing tradition exemplified by John Brinkerhoff Jackson and Britain's W. G. Hoskins and makes concrete the theoretical insights of environmental historians such as William Cronon. Burke's volume, while not reaching those heights, is a good book—despite its annoying need for a proofreader—that we can hope will inspire similar close looks at the landscape we live in and have created.

*The Rise of the Agricultural Welfare State: Institutions and Interest Group Power in the United States, France, and Japan*, by Adam D. Sheingate. Princeton Studies in American Politics. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. xii, 279 pp. Tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.

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Adam Sheingate is out to "test propositions" (xi). For two decades, political scientists have been holding forth on the failure of federal governmental institutions to effectively address national social and economic problems. Many have concluded that American economic and social problems persist because of an absence of "state capacity," or a national bureaucratic apparatus so enfeebled that decisive government action is impossible. Since government institutions are weak, some argue, interest groups have undue influence over the development of federal policy. Sheingate tests these notions in the context of farm policy in the United States, France, and Japan.

In Sheingate's view, American farm policy is an exception to these propositions. He concludes that the federal machinery that manages farm programs in the United States is quite sophisticated and that agricultural interest groups do not control the policy-making process. Such conclusions constitute an "important challenge to how we un-

derstand the impact of institutions on interest group power and government capacity" (5). They validate the theories of the old "pluralist school" of political science, which predicted that government policy would be a product of a contest between competing interest groups, not dictated by a small interest group that had "captured" a government agency.

After a review of the scholarly debate over state theory, Sheingate marches through the growth of federal institutions that have attempted, to various degrees, to shape American agriculture. As is common with political scientists' work, no primary research is in evidence. Sheingate relies entirely on the work of historians, most of which proceeded largely unaware of its future theoretical implications for political scientists. One would feel better about Sheingate's conclusions if he had conducted more primary research for his conclusions and relied less on parsing the existing works in a field that, to be charitable, is underdeveloped. As a result of his reliance on secondary material, Sheingate misses some important policy developments. He sees late nineteenth-century agricultural policies, for example, as largely "promotional," centered on the research and information distribution programs within the newly created Department of Agriculture. He misses a burgeoning regulatory movement spearheaded by farmers that sought to intervene to manage transportation markets and support government efforts to limit industrial concentration by invoking the newly adopted antitrust statutes. He overlooks these developments in part because the institutional history of agriculture has not focused on them.

Despite his reliance on an underworked field of study, Sheingate ultimately persuades, leaving readers with a greater faith in theories of political pluralism. Contrary to those who regard the political process as managed and controlled by elites and interest groups, Sheingate concludes that "farm groups *tried and failed* to capture the agricultural policy process" (178). With policy making divided between the White House and two houses of Congress and with different parties frequently in control of different branches, a dominant agricultural constituency would have been hard-pressed to successfully pursue a coherent policy agenda even if such a dominant agricultural constituency existed, which it did not. Farmers were divided along commodity lines, into regional interests, into organizations that often supported certain parties (the Farm Bureau Republicans, the Farmers' Union Democrats), and into differing income groups. The disunity among farmers would have been even more evident to Sheingate if he had recognized the emergence of the rebellious National Farmers Organization, another oversight that reflects Sheingate's reliance on secondary research

which, until recent years, has failed to take the NFO seriously. The political disorganization of farmers became worse when the number of farmers declined, which diminished their political power even more. Soon nonagricultural constituencies such as consumers, environmentalists, and taxpayers were interfering in the agricultural policy-making process.

The disorganization of the farm constituency and the rise of new interest groups ultimately led to the retrenchment of farm programs. Sheingate quotes the work of other political scientists for the rather obvious proposition that "when interest groups are highly fragmented . . . they are less able to defend programs" (26). The result was the adoption of the "Freedom to Farm" legislation in 1996, when both farm prices and budget deficits were high, conditions that legitimated the concerns of nonfarm groups and justified farm policy retrenchment. In the end, Sheingate's brief for the continued validity of pluralist political theories convinces. He thus undermines the cynical theories of the "capture school" at a time when we can't afford to be cynical about our political institutions.

*A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*, by Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard. Development of Western Resources Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. ix, 219 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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A society does well to critique its dominant cultural wisdom. Alternative experiences and visions, rather than the well-guarded traditions of the establishment, have often been the more adaptive resources of a culture. In *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*, Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard demonstrate how lessons learned from the history of alternative agricultural ideas and practices in twentieth-century America sustain a wider range of options for the twenty-first century.

Focusing on alternative agricultural innovations, Beeman and Pritchard argue that the hegemonic discourse of technologically driven decision making was ever countered by alternatives that gained considerable momentum in the twentieth century. The authors make significant methodological contributions to the study of agricultural history by defining the cultural and historical context in which alternative ideas and practices emerged, diverged, and converged.

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