

*A History of Missouri, Volume 4, 1875 to 1919*, by Lawrence O. Christensen and Gary R. Kremer. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997. x, 286 pp. Bibliographical essay, index. \$34.95 cloth.

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Writing in the early 1920s, famed novelist Hamlin Garland insisted that he had seen more change during the sixty or so years of his life than had occurred in all the years between Julius Caesar and Abraham Lincoln. Even without resort to such literary license, it is still true that trying to capture the history of even a single state's evolution during those decades of bewildering change between the Civil War and World War I is a daunting task, particularly if one has to meet that challenge in fewer than 250 pages of text. To their credit, the authors have managed to produce a highly readable history of Missouri from 1875 to 1919 that is enlivened with a wealth of anecdotal material and conveys a strong sense of the variety of life experiences in the state. By maintaining a reasonably tight focus on the economic modernization of the state and on the evolving political response to that historical process, they have fashioned a conceptual framework that lends a high degree of thematic unity to what is essentially the story of amazing transformation.

Of all the adaptations undergone by Missourians during those crucial decades, none was more dramatic or important than their altered perceptions and expectations of state government. Reacting vigorously against what many regarded as the excesses of the state's Reconstruction government, Missouri voters overwhelmingly ratified a new constitution in 1875 that significantly broadened individual liberties by carefully circumscribing the power and functions of state government. With its hands effectively tied, state government was able to do little to control or mitigate the impact of the socio-economic modernization wrought by the railroads and other large corporations. Largely unimpeded by public direction or regulation, rampaging economic development primarily benefited developers, boosters, and entrepreneurs at the expense of farmers and workers, whose share of the resultant benefits shrank appreciably due to increased farm debt, declining wages, periodic unemployment, tight money, and massive deflation. Ironically, most of those disadvantaged by modernization initially reacted by becoming even more opposed to government activism, since they saw government once again as the ally of their oppressors. Not until the horrible depression of 1893-1897, and the limited success of the Populists, did most Missourians begin to look to political activism and government

intervention. At first sporadic and uncoordinated, the myriad demands for government action were united only by a growing consensus that large numbers of Missourians were the victims of "the trusts," and they could only improve their lot by regaining control of state government. As the twentieth century dawned, this burgeoning consensus gradually metamorphosed into the state's particular version of the Progressive Era, most frequently designated as "the Missouri Idea."

Like its analogs in Wisconsin, Iowa, New Jersey, and Oregon, the Missouri Idea was anything but a coherent ideology espoused and implemented by a definable movement. Even translated into the programs of the state's two most celebrated Progressive Era governors, the "moral democracy" agenda of Joseph W. Folk and the "New Nationalism" of Herbert W. Hadley were characterized by almost as many differences as continuities. Along with Hadley's successor, Elliott W. Major, these governors constructed a modern, activist state government, poles apart from that envisioned by the drafters of the 1875 constitution. The imperatives imposed by mobilization to meet the challenges of World War I guaranteed that the process of political modernization could never be reversed.

The authors generally succeed in telling their story in a coherent and interesting fashion, yet their finished product will prove to be ultimately disappointing to serious scholars, either of Missouri history or of the midwestern Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Unfortunately, the book lacks detailed documentation, whether in the form of footnotes, endnotes, or backnotes. The only clue provided for those seeking more intensive investigation is a topically arranged bibliographical essay and occasional attributions in the text itself, hardly sufficient to provide other researchers with an adequate road-map. Moreover, there is little concerted effort to provide much basis for comparison between Missouri and surrounding states, or to place the commonwealth's experience within the context of a broader regional or national framework that might enhance comprehension. With respect to the Progressive Era, for example, the authors select but one interpretive paradigm from among the many extant, even though they acknowledge that its requirements fit only Folk's background, motivations, and contributions, begging the question of what explains the rest of Missouri's reformist surge. The absence of those vital elements detracts seriously from what otherwise could have been a work of substantial significance.

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