

### Book Reviews

two strong impressions: first, that this decline in popular participation in politics was unfortunate and, second, that the changing campaign strategies he describes were largely responsible for bringing about the decline. Yet he proves neither of these points. Indeed, the author himself frequently gives passing notice to many other factors like immigration, urbanization, modernizing media, uninspiring candidates, and alternative forms of entertainment that surely had as great if not much greater influence on voter behavior than campaign strategies.

McGerr won a Yale University prize for the doctoral dissertation on which this book is based. But, though it is well written, clear, and based on exhaustive research, it is not very interesting. One problem is that it is almost too detailed and documented. Rather than being content with straightforward declarative statements, McGerr reiterates and reemphasizes—and includes lengthy and repetitive quotations—to hammer home not very controversial or questionable points. More than that, the book suffers from its focus. A study of mechanisms for shaping and encouraging political behavior is far less riveting than revelations about the rascals and honorable gentlemen who ran for and won office, or even, for that matter, than investigations of the many issues on which they campaigned or the beliefs they held about current affairs and future prospects for the United States. One can only hope that this obviously talented and industrious historian will turn his attention to a more compelling topic in the future.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

JOHN DOBSON

*The Hoosier Politician: Officeholding and Political Culture in Indiana, 1896–1920*, by Philip R. Vandermeer. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. xii, 256 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 cloth.

*The Hoosier Politician* is the first attempt by an American historian to unify many of the concerns of the “new” political historians and to apply both their quantitative techniques and theoretical interests to state-level politics. The major purpose of the book is not to give a narrative account of Indiana politics between 1896 and 1920, but to describe Indiana’s political culture—the changing institutions, political behavior, and values of Hoosiers and their politicians during the era. In attempting to describe a political culture at any particular time, the new political historian is much indebted to other social scientists, particularly political scientists and sociologists, for their theoretical contributions and quantitative techniques. In *The Hoosier Politician* Vandermeer draws heavily on political science theory and largely

bases his study on a quantitative analysis of the 1,127 members of the state legislature during the period. This new approach to the study of political culture proves successful, for it adds dimensions to the work that would have been lost in studies depending solely on the analysis of election data.

As Vandermeer sees it, four broad areas of interest either define or relate to the political culture of the time. These are generally presented in the four substantive chapters of the work, and they represent the major concerns that the new political historians have about this period. The first is the electoral system, including several subtopics, the most significant of which is the political realignment of the 1890s. Several scholars have modified the claim originally made by V. O. Key, Jr., that the election of 1896 was a realigning election, to suggest that the *decade* of the 1890s was a realigning decade. Vandermeer extends the time for the famous realignment even further. The Republicans actually registered a very slow, almost imperceptible increase in their electoral percentages from 1888 until 1904. The Democrats then revived until Wilson's fateful declaration of war in 1917, at which time the GOP staged its really dramatic growth due to the wholesale defection of German-Americans. Vandermeer concludes, "the changes in Indiana were not sudden or complete, nor were the new patterns so durable as suggested by the literature."

Vandermeer also elaborates on Richard Jensen's useful description of the changes in campaigning style. Although he establishes that at the beginning of the period nearly 90 percent of Hoosier males voted, he estimates that only 5 percent actively participated in politics. During the pre-ninety's "Army" style days, activists toured the state, gave innumerable speeches, marched in parades, and comprised a dedicated party cadre which genuinely believed that their political party was one of the most important elements in their lives. Slowly, Vandermeer shows, the style of campaigning changed as new technological innovations created a new "merchandising" style. The increasing appearance of national candidates negated the effectiveness of the village-based politician-orator. The increasing urbanization of the state brought forth the largely urban-based representative of special interest groups. This "functional" basis of politics slowly supplanted the small-town representative of multiple groups and made economic interest rather than religious orientation the basis of Indiana politics.

The second portion of *The Hoosier Politician* is a collective biography of the 1,127 legislators who served between 1896 and 1920. In this section Vandermeer largely confirms others' research, but because of the size of his group and his knowledge of the larger political culture he is able to add some new and significant detail to the picture of early

twentieth century lower level politicians. For example, he successfully establishes a difference in occupational background between Republicans and Democrats. Although both parties recruited their leaders from upper social and economic groups, the GOP leadership tended to be bankers or successful businessmen while the Democrats represented less institutionalized interests such as real estate or insurance salesmen. Republicans, in general, represented the most dynamic elements in the state, while the Democrats represented those who defended a more decentralized, less powerful concept of government.

In his discussion of the religious and ethnic dimensions of Indiana politics Vandermeer adds both rich detail and some new theory to the historiography of the period. The detail presented is the most thorough explanation available about the specific religious groups that supported each party. The theory that religious evangelicals really hoped to purify the earth shifts the emphasis in ethno-cultural historical interpretation from social action as a method to achieve salvation to social action as a means to establish God's kingdom on earth. This theological difference added urgency to the evangelical movement. For evangelicals and many Republican leaders, religion and politics should combine for this noble goal.

The final portion of *The Hoosier Politician* deals with careers of the state representatives and the structure of the Indiana General Assembly in which they served. The political system Vandermeer describes is vastly different from the one we know today. Officeholding was of short duration, averaging only slightly over one term. The legislature was crudely structured, with party and personal contacts serving as a substitute for the more formal organization of the later twentieth century.

*The Hoosier Politician* is a pathbreaking work. It successfully combines many of the concerns and methodologies of the political scientist with those of the historian. This can be seen both by the theoretical sophistication of its themes and the impressive command of the secondary literature in relevant fields. The primary research introduces sources previously ignored by all but a few scholars. It will deservedly serve as a model for similar studies in different states for some time to come.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—KANSAS CITY

STANLEY B. PARSONS

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.