

### Book Reviews

Technology has transformed the American farm and has dramatically changed the role of the farmer in American life and thought. An essay tracing these developments would have added significantly to the importance of the book.

A second deficiency in the book is the failure of the various essays to make a serious effort to compare and contrast the earlier periods of crisis with the current period of agricultural distress. The point is made that farmers have experienced crises before, but differences between previous crises and the crisis of the 1980s are largely ignored. As a result, the historical perspective promised by the book is frequently lacking. Each of the essays has merit, but they deal with such disparate topics that the collection lacks unity and focus.

The causes of the current farm crisis may be, as this book suggests, part of a recurring pattern that has dominated the development of American agriculture since the late nineteenth century, but that should not obscure the fact that there are profound differences between the earlier periods of crisis and the 1980s. The current farm crisis, like the crises in the nineteenth century and the 1930s, has resulted in a major debate about the future of American agriculture. The social, political, and cultural context of that debate, however, has changed almost beyond recognition since Franklin D. Roosevelt ushered in the New Deal some fifty years ago. The farm population has been reduced to a small minority; the political influence that farmers routinely expected can no longer be counted upon; and the farmer has become a highly capitalized businessman in search of profit. Modernization has robbed American farmers of the imagery and ideology that has defined their place in American society since the founding of the Republic.

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*Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey*, by Carlos A. Schwantes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985. xii, 321 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, index. \$22.95 cloth.

The depression of 1893 has long attracted the interest of historians. In recent years scholars have stressed the impact of that depression on the nation's politics, economy, and foreign relations. They have emphasized broad developments rather than the particular episodes that figured prominently in the works of earlier students, such as the bitter Pullman strike and railroad boycott; the dramatic "Cross of Gold" speech and whistle-stop presidential campaign of William Jennings Bryan; and the desperate marches on Washington, D.C., of groups of the unemployed, most famously that led by Jacob Coxey. Carlos

Schwantes returns to the last of these subjects, initially treated in 1929 by Donald L. McMurry in *Coxey's Army: A Study of the Industrial Army Movement of 1894*.

In form as well as content, Schwantes's *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* represents a throwback to the earlier genre of historical writing in that it is, as the author notes, largely presented as narrative. Schwantes, professor of history at Walla Walla College and author of *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (1979), possesses talents essential to his undertaking: he has an eye for relevant detail; he writes well; and he is sensitive to the drama of his subject. He draws heavily on newspapers—142 of them, from 98 cities in 31 states and territories and the District of Columbia. Indeed, Schwantes views the Coxey movement, which was covered closely by the press, not only as “a chapter in the history of American reform,” but as one in the “history of journalism” as well (x-xi).

Coxey's Army and related protest groups owed much to the collaboration of Jacob Coxey, an Ohio businessman and Greenbacker, and Carl Browne, a California jack-of-many-trades, agitator, and promoter, who had met in 1893 at the convention of the Bimetallic League in Chicago. Coxey advocated that the federal government issue non-interest-bearing bonds to finance the construction of roads and other public works in order to alleviate the distress of the unemployed. Browne suggested marches on Washington, D.C., to deliver Coxey's message in person.

Coxey's Army, or The Commonweal of Christ, as Browne and Coxey termed it, was but the first, albeit the most famous, of a number of “industrial armies” that set out for the nation's capital during 1894. From Massillon, Ohio, Coxey's Army marched and rode on canal boats to reach Washington, D.C., where Coxey was thwarted in his attempt to speak at the Capitol on May Day. His followers subsequently languished. Most “armies” mobilized far to the west of Ohio, in the Rocky Mountains and along the Pacific Coast. (Schwantes concludes that on a per capita basis Washington spawned more Coxeyites than any other state.) Of necessity, the westerners made their way east by rail and water, as well as on foot. Although Schwantes's initial references to “legions” (ix, x) and “large armies” (11) strike me as exaggerations, his narrative of the western groups captures the essence of their odysseys. Along the way the protesters received invaluable support from labor organizations and the People's (Populist) party. Within localities, officials and citizens generally assisted the Coxeyites, if only to see them on their way. The groups ran afoul of the law when they stole trains, an

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act that led to the intervention of federal authorities. Still, accidents were to claim more casualties than clashes with government forces.

A western group that formed in San Francisco and came under the command of Charles T. Kelley in Oakland spent some five weeks in Iowa. Kelley's men entered the state at Council Bluffs, where Jack London joined them, then marched to Des Moines, where President B. O. Aylesworth of Drake University presided at a sympathy meeting and compiled data collected by Drake students on the marchers' occupations, politics, religions, and nationalities. The contingent next sailed down the Des Moines River to Keokuk on boats made by members before heading for St. Louis.

By vividly recreating the marches of the industrial armies during the grim spring of 1894, Professor Schwantes contributes to our understanding of a protest movement of poignant interest. Still, the book disappoints on some counts. At points, text and dust jacket ("His narrative . . . shows how Coxeyism presaged the New Deal relief and recovery programs") claim too much for Coxeyism. To be sure, Schwantes shows caution in his analytic final chapter, "Coxeyism in Perspective," but overall, narration outweighs analysis. One especially misses an explicit comparison of the meaning and efficacy of protest marches by diverse laborers with alternative forms of organized protest, such as unions based in laborers' workplaces or political activity based in workers' neighborhoods. Schwantes sheds more light on westerners in the Coxeyite movement than did McMurry, its earlier chronicler, but he largely ignores the admittedly small northeastern protest forces, which, according to McMurry, drafted "the most radical and comprehensive program presented by any of the industrial armies" (228). In other respects—organization, coverage of incidents, and at some points even language—Schwantes's book reads more like an updating, fifty-six years later, of McMurry's study, rather than a rethinking of Coxeyism.

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*The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928*, by Michael E. McGerr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. xi, 307 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

In *The Decline of Popular Politics* Michael McGerr provides a detailed description of how political campaign strategies and styles changed in the North after the Civil War. His story covers an evolution through three overlapping strategies for inducing citizens to vote: spectacular, educational, and advertising. As they had before the war, both major

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