

The central issues in this debate seem to be lurking beneath the surface of Ritter's evenhanded analysis. Given the current majority of inflation hawks on the Federal Reserve, a simpler and more direct explanation of how creditors profit from deflation and debtors experience some relief from moderate inflation would have been welcome. The success of the current banking regime in convincing a nation of chronic debtors that even a hint of moderate inflation threatens the "new economy" is one of the greatest changes in political culture of the past 50 years. That there is no outcry in the popular media when Greenspan says that the economy is growing too fast and that too many people are employed and that he must raise interest rates to cool things down and "ease the pressure in the labor market" would have been unthinkable in the 1890s (or 1960s).

Ritter sets out a historical epoch well known to many, a time when average citizens actively debated the right of bankers to regulate the economy free from government influence. Although she focuses almost exclusively on leaders, we know that this debate flourished in small-town saloons, country debating societies, political clubs, union halls, and local chapters of farm organizations. Back in that day, ordinary folk challenged the leisure class over monetary policy and the right to profit off their wealth. Ritter calls this broad coalition of people *antimonopolists* and rightly sees it as a farmer-labor movement with roots that extended back into the early part of the nineteenth century. She links antimonopolism to producerism, or the belief that those who make something tangible for a living (farmers and workers) are the true heroes of the economy, and that bankers are parasites.

Ritter sees the antimonopolist tradition suffering a substantial defeat in 1896, and she is right. Still, it would be interesting to hear her thoughts on the recent defeat of Microsoft on antitrust charges or her unguarded reflections on the bipartisan love affair with Alan Greenspan. Her book will serve those not familiar with the antimonopoly tradition well, and it will ultimately stir the blood of those who still embrace that tradition.

Cooperative Commonwealth: Co-ops in Rural Minnesota, 1859-1939, by Steven J. Keillor. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000. xiii, 458 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00.

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Mention the word *cooperative* to Americans today and you get a variety of responses. To the farm community, a cooperative might be known for providing insurance, utilities, produce storage, or marketing. To urban citizens, co-ops furnish affordable housing or daily consumer needs. Most people would be acquainted with the concept, even if many would be confused about the exact meaning of the term. George E. Vincent, president of the University of Minnesota in 1916, said, "I can think of no word with which people juggle more unsuccessfully than the word co-operation. How easily and smoothly it can be used" (261). As Steven J. Keillor makes clear in this exceptional volume on the cooperative movement, this ambiguity is not new, and it has serious ramifications for our understanding of U.S. history.

Historians have long been aware of the importance of grassroots cooperatives in our nation's past. Americans repeatedly have availed themselves of collective organizations to respond to changing political, economic, and social circumstances. Rural communities, in particular, relied on cooperation as a means of economic protection but also to express their unique perspectives concerning the spread of industrial capitalism. The mere mention of the profound events that draw upon rural cooperation—the Farmers' Alliance, Populism, the Farm-Labor Party, modern consumerism, and "movement culture"—hints at the profound connections between these affiliations and the expansive themes of American history. Driven by economic, political, social, religious, ethnic, and intergenerational tensions and opportunities, the study of rural cooperatives *is* the study of America.

Keillor examines and explains the broader implications of cooperation through a detailed analysis of the state of Minnesota. Farmers in this "cooperative commonwealth" turned to cooperation more forcefully and successfully than in almost any other state. By 1919, "Minnesota farmers sold 44 percent of their output through cooperatives . . . [and] had more cooperatives than any other state—390 grain elevators, 711 creameries, more than 400 livestock shipping associations, 110 stores, 900 rural telephone companies, and 150 fire insurance mutuals" (283–84). The local connection between Minnesota's commercial farmers and their attempts to democratically control the marketplace gave life to these varied organizations.

Critics might claim that the text is overly focused on Minnesota, omitting much of the regional activity in neighboring Iowa, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas, but Keillor strongly supports his methodology by linking cooperation to the broader themes of rural history. The rise and fall of the cooperative movement, not state or local history, paces his narrative. As a result, Keillor is able to explore the intricate dilemmas

posed for American farmers by commercial agriculture. Cooperatives unveil the paradoxical relationship between free-market, communal, and democratic values that can be obscured by more personal narratives. Taking an ingenious twist on Alfred D. Chandler's "administrative coordination" of the marketplace, Keillor describes the "democratic coordination" of cooperatives that sustained their ardent economic communalism. Moreover, Keillor develops and deepens our appreciation for the growing tensions between rural and urban life. He demonstrates how cooperatives allowed Minnesota's farmers, and by extension almost all other farmers, to *avoid* resolute commitments between subsistence or commercial agriculture. To Keillor, the "exaggerated dichotomy" made by some historians between a market and moral economy "reveals an anti-rural bias—the underlying assumption being that farmers could not have defined their own market rules and formed their own definition of commercial agriculture" (340). Well written, thoroughly researched, and persuasively argued, Keillor's text firmly rejects this conclusion. It would be a mistake for scholars to dismiss his contribution as merely a local history of cooperation.

In other ways, too, *Cooperative Commonwealth* adds to our awareness of both Minnesota and rural history. One theme running throughout the text is that of rural continuity. Farmers actively sought to merge traditional knowledge and practices with new insights. The study of farm technologies, for example, demonstrates how commercial planters could be both traditionalists *and* entrepreneurs when choosing dairy or milling implements. From a broader perspective, Keillor shows how continuity in cooperation linked rural associations such as the Grange with the later Farmers' Alliance in ways that scholars rarely acknowledge. Grange purchasing and marketing cooperatives provided "well-worn grooves" that subsequent rural associations found difficult to avoid (150). Continuity also had a disarming effect on rural radicals intent on wresting economic control from those with capital. Minnesotans certainly aired their grievances and sought greater democratic coordination, but, as a result of the well-developed cooperative model, there was "little evidence of radicalization" in the countryside during the turbulent 1890s (167).

Equally interesting is Keillor's treatment of the changes to the cooperative movement during the Progressive era. Ostensibly an ally of cooperation, progressive politicians and, most notably, educators at the University of Minnesota subtly yet profoundly shifted the emphasis away from the democratic control of the market at the local level to bureaucratic solutions that championed academic expertise, legal scholarship, and efficiency. Radical efforts to maintain or establish local

authority over the marketplace were ignored in favor of new, more rational methods of production and distribution. While the county agent, the university, and the Republican Party gained legitimacy through the traditional cooperatives, they also bled much of the intensity from the concept by the 1910s. Keillor believes that "when experts sold rural school consolidation to farmers as 'co-operation,' they showed an ability to make it a testimonial for almost any proposal" (263). As a result, much of the economic reform initiated in the 1920s and 1930s lacked a firm connection to the historical precedents of rural cooperation.

Finally, Keillor also demonstrates how ethnicity and changing market conditions affected, but did not control, rural Minnesotans' behavior. The large percentage of Scandinavian immigrants in the region, and the "Old Stock" biases against them, certainly helped the fortitude of some local cooperatives. Still, in no case was it clear that ethnicity had any lasting effect on the nature or direction of cooperation. Keillor concludes that "ethnicity facilitated cooperation, but the gradual assimilation [of ethnic families] . . . did not bring a cooperative crisis after World War I" (341). Similarly, regional farmers' collective traditions facilitated their adroit shift from wheat and corn production to dairying. Although Progressive advocates of the more influential cooperatives, such as the Land O'Lakes Creameries, largely forgot this legacy, its roots penetrated deep into the region's local history.

In sum, Steven Keillor has written an important and, one can hope, influential book. In keeping with positive trends in recent rural studies—including works by Hal Barron, Victoria Woeste, and Sally McMurry, to name only a few—Keillor clarifies and connects local rural behavior and associations in ways that animate the larger debates of rural history. By compelling us to resolve the meaning of "cooperatives" anew, Keillor has illuminated new paths toward a more elegant understanding of rural America.

We Have Come to Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880–1960, edited by Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth I. Perry. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. xiv, 205 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

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Until recently, neither women's historians nor political historians had shown much interest in women's partisan activities. It has been widely assumed that women played no significant role in party organizations

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