

Book Reviews

Michael D. Gibson, book review editor

Representative Democracy: Public Policy and Midwestern Legislatures in the Late Nineteenth Century, by Ballard C. Campbell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980. pp. v-xi, 260. Index. \$20.00.

And the new political history marches on. In *Representative Democracy*, Ballard C. Campbell, associate professor of history at Northeastern University, extends the methods and interests of the new school of political historians to the shaping of public policy in three late nineteenth-century midwestern state legislatures—Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Although his principal focus is on legislators rather than voters, Campbell describes a political system which shares many of the characteristics delineated in recent studies of popular voting behavior in the Middle West in the last one-third of the nineteenth century.

Representative Democracy is a welcome addition to late nineteenth-century political history for several reasons. One is the author's recognition of the primary role of state government in American life prior to the advent of the New Deal. A second merit of the study is its emphasis on the shaping of public policy, an aspect of political history which few historians study. Campbell's most important contribution, however, may be the methodological sophistication with which he attempts to untangle the skein of late nineteenth-century state legislative voting behavior.

In both its methodological sophistication and its use of individual-level data, Campbell's volume is reminiscent of Melvyn Hammarberg's *The Indiana Voter: The Historical Dynamics of Party Allegiance in the 1870s* (1977). Unlike most practitioners of the new political history, Hammarberg and Campbell use both biographical data for individuals and demographic data for electoral units in their reconstructions of late nineteenth-century midwestern political life. Although *Representative Democracy* shares the conclusions of earlier studies in the new political history regarding the close relationship between ethnicity and political party preferences in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is

especially close to the *The Indiana Voter*. Much like Hammarberg, whose concern was with individual voting behavior, Campbell concludes that political party affiliation was an important independent variable in the shaping of public policy in the 998 roll calls he studied on 550 contested bills and resolutions in the fifteen Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin legislatures of 1886 through 1895.

At least in these three state legislatures, the two major parties were not Tweedledum and Tweedledee in the decade preceding the first McKinley-Bryan election. Although the relationship between party affiliation and legislative voting behavior varied from issue to issue, and from state to state, legislators' party affiliation explained a much larger share of their voting behavior than any other variable. In many cases party affiliation explained more of the variances in legislative voting behavior than all other factors combined.

Among the five policy spheres (community mores, commerce, fiscal policy, government, and public services) identified by Campbell, the relationship between party and legislators' voting behavior was especially strong in the area of mores. Questions regarding alcoholic beverages and education were the most bitterly contested of the mores issues. On such questions, Republican legislators in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin consistently voted for a larger governmental role, e. g., the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, state government requirements that only English be used as the language of instruction in public school classrooms, and that all persons in specified age groups attend school. Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin Democrats, on the other hand, consistently supported "personal liberty," or at least local option, in these and similar life-style areas. In these midwestern state legislatures, as in Congress, the Republican party was the party of "big government" in the late nineteenth century, the Democratic party the party of "little government."

The two major parties differed on some of the most highly contested state legislative issues of 1886 to 1895 partly because they appealed to and were composed of such different groups of Illini, Hawkeyes, and Badgers. Most Democrats among the 1375 state representatives studied by Campbell were Irish Catholics, German Catholics, German Lutherans, or Continental Protestants (non-Lutheran Protestants of northern European descent), as were most residents in the legislative districts electing Democrats. A large majority of Republican representatives, on the other hand, were British Protestants, Yankees (Americans of British ancestry whose parents had been born in the United States, usually in the North), or Scandinavians. Republican legislators most often represented Yankee or Scandinavian districts.

The values of Catholics, German-Americans, and Continental Protestants, particularly on such issues as alcoholic beverages and education, were those of Democratic state legislators and party platforms. British Protestants, Yankees, and Scandinavians, however, chose positions which found expression by Republican state representatives and party documents.

Unlike party and ethnicity, neither size of community nor occupation correlated strongly with the legislative voting behavior of representatives in the three midwestern states. Campbell found little evidence of rural-urban conflict in these governmental bodies. Rural Democratic legislators, for example, opposed prohibition much more often than Republicans representing urban constituencies. The explanation lies in the distribution of ethnic groups in the three states. Both the groups which favored a regulatory, paternalistic state and those preferring the largest possible degree of personal liberty (cultural pluralism) resided in both rural and urban areas. As a result, each major party elected representatives in both types of population areas, creating legislatures in which party contributed far more than demography to policy making.

In addition to careful descriptions and analyses of policy making in the three states, Campbell adds considerably to our knowledge of other aspects of late nineteenth-century political life. One chapter, "Electing Representatives," suggests how much less we know about the aspect of 1980s than of 1880s or 1890s political life, at least in Iowa, the state this reviewer knows best. The first eleven pages of "The Lawmakers and Lawmaking" will probably tell current residents of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin considerably more about the personal characteristics of their state legislators of 1886 to 1895 than they know about those of either the 1970s or the 1980s.

Although students of Iowa political history can learn much from *Representative Democracy* about politics in the Hawkeye state in the 1880s and 1890s, knowledgeable readers will probably wince when they read repeatedly that Horace Boise [sic] served as the state's governor following the elections of 1889 and 1891. Campbell employed the same spelling each time he mentioned Boies in an earlier study, "Did Democracy Work? Prohibition in Late Nineteenth Century Iowa: A Test Case," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Summer 1977): 87-116.

In addition to the spelling of Horace Boies's name, Campbell encountered at least one other problem in *Representative Democracy*, i. e., the difficulty of writing attractive prose when an author uses, and describes for his readers, methodologies as sophisticated as those employed in this volume. In such chapters as "Electing Representatives"

and "The Lawmakers and Lawmaking," where less complex methods of analysis are employed, the author's presentation reads smoothly. In later chapters, however, *Representative Democracy*, much like *The Indiana Voter*, demands considerably more of the reader. A thirteen-page "Appendix on Sources and Notes" relieves the text of some of the burden of describing Campbell's methods and the problems inherent in their use.

In an attempt to prevent any further widening of the gulf between professional historians and the largest possible reading public, Campbell may wish to consider making greater use of such appendices in future works, thereby encouraging as many students of American history as possible to avail themselves of the products of the new political history. With the publication of *Representative Democracy*, as well as of his several journal articles of the 1970s, Ballard Campbell has advanced the development of the new political history and has established himself as one of its leading advocates.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

THOMAS G. RYAN

Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West, by Carl Abbott. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981. pp. xii, 266. Appendices, bibliography, index. \$27.50.

The idea of the American West as the locus of the sturdy yeoman farmer, resident in the "Garden of the World," is being revised by historians of the urban frontier, especially for the period up to 1830 by Richard Wade in *The Urban Frontier, 1790-1830*, (1959). And now Carl Abbott has continued, in a narrower thematic context, the story of the rise of the middle western city up to 1860 with careful case studies of the economic growth of Cincinnati, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Galena, Illinois. Since Wade found so much of early middle western urban development derivative from eastern experience it is interesting that Abbott discovers vigorous local initiative central in the conceptualization and implementation of growth in these frontier cities. The focus of his comparative studies is the relation of boosterism, the process by which business and civic leaders assessed the situation they faced, tried to define an economic program to be carried out by public and private action, and publicized that assessment and program to local and national audiences," to development. Because the exuberant rhetoric which often characterized this publicity has established itself in our folklore as the empty puffery of parochial Chambers of Commerce and archetypal small-town Babbits, it is a bit surprising that Abbott finds boosterism,

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.