

Book Reviews

Michael D. Gibson, Book Review Editor

Illinois: A Bicentennial History, by Richard J. Jensen. New York: W. W. Norton/American Association for State and Local History, 1978. pp. xix, 179. Maps, notes, illustrations, suggestions for further reading, index. \$9.95.

Richard Jensen's contribution to *The States and the Nation* is certain to be one of the most controversial volumes of the series. It is a stimulating, exasperating book.

Jensen commendably asserts from the outset that his main concern is with the lives of ordinary Illinoisians, and his method is to make use of the social scientists' concept of modernization. He maintains that modernization is a more revealing interpretive strategy than such usual ones as those based on class, urbanization, or industrialization. The history of Illinois he believes to be "a story of conflict and accommodation" between traditionalists (Southern and later Irish and black population stocks, given to localism, masculine supremacy, extreme family orientation and fatalistic resistance to change) and modernizers (Yankees and some North Europeans, with faith in reason and equal rights for all, upwardly mobile, and possessed of a strong sense of efficacy).

The applications of the modernization approach by American historians have previously been to studies of communities or institutions with colonial or eighteenth-century roots, within

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which radical modernizing transformations can readily be documented. It seems debatable that the tactic is so generally amenable to the study of at least the early years of a new community such as Illinois. Unlike earlier users of the approach, Jensen does not deal in this book with the modernization of a traditional community, but with conflict among immigrants to a newly-settled area, who came from communities that were allegedly still traditional or already modern. The dichotomization that results is excessive, at least in the 60 pages that Jensen devotes to the ante-bellum period, so much so that the action he depicts there is carried out by largely anonymous forces of "traditionalists" and "modernizers." One looks almost in vain for the names of very many individual Illinoisians; and such luminaries as Edwards, Ford and Coles are not even listed in the index.

Some of the difficulties that Jensen gets into as a result are serious, in his dealings with both economic and political subjects. In his scheme, for instance, modernizing attitudes must be prerequisite to the development of a modern economic structure. Jensen rightly credits Yankee "modernizers" with peopling the prairies and beginning the cultivation there of the bumper grain crops that made Illinois a banner agricultural producer; but with less validity does he attribute to them the impetus that drove the state into a market economy. In fact, Southerners and Jacksonians ("traditionalists" in his eyes) had already promoted the Illinois and Michigan Canal and anticipated the railroad systems that were necessary to accomplish this. Likewise the Jacksonian Democrats, unequivocally old-fashioned to Jensen, might, as he says, have been "traditional" in some of their policies, but they were not in all of them, and indisputably they were "modernizers" in organization compared to the anti-party Whigs. This is one of the important reasons why they dominated the state until the Civil War.

Yet the modernization scheme seems to work for Jensen for the Civil War period and beyond, historiographical terrain with which he is quite familiar. The Republican Party, its policies and its constituency can certainly be treated credibly as "modernizing," and the Democratic Party until very recent years, given its membership (often recruited from genuinely tra-

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ditional foreign immigrant stock after the Civil War) can well belong in the opposite category. Jensen's characterization of the Democratic New Deal's antimodern nature, in its assumptions of an end to economic growth and of more or less perpetual hard times, is a brilliant insight.

But perhaps the greatest utility of a modernization approach for post-Civil War Illinois historians is that it allows a satisfying conceptual treatment of the state as a whole, thereby avoiding the schizophrenia so common in earlier renditions of the state's history, which have been unable to unify disparate accounts of what went on in Chicago and downstate. Jensen reveals this to be false dichotomy; for example he notes that in twentieth-century Illinois modern downstate farmers have many attitudes in common with Chicago businessmen; indeed he asserts that agriculture is the most "progressive" element of the Illinois economy. Likewise, unionized blue-collar workers can qualify as among the most traditional of the contemporary population.

Some "traditionalists" among historians will consider this book outrageous; it is certainly audacious, and it stimulates the reader to a rather constant dialogue with the author. On balance, in spite of its questionable aspects, it is probably the most interesting book-length treatment of Illinois's history since Governor Ford's was published over a century ago.

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Minnesota: A Bicentennial History, by William E. Lass. New York: W. W. Norton/American Association for State and Local History, 1978. pp. xi, 224. Maps, notes, illustrations, suggestions for further reading, index. \$9.95.

Minnesota is large, diversified, and vigorous.

In the North Star State are fertile fields of grain, cattle pens, turkey farms, lakes sparkling with cobalt blue, ore mines sending across Lake Superior precious metal to foundries producing iron and steel. There are some stands of virgin pine and many

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