

Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War; A Decade of Frontier Politics, by Morton M. Rosenberg. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1972. pp. ix, 262. \$8.95.

HISTORIANS HAVE established two general approaches to the study of state and local history. The first isolates the state and explains "local" conditions only in terms of internal causes and consequences. This method is insular, too often chauvinistic, and of little value in understanding the history of an event or a group of people. The second approach substitutes national issues in lieu of local motives. This national emphasis assumes that people in the 1850s were concerned with the same issues as are retrospective historians in the 1970s. In this study of Iowa's political restructuring during the decade preceding America's civil war, Morton Rosenberg attempts, with considerable success, to avoid both the parochialism of the local approach and the overgeneralized assumptions of the national orientation. The result is an old-fashioned political narrative of conventions, platforms, and campaigns, in which local socio-economic conditions and Hawkeye personalities were significant, if not determining, factors.

The most notable political development in Iowa during the last antebellum decade was the decline of the Democratic party and the organization of dissident groups—Whigs, nativists, Free-Soilers, prohibitionists, and Kansas-Nebraska Bill opponents—into a new and eventually dominant state Republican party. This does not mean that Iowans merely reacted to national issues. Land grants, homesteads, and the organization of Nebraska Territory were all very personal issues to mid-nineteenth century Hawkeye pioneers, and prairie Democrats could not successfully disassociate themselves from the locally unpopular record of their national party. But, if unpopular national policies disturbed the dominance of Iowa's Democracy, a combination of local issues instituted its decline, and an astute Republican leadership manipulated the issues to initiate one hundred years of Democratic impotency. Professor Rosenberg makes it clear that, although men did not always control events, they did use those events positively and creatively to achieve their own ends, no matter how personal

or short-sighted those ends may now appear.

Unfortunately, the utility of the author's approach is weakened by the shallowness of his analysis. Although the first chapter purportedly examines demographic conditions, the analysis is weak and tentative and is seldom used in the succeeding narrative. Each election is considered separately, no voting patterns or trends are established, and newspaper proselytizing and party platforms are given too much credence. Too often, as when considering the ethnic vote in the 1860 presidential election, the author relies almost entirely upon secondary works. Most unfortunate of all in a narrative of this kind, the story is dull. Personalities like James W. Grimes and Samuel J. Kirkwood are seldom more interesting than a page number, and even the furious Kirkwood-Dodge campaign of 1859 becomes humdrum. As it now stands, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War* is adequate and occasionally insightful. One cannot but wish, however, that the author had demanded more of himself, both in analysis and in presentation.

—David Crosson

Bright Eyes—The Story of Susette La Flesche, An Omaha Indian (McGraw-Hill, 1974, \$8.95), by Dorothy Clarke Wilson, is a biography of the daughter of a French-Indian who in the mid-1800s became the last chief of the Omahas. Bright Eyes was sent to a mission school and later attended an eastern school before returning to the reservation to share her knowledge as a teacher. Soon the young girl was involved in a fight for the rights of her tribe and a kindred tribe, the Poncas—she testified before Senate committees, addressed vast audiences and was feted in the White House. Later she lectured in England and fought for Indian citizenship.

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