

Both sides of the international boundary are presented in fairly equal portions. Although this line, marked by little iron monuments at one-mile intervals, seemed to have little significance to the settlers at the time, the differences gained importance during the decades that followed. Complaints against the railroads, the banks, the elevators, and government monetary policies were quite consistent, but the cultural experiences of settlers on the two sides of the "line" differed somewhat. To Montana, besides the native-born Americans, came many northern Europeans, many of whom had previous frontier experience in the Midwest. In Canada, the new arrivals were from England and eastern Canada, as well as all parts of the United States and Europe. The frontier experience north of the boundary was therefore tempered by the expectations of Canadians and English.

Settling the Canadian West is a complementary addition to the existing scholarship on this regional settlement process. While earlier efforts concentrated on the governmental and political activities that played a large part in this exodus, more recent scholarship tends to study the lives of the people involved and the parts played by men and women in community building. Other historians have studied other areas of the northern Great Plains that were settled at the same time. The bibliography will prove to be valuable to any reader who desires to learn more about the process of community building in the West and the development of this particular region. Bennett and Kohl's presentation and evaluation of what real folks have recorded about their own experiences and those of their ancestors is a very readable volume for both the specialist and the casual student of western lore.

The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics, by Peter H. Argersinger. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. x, 302 pp. Notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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Peter Argersinger's *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism* is a collection of articles he has written during the past quarter-century about the American Populist movement. Most of the articles deal with an important and seldom explored dimension of Populist history—the limitations placed on political radicalism by American political institutions. In this concern, Argersinger is unique among historians of Populism and political historians in general. The work has implications far beyond Populism: it can be viewed as a study of how the American political

system—for better or for worse—dampens political radicalism and skews political discourse toward the middle of the ideological spectrum.

Argersinger's thesis is effectively presented in the first chapter, which was written expressly for this volume and skillfully ties the somewhat disparate articles into a coherent whole. Some of the articles simply recount the details of a particular election, but most deal more analytically with the Populists' confrontation with the American political system. The author is primarily concerned with the structural obstacles that work against radical ideas or politics. At the heart of the problem, he believes, stands the very foundation of representative democracy, the single-member legislative district and plurality of votes needed to elect that single member. In a political culture that historically prized party loyalty, Populists or other fledgling radical groups faced an almost insurmountable numerical obstacle to placing a significant number of their followers in legislative bodies. Even in those few cases where they might pose a threat, conservative legislators could often exclude them by creative gerrymandering. The solution to this problem is not proposed in this work, but is seen in an article Argersinger published several years ago in the *Journal of American History*. In it he argues for proportional representation, a solution for this problem but a Pandora's box for others.

When blocked from power at least partially by structural realities, Populists faced their greatest dilemma. This problem was expressed by the political scientist V. O. Key when he pondered the choices possible for a third party in America. If it cannot win outright, then the next choice has to be joining with another party to throw the rascals out. For the Populists in Iowa and the plains states, this meant joining or fusing with the conservative and often hated Democrats. Almost from their inception Populists had argued endlessly over the wisdom of fusion with the Democrats because they realized that fusion meant compromising their principles for electoral success. When they finally solved the dilemma and fused, they split the movement and the main body of Populists became little more than Silver Democrats. The system, however, continued to work against them. As soon as fusion became the troubled path to reform, the Republicans set up new legal barriers, the most shameless of which were the anti-fusion laws enacted by Republican legislators in Iowa and the plains states. Under these laws, candidates could appear on a ballot under only one party label. This made Populist-Democrat fusion of candidates impossible unless one party gave up its electoral identity. When Populists fused with the Democrats and were listed in the Democratic column on the ballot, the Populists lost their identity and by the turn of the century had lost most of their ideology and party organization.

Even more effective than the anti-fusion laws in limiting Populist electoral success was one of the most hallowed of American electoral reforms, the Australian or secret ballot. Before this "reform," parties supplied ballots to the voters, who usually responded by voting the straight ticket. After the reform, with governmental units supplying the ballots, economy often demanded that a party win a certain percentage of the vote in a previous election before being placed on the ballot. If this was impossible, a petition had to be circulated. If the petition required ten percent of the voters, then it became both expensive and time-consuming, a real problem for poor farmers tied down by the daily chores on the farm. Even should any Populists be elected to a legislative body, they found that unless they controlled that body the political system gave them little power. In an era of strict party government, they found that they were ignored in debate, their bills never reached the floor, and they spent their hours attending meetings of the most obscure committees.

Argersinger makes a good case for his argument. His research is a model for historians. He uses a wide variety of sources and methods, from archival records to roll call analysis, and his thesis is important for Populist historiography and political science. There are, however, a few points about which I have some disagreements. I would have liked to have seen an even more systematic presentation of the restrictive laws. He dwells too much on Iowa and the Dakotas and does not include the "West" as promised in the title. More personally, I found him to be a real follower of the pure, "mid-road" Populist ideal. As a successful biographer of William Peffer, a leading mid-road Kansan, he seems to harbor the belief that if the Populists had not sold out to the opportunistic fusionists, they might have had a real impact on American society. This is difficult to imagine when one considers their very limited electoral success. They probably were lucky to have had the influence John D. Hicks claims for them, as the intellectual forebears of much of the regulatory legislation of the twentieth century, another system that didn't work too well.

Norwegian Yankee: Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923, by Millard L. Gieske and Steven J. Keillor. Biographical Series. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1995. xv, 426 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 cloth.

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Norwegian Yankee is a full biography of Knute Nelson, an enduring Scandinavian-American politician in Minnesota. The subtitle's refer-

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