

Book Reviews

Antebellum Politics in Tennessee, by Paul H. Bergeron. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982. xxi, 208 pp. Bibliographical essay, notes, index. \$22.00 cloth.

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since Angus Campbell and his associates published *The American Voter*. That book surveyed Eisenhower-era voters and found little public sophistication in understanding issues or the positions taken by candidates. A voter's identification with a political party, Campbell discovered, represented the most important characteristic of American electoral politics. Political parties, earlier thought of as mere patronage-dispensing machines, suddenly took on an importance in their own right.

Historians of American politics reacted to *The American Voter* in two ways. Some maintained that voters of earlier periods, such as the 1850s, showed far more understanding of issues than did Campbell's voters in the 1950s. These historians continued to write political history based on changing issues. Other historians accepted Campbell's premises and began to study the organization of parties and the identification of voters with parties. The two-party system of Democrats and Whigs before the Civil War has attracted the bulk of recent scholarly research on party formation.

Paul Bergeron has written a book on the two-party system in antebellum Tennessee that focuses on the connection of issues with party development. Bergeron never maintains that Tennessee voters particularly cared for issues, but he does argue that issues counted in mobilizing party workers to their tasks. The Democrats and Whigs contested elections in Tennessee for better than a dozen years on a near-equal footing. These elections were marked by dramatic campaigns and high voter turnouts. The parties themselves did their own preelection canvassing by identifying the preferences of each voter in the state. The key to victory in Tennessee elections was for a party to identify its potential supporters, stir their passions, and get them to vote on election day.

Tennessee Whigs, as in other southern states, built their party between 1836 and 1840 through opposition to Martin Van Buren. Bergeron offers a good description of the revolt within the Tennessee Democracy against Andrew Jackson's attempt to hand pick his successor. Led by Hugh Lawson White, the soon-to-be-Whigs claimed to be more Jacksonian than Jackson. The anti-Jackson faction had its greatest strength in east and west Tennessee, while Jackson forces retained control of the middle third of the state. These geographical distinctions of the late 1830s remained the basis for the Whig and Democratic parties until the Whigs self-destructed over the slavery issue in the mid-1850s. During this time of electoral stability, the

Whigs won victory after victory in Tennessee, but by ever smaller margins. Control of state politics swung firmly to the Democratic side with Andrew Johnson's 1853 campaign for governor.

Only in his conclusion does Bergeron raise the question of who voted for which party. He considers and rejects several explanations for variations in voting behavior. Tennessee Whigs and Democrats showed remarkably little difference in the distribution of occupations, wealthholding, age, and place of birth. The only major difference between the parties was residential, though Bergeron is too convinced of the genuine voter commitment to the two parties to call the arrangement "friends and neighbors" politics. Bergeron leaves the reader with the belief that party identification operated as an independent variable in pre-Civil War Tennessee, and that nothing short of the collapse of one of the national parties could shake the voters from their tenacious loyalty.

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Polish-Black Encounters: A History of Polish and Black Relations in America Since 1619, by Joseph A. Wyrwal. Detroit: Endurance Press, 1982. xiii, 558 pp. Bibliography, index. \$15.00 cloth.

Joseph A. Wyrwal, a respected Polish American historian and activist in Polish-black coalitions in Detroit, has made an interesting contribution to our understanding of contemporary urban America in this appropriately titled study of the relationships between American blacks and one specific, large ethnic minority, Polish Americans, as they have evolved since the early seventeenth century. The book's early chapters compare and contrast the roles of Poles and blacks in colonial times, during the eras of the American Revolution and Civil War, and during the two world wars; these set the tone for the author's skillful exposition of Polish-black relationships in urban America since the 1960s Civil Rights movement.

The author suggests by numerous anecdotes and examples that, historically, individual Poles and blacks get along well, and that in the critical nineteenth century both suffered humiliations and rebuffs from the dominant white society. Wyrwal argues that both blacks and Poles (and other ethnic groups as well) were victims of exploitation, segregation, and discrimination and that both had almost no cultural preparation for their fateful encounter in northern American cities, where they competed in the grim and uncertain business of survival in a period of intense industrialization. Thus, blacks and Poles became antagonistic toward one another only in the late nine-

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