

*The Public Image of Big Business in America, 1880-1940: A Quantitative Study in Social Change.* By Louis Galambos and Barbara Barrow Spence. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. Charts, tables, appendix, notes, and index. \$15.00.)

How and why have American middle-class attitudes toward big business varied since the rise of the large corporation? Louis Galambos seeks to go beyond previous impressionistic answers to this question by making a systematic, quantitative analysis of the content of issues selected from sixty years of eleven special interest magazines. These magazines catered to four occupational groups—farmers, trade unionists, Congregational clergymen, and engineers—which he takes to be representative of the “middle cultures.” Largely neutral toward the “trusts” in the 1880s, farmers, laborers, and clergymen, according to Galambos, blamed giant industry for their economic difficulties and status decline in the 1890s and politely applauded TR’s symbolic trustbusting. The engineers were largely economically comfortable, apolitical technocrats throughout the sixty-year period. Increasingly influenced by the conservative views of such organizations as the Farm Bureau and AFL, the middle-class gradually but steadily substituted the bureaucratic for the individualistic ideal. After World War I, businesses appeared in these magazines not as “octopuses” or “monsters,” but as “firms” or “corporations.” Mass unemployment, FDR’s attacks on “economic royalists,” leftist organizing, and the TNEC investigations failed to rekindle any anti-capitalist blaze in a middle-class mind fireproofed by what he terms “the organizational revolution.”

Galambos’ book is marred by a turbid style, a fundamental confusion about causality, a lack of scientific rigor in a book whose only claim to attention is its attempt to go beyond an impressionistic methodology, a poorly defined dependent variable, and a pseudo-statistical method of evaluating the importance of independent variables. In Galambos’ structural-functional style of thought, things get done not because individual people act but because

bureaucracies have "needs" or "demands" or because there exist "problems generic to this age of organizations" (pp. 10-14). He generally assumes, moreover, that his magazines reflect rather than produce mass attitudes. Though aware of this problem, Galambos never comes to grips with its implications for his analysis. Thus, his rejection of vaguely defined "political variables" as important influences on attitudes toward business and his claim that middle-class hostility toward business faded may well reflect the views of editors, not readers, or changes in the magazines selected as sources—for example, his shift from Wallace's *Farmer* to the *Nebraska Farmer* in 1933. Or, these conclusions might result from the increasing specialization of the magazines, as communications media such as radio and mass circulation newspapers became readily available to citizens who previously took their political as well as economic information from professional journals.

Galambos' version of content analysis, moreover, can be attacked on at least three grounds. First, he made no effort to confirm the reliability of his content analysis by employing someone unconnected with the project to do independent evaluations of samples of his items. Second, instead of counting column-inches of copy devoted to large businesses, which would indicate variations in the significance each magazine attached to big business over the years studied, he scored each "item" (editorial, news story, or letter) equally, and presents the reader only with the percentages of "favorable," "ambiguous or neutral," and "unfavorable" items for each year. His is thus a time series not of incomparable apples and oranges, but perhaps of watermelons and peas. Third, in an effort to assess the comparative importance of "economic," "organizational," "political," and "social" variables in producing changes in attitudes toward capitalist industry, he measured only economic variables independently. The significance of the other "factors" he apparently determined by counting the "sources of the items"—for example, whether an editorial referred to a politician's speech or a labor union meeting. The disparate methods of measuring these four "determinants of public opinion," as well as the inevitable difficulties in assessing the motives which underlay the production of any item—for instance, how did he score items with two sources, no manifest source, several possible latent sources—completely undermine his conclusions about the relative importance of each of his four sets of vaguely defined variables.

Despite his laudable aims and admirable industriousness, then, Galambos has not succeeded in adequately describing or accounting for changes in public attitudes toward big business in America.