

Retreat From Reconstruction, 1869-1879. By William Gillette. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979. Pp. xiv, 380. Notes, critical bibliography, and index. \$25.00.)

A dozen years of thorough research into manuscripts and newspapers, a clear and colorful, sometimes brilliant (if not always careful) writing style, and a message in tune with the current pessimistic popular dogma that government is, by its nature, incapable of solving important societal problems guarantees this book a large and respectful scholarly audience. Charging that historians who have sought to revise William A. Dunning's harsh racist portrait of Reconstruction have exaggerated the era's idealism and its accomplishments partly because they concentrated too much on the 1860s, Gillette details what he terms a "postrevisionist" picture by focusing on the 1870s. Confident he can gauge the most subtle shifts in public opinion and the most complex election outcomes without any statistical analysis of election returns and, of course, without any public opinion polls; zealously, without a trace of a misgiving, judging the morals and tactics of every important politician and group of politicians; continually contradicting the accounts of other historians without directly confronting their arguments or data; satisfied to array only what he asserts is "a representative selection" (p. 441) of his evidence to buttress his points, Gillette has written a book which is at once methodologically and substantively deeply conservative.

Political history originated in reports of the acts and words of warriors, kings, and their assistants, and Gillette's analysis of Grant's and Hayes' Southern Reconstruction policies and of congressional battles over the Civil Rights and "Force" bills constitutes the most original part of his book. He contends that federal guarantees of southern blacks' rights to vote were ineffective because the efforts were seldom adequately financed, at best sporadically and often incompetently enforced, usually given a lower priority than attempts to quash northern Democratic electoral abuses, and generally hampered by the decentralized nature of the federal justice system. Putting less emphasis

than other scholars would on the legal and extralegal southern opposition and the refusal of most southern juries to convict persons who interfered with Republican voters, deemphasizing the prophylactic effect of some southern prosecutions (for example, in North Carolina in the early seventies), and exaggerating the extent of black disfranchisement (p. 233), Gillette indicts the Republicans for "brave talk but timid action," and pronounces their enforcement policies unqualified failures (pp. 48-55).

Disputing almost every evidence of Republican idealism or concern for black rights, Gillette admits that Grant often tried to uphold radical southern governments, but condemns the president's southern policies for lacking an overall strategy, for tactical mistakes, and for inconsistency. When he uncovers editorials which contradict his general argument in many Republican newspapers in 1874, Gillette dismisses them as unrealistic expressions of "visionary hopes and empty feelings" (p. 216). The successful Republican struggle to pass the compromise 1875 Civil Rights Law he blasts as an indulgence in "empty ritualism" (p. 279). Without systematically analyzing compliance with that public accommodations law, he terms it merely an "insignificant victory" and "the most meaningless piece of postwar legislation" (p. 273).

In Gillette's view, the Reconstructionists always did either too little or too much, almost always acted for the crassest of political motives, and even when they fostered progressive legislation, never expected it to have a significant impact. In fact, the whole charade was meaningless, for, echoing Sumner — not Charles, but William Graham — Gillette castigates the Republicans for harboring "the illusion that law was a panacea for postwar ills" (p. 366), asserts that laws are ephemeral unless they reflect — he implicitly denies that they can even partly shape — "an enduring consensus" (p. 364), and concludes, again without any close analysis of local conditions, that two decades of struggle had not "truly reconstructed or reformed" or "fundamentally changed" the Old South (p. 379).

If revisionism was a product of what C. Vann Woodward called "the Second Reconstruction," Gillette's vision may be the

typical creation of what might be referred to, in view of the current popularity of the views of such men as Arthur Jensen and Edward O. Wilson, as the second Social Darwinist period. But is progress in building up a systematic body of knowledge or at least in rejecting false views impossible? Is history a Hindu profession, condemned to the mere endless repetition of cycles of opinion?

I remain a qualified optimist on such questions. Had Gillette been willing to confront directly C. Vann Woodward's arguments and evidence for the "Jim Crow thesis" (p. 192) or for his account of the 1877 Compromise, or those of Paul Kleppner and the ethnoculturalists on the nature of the 1874 election, scholars would be better able to judge the comparative merits of the competing explanations. Had he more systematically arrayed his newspaper and manuscript evidence, Gillette might not have left the impression that he was, like a debater, pulling out of his box of notes only those quotations which fit his case. Had he supported his repeated quantitative assertions about public opinion (statements containing such phrases as "most Americans thought," "practically everyone agreed," and the like appear prominently in at least sixteen places in the book) with quantitative or other methodically arranged facts, his conclusions might have been more convincing. Had he openly dealt with the works of scholars of periods before and after the 1870s, he would have had a much more difficult time brushing off evidence of Republican idealism or judging that the legacy of reconstruction was merely "a solid Democratic South" in which blacks were "not truly free" and were "prevented . . . from voting" (pp. 377-79), and his interpretation would have been more balanced and solidly based.

Many of Gillette's remarks are shrewd; some of his judgments — for example, on Grant's waffling and Hayes' naïveté and ineptitude as president — are probably correct; and he may possibly be right on such questions as the importance of the Reconstruction issue in the 1874 elections. Since he does not put his various theses in jeopardy, it is extremely difficult to resolve these matters. Thus, Gillette's tremendous diligence, his crisp and even elegant prose style, his laudable desire to investigate

new topics, and his courage in taking on large and important questions all come to much less than they might have because of his unwillingness to break with an outmoded approach to doing history.

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Alcohol, Reform and Society: The Liquor Issue in Social Context. Edited by Jack S. Blocker, Jr. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979. Pp. xi, 289. Tables, notes, notes on sources and contributors, index. \$23.95.)

We are in a new wave of historical writing about the temperance and prohibition movements. The work of James Timberlake, Norman Clark, Andrew Sinclair, and the reviewer constituted the first; the recent and forthcoming books by Clark, Ian Tyrrell, Blocker, and H. G. Levine comprise the second. As generational conflict is manifested in the human studies, each generation is in reaction to its predecessor. This collection of original papers on the history of the liquor issue is a good introduction to the new wave. It contains an introductory statement by the editor and a paper by the sociologists Gail Frankel and Paul Whitehead on sociological perspectives on drinking. The latter brings us *au courant* with recent new developments, challenging social norm theories by analysis of total national consumption patterns as a significant dimension for policy decisions.

Following are eight historical chapters, each by different authors and arranged in a chronological sequence and a well-organized bibliography. Tyrrell writes on temperance as it reacted to economic change in the antebellum North. There are two papers of a narrower focus: David Henderson on the postwar, reeling New England cultural movement and Charles Johnson on the social profile of the temperance movement in Britain. George Winter presents the temperance battle in England and the first five years in 1853 Ohio, and Jack Blocker writes on the organizational structures of the Prohibition Party, and the Anti-Saloon