

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. xiii + 369 pp. \$29.95.)

Anyone teaching a graduate or advanced undergraduate course in American political history will want to assign this set of nine gracefully written essays, two published for the first time here. Richard L. McCormick's knowledgeable assessments of the state of the field, his perceptive summaries and gentle critiques of the writings of others, and his provocative original hypothesis about "Progressivism" suggest questions that are sure to be high on the research agenda for political history in the next decade or more.

McCormick focuses on the connections and disconnections between public opinion, voting rules, electoral activity, and governmental policies. Although his views are complex, subtle, and qualified, a starkly foreshortened sketch of his description of the years from 1830 to 1910 might read: In the nineteenth century, Americans were parochial and were skeptical of comprehensive activity by the state, but they were often in favor of more particularistic measures. The world's most liberal suffrage requirements, the plethora of elective offices, and the dearth of legal constraints on competition for positions encouraged popular partisan organizations. Attracted primarily by politicians' symbolic appeals to ethnoreligious identifications and their more instrumental appeals to local economic self-interest, white male voters turned out in record percentages. Except when confronting the slavery issue, policy makers were concerned primarily with distributing patronage, subsidies, and property rights. In 1905-1906, there was a sudden shift in mass attitudes, as muckrakers and insurgent politicians popularized the view that businessmen had everywhere corrupted politics. The policy response was a shift in the locus of power from legislatures to executives, and a shift in the primary governmental function—from passing out divisible, compromisable benefits to regulating the economy. This alteration in the states' functions and the concomitant legal restraints on parties and voting weakened political machines, reduced incentives for voter participation, and heightened the importance of lobbying by interest groups. But, ironically and unintentionally, the "reg-

The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era. By Richard L. McCormick.

ulatory revolution" also increased the power of corporations and political parties, as affected industries captured the regulators and as the two major parties solidified their duopoly over access to the electoral system.

To evaluate McCormick's fresh but largely untested interpretation, historians need more than anything else to develop better ways of systematically measuring beliefs, voter behavior, and laws and administrative practices over long periods of time. What did people in particular groups at particular times think was the proper scope of governmental activity, and were their actions consistent with their expressed opinions? How stable were political divisions within, as well as between, communities and how were major and minor fluctuations in those divisions over time related to policy changes? Did "distributive" activity decline relatively and did regulatory and redistributive acts by all state governments expand dramatically after 1905? Did voters really perceive regulation of transportation and utilities as more divisive than, for instance, tariffs, internal improvement subsidies, civil rights, and monetary policies, and, if so, why should the introduction of conflicts over more controversial policies dissuade people from voting? Who influenced the formation of policies, especially economic policies, how were the influentials organized, and how did their identities and methods vary from place to place and change during the period? What were the consequences of various policies, and how can one reliably determine the intentions of various groups of their framers and supporters?

Whether or not McCormick's positions on substantive issues are all ultimately accepted — and I am dubious about many of them — the book represents perhaps the most stimulating series of essays of this decade by an American political historian.

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