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Review of *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* By Jeffrey Ostler

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Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892. By Jeffrey Ostler. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. Maps, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 260 pp. \$29.95.

Previous hypotheses, including those by recent revisionists, have claimed that the success of Populism in Nebraska and Kansas was due to greater economic hardship than that experienced in Iowa where Populism "failed." Jeffrey Ostler challenges this long held belief and shows that while economic reasons contributed, the party system of each state actually played the major role in determining what path agrarian radicalism would take.

Ostler examines the economic conditions of eastern Nebraska, eastern Kansas, and western Iowa, and finds that there was little economic difference between these sections of each state. Ostler then recounts a brief history of the Republican party, explaining that in the years following the Civil War it was the sole political force in the three states under examination. Such dominance, however, left the Republican party vulnerable to

splintering during periods of economic, social, or political discontent.

In Nebraska and Kansas the Republican Party remained the dominant force up until the 1880s. In Iowa, however, the Democratic Party had gained some popularity among voters and contributed to a competitive political climate. As a result, leaders in both the Iowa Republican and Democratic parties listened to and incorporated a majority of the demands of the Alliance leaders, resulting in a partial appeasement of the radical agrarian movement. In Nebraska and Kansas, where Republicans held on to their control, Alliance leaders' voices may have been heard, but they were not politically heeded. As a result, agrarian radicalism in Nebraska and Kansas had nowhere to turn but to the formation of a third party.

Although women were absent from the political scene in Iowa, Ostler is careful to include women in his study by examining their participation as Alliance members in Nebraska and Kansas. Women may not have been major political figures in the Alliance, and in many cases they assumed traditional female roles within each chapter; but their participation in an active political party gave many their first taste of public political participation. In Nebraska one-fifth of Alliance membership was female.

Ostler's review and interpretation of political events in Iowa is convincing, and the tables he provides clearly show a marked difference in voting patterns on either side of the Nebraska/Kansas and Iowa borders. His treatment of the political situation in Nebraska and Kansas is not as thorough, however, since it focuses mainly on the doings of Alliance members and does not give as detailed attention to the Republican Party. Overall this book is engaging reading and accessible to a wide audience.

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