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Review of *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915* By Robert W. Cherny

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tribution to the social and political history of the Great Plains with his study, *Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915*. He not only explores the historiographic issues related to Populism and Progressivism, but also assesses changes within the Nebraska political system that were often the unintended by-products of the two movements. His approach relies on extensive statistical analysis including the use of collective biography.

The most optimistic Populists, according to Cherny, sought to establish a cooperative commonwealth in which the government owned the railroads and other corporations. Although they failed to attain this goal, they did succeed in making economic issues an enduring feature of Nebraska politics. Prior to the onset of Populism, political candidates had made symbolic appeals to an electorate that had divided predictably along ethnocultural lines. Drawing its primary impetus from economically marginal farmers, especially Democrats, the Populist revolt shattered the hold of Bourbon Democrats over their party. Through fusion and the gradual absorption of many Populist voters, the Democrats entered the twentieth century as a truly competitive alternative to a Republican party that remained unchanged in the 1890s.

The Progressive Era in Nebraska was accompanied by the decline of firm party loyalties and the rise of enduring coalitions within both the Republican and Democratic parties. Although ethnocultural background remained the most reliable predictor of electoral choices, the continued salience of economic issues meant that candidates had to speak to those concerns while campaigning. Cherny's analysis reveals that many voters began to switch parties according to the perceived mix of issues in each election. This represented a drastic departure from the pre-Populist period when intense party loyalties forestalled virtually all deviation from a straight party ballot. The Progressive Era also saw the formation of coalitions around leading politicians who carried personal followings from one election to the next. These

Populism, Progressivism, and the Transformation of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1915. By Robert W. Cherny. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Maps, tables, figures, appendices, notes, selected bibliography, index. xviii + 227 pages. \$17.50.

Robert Cherny has made an important con-

individuals attempted to use their own organizations to attract votes while seeking to avoid dealing directly with the issues that were crosspressuring voters.

This solid study of Nebraska electoral behavior raises certain questions that Cherny treats too lightly. His discussion of the ideological content of both Populism and Progressivism is withheld until the last chapter and is too limited. Consequently, his distinction, early in the book, between moderate and radical Populists makes little sense. This same juxtaposition leaves the reader searching for both the origins and goals of the Progressives. Cherny's assertion that there was no demonstrable link between Populism and Progressivism is confusing because he also states that Democratic Progressivism was a direct continuation of concerns first addressed by Populist-Democratic fusion in 1894. Cherny's statistical sample, which contained 95 percent of the electorate, was limited to two-thirds of Nebraska's counties. Some readers will question the omission of less populated but sometimes heavily Populist western counties. Despite these objections, it is obvious that Nebraska now has a book-length treatment of the Populist-Progressive period comparable to the many other fine studies that have emerged in the last fifteen years.

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