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## Book Review: *Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor's Race* By Kenneth Bridges

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**Twilight of the Texas Democrats: The 1978 Governor's Race.** By Kenneth Bridges. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008. viii + 219 pp. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

The political earth shook in 1978 when, for the first time since Reconstruction, a Republican won Texas's most coveted electoral prize, the governorship. In his new book, *Twilight of the Texas Democrats*, historian Kenneth Bridges provides what for years to come will be undoubtedly the most well-written and comprehensive account of this critical moment. Bridges's book is a fast-paced, traditional political narrative. Though the author briefly contextualizes the political culture of the late 1970s by retracing Texas history from the Civil War to the modern era, the book's primary focus and major characters

are the candidates and campaign managers active in Texas during the late 1970s. Bridges provides a nuanced and comprehensive narrative of the 1978 election battle between Republican Bill Clements and Democrat John Hill. That narrative illustrates what many historians have previously argued, that Clements's victory in 1978 was the seminal moment in a longer contest between partisan and ideological factions and can justifiably be viewed as a significant turning point in the emergence of a legitimate two-party system in Texas.

Bridges's skill in presenting the 1978 campaign narrative should provide political enthusiasts with much to savor. In fact, this book arguably offers the most accessible and well-written narrative on Texas politics during the 1970s yet available. Still, this traditional campaign narrative overshadows the brief but profitable discussions that are rarely offered on the broader dynamics of public perceptions in Texas during the period. In correctly asserting that the late 1970s were a time of partisan, not ideological realignment—and he is clearly correct on this point—Bridges fails to communicate the power of political ideologies to shape voter perceptions and actions, including the breaking down of previously rock-solid partisan loyalties.

Put another way, Bridges succeeds in whetting the appetite for a more comprehensive analysis of the Texas political culture and populist conservatism that evolved after World War II. Recent trends in the historiography of modern conservatism have shown that approaching political change from the bottom up yields rich results. Public motivations, perceptions, and behaviors have as much to do with electoral outcomes as do decisions made in campaign war rooms. Certainly, Bridges's intent was not to write an analysis of the Texas grassroots during the 1970s, and he should not be faulted for failing to do so. Still, the historiography on modern Texas politics remains hierarchically driven. More should be done to connect the drama of the traditional campaign narrative with public perceptions of that drama at the local level. A fuller understanding of modern Texas politics—indeed of populist conservatism and political change across the Great Plains—will require that more attention be paid to the dynamic among campaigns, socioeconomics, and public perceptions.

Still, there is much to celebrate with this book. Historians will appreciate the appendices—possibly the most comprehensive collection of vote totals and electoral statistics yet to appear in a volume dealing with Texas politics. Articulate, succinct, precise, and engaging, Bridges's book should prove a valuable resource for students of

Texas politics. **Sean P. Cunningham**, *Department of History, Texas Tech University*.