



**Sean Wilentz.** *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln.* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. xii + 1044 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-05820-8.

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**Published on** H-SHEAR (August, 2006)

## American Democracy before the Civil War

Sean Wilentz, Dayton-Stockton Professor of History at Princeton University and well-known public intellectual, has written a very big book. However, while time consuming, it is not tedious, because it is exceptionally well written. In a close-knit circle such as H-SHEAR, I will depart from normal reviewing practices and begin with the “blurbs.” Of course, they are a bit over the top, but I think they represent what Wilentz intended when he was constructing this book. Since this book has already won the Bancroft Prize, I beg the readers’ indulgence for an overly long, overly footnoted, and perhaps, overly critical review.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., writes that it is a “profound and powerful work” that “casts fresh and vivid light on the growth of democracy in America and the causes of the Civil War.” Phillip Roth, certainly one of the best novelists in America today, says that Wilentz is “among the finest writers of history America has produced.” The book is a good read, but does not show an impossibly “deep understanding of every last detail of the American political tradition.” Novelists are not historians. The former president of SHEAR, Joyce Appleby, however, is a very good historian and loves both the “splendid detail” and Wilentz’s sure-footed guide through “the labyrinth of American politics” of the time.

David Herbert Donald praises Wilentz, because he “emphasizes politics, not impersonal social forces” and provides “subtle portraits of leading men.” That he often does quite well. I am not sure, however, what Donald means by “politics,” since Wilentz practically ignores electoral and legislative behavior and the intricacies of most of the legislation he discusses. Although he seems to agree on many topics with Charles Sellers, Wilentz pulls up short of declaring that democracy and capitalism are incompatible.[1]

Wilentz’s colleague, James M. McPherson, com-

pliments him for his portrayal “in dramatic detail of the contested rise of democracy” that led to the Civil War. That seems to be the author’s intent. Wilentz, to a degree, rejects McPherson’s ideas about modernization and follows Eric Foner in describing how the North tended to develop a democracy rooted in the idea of “free labor,” while the South moved toward what has been called “Herrenvolk democracy” based on universal suffrage for white men in a slave society.[2]

While I generally think that these “blurbers” are right, I cannot agree with the Harvard Professor of Law, Randall Kennedy, who insists that Wilentz has established “himself as a major figure in all of American historical scholarship.” Wow! I agree with much of this praise, but Kennedy sets the bar too high. I do not think that Wilentz has told those of us who study this period anything dramatically new. When Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote almost the same story over sixty years ago, he did something new and established a critical point in the historical debate that hatched a huge and varied body of scholarship.[3]

Were I still teaching in the United States, I would make my students read this book. In fact, for my entire career I taught a course for which it would have been a perfect text (when it became available, I assigned a reader that Wilentz edited). *The Rise of American Democracy* is crammed with information and I do not disagree with most of the factual statements. However, there are moments where Wilentz is not completely wrong, but leaves incorrect impressions. It is a teacher’s dream. One example is the origin of the American Colonization Society or more properly the American Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color. Wilentz quotes Clay’s own extreme emphasis on his role and notes what Robert Remini says, slighting the more correct position of Douglas Egerton in his biography of Charles Fenton

Mercer.[4] Wilentz does note one of Egerton's articles, but does not acknowledge what it shows us. Simply put, Clay did not create the American Colonization Society. But this is a minor point, although Wilentz uses the story as part of his attempt to demonize Clay.

What does this very big book say? Wilentz shuns analysis and has written a narrative history, which tells a relatively familiar story for those of us who grew up on David S. Muzzey's high school text and were assigned Harold Underwood Faulkner in college (as a high school teacher, I had to teach this story from a textbook by Faulkner).[5] *The Rise of American Democracy* is Progressive History 101 and it is not "neo," with a heavy emphasis on class as one might have expected, but rather "retro." The Constitution is, for Wilentz, a backlash at the democratic forces unleashed in 1776. The ideal democracy was Pennsylvania under its Constitution of 1776, which had a unicameral legislature and essentially no executive. It also discriminated against Quakers and various sectarian Germans. I can agree with the standard Progressive idea that the Constitution was a step backward on the road to democracy, but Wilentz does not analyze the undemocratic aspects of the Constitution in the way Robert Dahl's recent book did. He simply repeats Charles Beard.[6]

Wilentz continues on with this Beardian story as he approaches the first of his great democratic heroes, Thomas Jefferson. He explains the origins of the Republican Party in an old-fashioned way by focusing on the resistance to the Hamiltonian program. With a few romantic references to the Democratic-Republican societies and a nod to the Whiskey Rebellion, he is off to a textbook description of the Jay Treaty fight, the XYZ affair, and the Alien and Sedition acts. Wilentz almost completely ignores Pennsylvania's local hero, John Fries. He devotes most of a chapter to the revolution of 1800 and 1801, without considering the question of taxation. One might wonder why someone so interested in Bush's tax policy does not note that the Federalists raised taxes and the voters rebelled, as Jefferson himself said. Wilentz also plays down the effects of the Three-Fifths Clause, which made Jefferson President. The 1800 election was manipulated in the state legislatures, including the least democratic of them, South Carolina.

The problem with this narrative of the Revolution of 1800 is that which plagues the rest of the book. Wilentz tells the reader his version of the "true

story" of democracy's emergence in the Early Republic without (even in the endnotes) confronting those historians who disagree with him or the contradictions inherent in his own argument. He does not acknowledge that in some Republican states there were less liberal laws concerning seditious libel than the Sedition Act. Nor does he refer to the fact that there was a possibility that the militias of Pennsylvania and Virginia might be called out to insure Jefferson's election. History is not something written in stone, but an ongoing debate. Wilentz has opted out. And he offers no real analysis of what was a true political realignment in Congress. At this late date we are left with the economic/sectional analysis of Manning J. Dauer in *The Adams Federalists* (1963).

Wilentz moves on to praise something historians since Beard have called "Jeffersonian Democracy" by describing some of the things Jefferson did when he was President. Everyone on this list is familiar with what Wilentz calls "Jefferson's Two Presidencies." Dumas Malone devoted two volumes to praising his administrations.[7] Forrest McDonald mildly criticized them in a slim volume.[8] Anthony F. C. Wallace savaged Jefferson's Indian policy.[9] Leonard Levy gave President Jefferson low marks on civil liberties.[10] Recently, Roger Kennedy has questioned the democratic implications of the Louisiana Purchase.[11] Wilentz deflects the criticisms of Jefferson for his views on slavery and race, and sanitizes his response to the Haitian revolution, but conveniently ignores these other matters. Since Jefferson is by definition a great democrat, what he did in his two presidencies must have contributed to the rise of American democracy. All of this "rise" seems mystical, since Wilentz never makes clear how Jefferson's actions as President, however admirable in many respects, actually expanded "American democracy."

The "action" related to the rise of democracy during these years was in the states. But other than cherry-picking a few rhetorical examples, Wilentz does not develop this point. Certainly he cannot mean the tremendous increase in the number of internal improvement corporations and banks that characterized the era, which he seems to dissociate from democracy. This is an historiographical chestnut that he does not want to crack. He refuses to deal with the entire literature grounded by Louis Hartz.[12] Nor can he really be thinking about the flood of entrepreneurship and individualism that Appleby traced in *Inheriting the Revolution*, which, for similar reasons, does not seem to fit with his views.[13] It also was not all

“good news.” The Republicans in New Jersey took away the vote from the few women that possessed it. In time the Jeffersonian/Jacksonian Republicans would take away the vote of free black men.

It is clear—and Wilentz subliminally acknowledges this—that the emergence of democracy in antebellum America was an emergence of white man’s democracy and was tainted by racism. The movement toward wider suffrage, even in his favored terrain, New York, was not partisan. As Chilton Williamson showed a half-century ago, in *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760-1860*, a “democratic suffrage philosophy was not the monopoly of either of the two great parties” in the Jeffersonian era.[14] Several of the leaders of the reform movement in the New York constitutional convention of 1821 became Whigs, and Martin Van Buren, Wilentz’s sometimes hero, was, at best, a moderate on suffrage expansion.

Since the book is centered on New York and especially Gotham, it is interesting that Wilentz dismisses in a footnote, Lee Benson, who was his teacher as well as mine.[15] Thus he does not have to explain the “wheels within wheels” that characterized New York state politics in the 1820s or deal with the handful of scholars, other than Benson, who disagree with him.[16] Even Charles Sellers described *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* as a “major breakthrough in our understanding of American political history.”[17] Benson’s arguments, which are crucial to the subject of this book, should be confronted rather than ignored or trivialized.

In the chapter on the “Era of Bad Feelings,” Wilentz develops his ongoing opposition to Henry Clay and everything he touched. I doubt that this diatribe is deserved and think that in most ways Prince Hal was as democratic as King Andrew—perhaps more. He was a constitutional democrat in his youth and a key figure in the Jeffersonian Republican Party during the administrations of James Madison and James Monroe. Jefferson was always Clay’s hero. Clay’s attitudes about the emerging South American republics were far in advance of most of his own party and Andrew Jackson’s supporters. His speeches indicate a Bill Clinton-like wonk on questions of finance. Wilentz focuses on what he calls the “aristocratic” corrupt bargain of 1825 at several points, although most historians are not sure if it even happened. Wilentz constantly misinterprets the election of 1824 as “negating the people’s will” (p. 513.) The sham election of 2000-01 was not like the constitu-

tional election of 1824. Jackson received 11.5 percent of the votes of white adult males. Wilentz knows this, but chooses to ignore Benson’s brilliant article that pointed out that nearly half of Jackson’s popular vote came from three slave states, which were basically interested in the Indian question.[18]

As with Jefferson, Wilentz does not analyze Jackson’s actions and assumes that since the Old Hero was a great democrat, what he did must have encouraged the rise of American democracy. Those who opposed him, for whatever reason, must have been impediments to the process. But then Wilentz is ambivalent about the Missouri Compromise, which has been connected to the rise of the Jacksonian party. While he acknowledges Jefferson’s misgivings, Wilentz is not willing to see that this political deal, brokered in a great part by the Virginia Republican James Barbour and accepted by James Monroe, was a Republican measure.

He seems unwilling to admit that Jefferson was more conservative on this matter than Clay. The grumpy old man of these years, although he still wanted constitutional reform in the Old Dominion, was neither the democrat of 1776 nor the advocate of the land policy that led to the Northwest Ordinance. In fact, Jefferson opposed what would become by the 1840s Wilentz’s ideal of democracy on this issue. Wilentz acknowledges that Jefferson did not like Jackson, but does not explain how one led to the other. (He later admits that Abraham Lincoln came into politics to attack Jackson without ever really connecting the two in relation to the book’s theme. In fact, Lincoln is the most problematic of Wilentz’s democratic heroes. He was never a member of the Democratic Party.)

So let’s get to General Jackson and “Jacksonian Democracy.” It is unclear exactly what this term means, although the party did call itself “The American Democracy” in 1840 and Schlesinger has made the best possible argument, within a paradigm of the New Deal, for its existence. Wilentz continues his textbook narrative of the administrations of the Old Hero following Schlesinger’s lead. He recites what happened in some detail, although he never addresses the policy implications of Jackson’s attack on the American System. What did Jackson do as president to further the rise of American democracy? The answer is practically nothing. Schlesinger ignored that Jackson made Indian removal the central goal of his first administration. Wilentz treats this tenderly. Only *one*

modern historian has defended Jackson.[19] Wilentz notes this and then wisely moves on.

Using democratic rhetoric, Jackson appointed his friends and supporters to federal offices. Jefferson had done the same and it became normal political behavior after Jackson. The studies of patronage do not agree that Jackson's appointments policy constituted some sort of democratic reform or that it introduced the spoils system, as Jackson critics charged. We must remember that the first usage of the term came from a good Jacksonian as he defended the system. William Marcy told his fellow members of Congress that New Yorkers "boldly preach what they practice.... They see nothing wrong in the rule, that to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy." [20]

Jackson did not turn out wealthy and well-educated people and replace them with the ignorant poor. As a Southerner, he did appoint more Southerners—slaveholders—than his predecessors. He did not bring in the common man, except possibly at the lowest level, where party hacks received post masterships. Most were editors and middling class types. Although Jackson was far richer than Adams, there was no real change in the social position of those in the government.

In political terms, General Jackson attacked the various elements of Clay's American System. The new president vetoed the Maysville Road bill, chosen carefully by Martin Van Buren to embarrass Henry Clay, and the extension of the charter of the Bank of the United States, which Jackson and most of his supporters associated with Clay. Like Sellers in *The Market Revolution*, Wilentz simply repeats Schlesinger and refuses to confront the huge literature on the subject, some of which he cites in his footnotes. Like Schlesinger, Wilentz also emphasizes Jackson's opposition to Nullification, but in the midst of the flood of detail does not stop to tease out the meaning of the contrast between Jackson's "State of the Union" address and the Nullification Proclamation, which came only a week later. Rather he argues that the idea really came from the Federalists and not Jefferson as John C. Calhoun argued. This is one of Wilentz's rare forays into the recent literature. I have no doubt that he has read most of everything I have. He has, however, a tendency to footnote those things that support his argument and avoid those that do not. Since he ignores others who have views on the subject, Wilentz is, as usual, being selective without defending his choice.

Jackson had hedged on the tariff in 1828, but seems to have been for moderation and opposed to a protective tariff. I do not know what to say on free trade. The classical economists were not really democrats and most conservative free traders have not been either. President Bill Clinton was for open markets. My friends across the street in the United Steelworkers Union were and are hostile to free trade and would vote for Clay if he were running. Wilentz is unclear about the relationship between tariffs and democracy and seems to approve of the Republicans' response to the Panic of 1857.

For Wilentz, the Bank War was central to the development of democracy. Jackson, however, was not the kind of activist president that Schlesinger portrayed. His favorite tool was the veto and he was something like a Roman Tribune. Wilentz insists that we should not accept the anti-Jackson literature (that had been there for years before Schlesinger wrote) questioning Jackson's democratic credentials. And, of course, Wilentz would not have us accept the generation of Schlesinger critics or the generation of post-Schlesinger scholars. He simply does not deal with them or their considerable arguments. Like Schlesinger, he did not read even the published version of Nicholas Biddle's papers. He mentions Thomas P. Govan, but never addresses his arguments.[21] For a very smart man, who likes to comment on current economic issues, Wilentz does not seem to know much about banking in the antebellum years. He states his view and then supports it with cleverly chosen quotations. He draws most of his examples from New York or Pennsylvania and, like Schlesinger, emphasizes the influence of the New York City Loco Focos.

Wilentz hardly mentions the slave South, which went heavily for Jackson. In 1832 he received 100 percent of the popular vote in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Missouri and between 62 and 95 percent in Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Clay won Kentucky and squeaked by in Delaware and Maryland, where he received four more popular votes than Jackson. The Old Hero received two-thirds of the vote in Indiana and Illinois, which had large populations born in the slave states—he did best in those states' southern counties. But he received only 54.7 percent of the vote nationally—down from what he had received in 1828. One gets the impression from this book that the South was populated entirely by followers of Calhoun and state rights Whigs like John Tyler. Basically the region was crawling with Jack-

sonian Democrats. Wilentz hardly talks about the Midwest. He does not come to terms with the poll book studies of Missouri, Illinois and Ohio or Ron Formisano's book on Michigan.[22] Wilentz's understanding of this area seems, from his narrative, almost as limited as his knowledge of the South. He does not even get into the wonderful exchange between the Tappan brothers about whether banks or slavery were more evil (Benjamin Tappan was a Democratic politician from Ohio that everyone on this list knows and his brother was an abolitionist from New York).

In his discussion of Jackson's Farewell, Wilentz emphasizes the opposition to the "money power." He seems to break with Schlesinger in arguing that Jackson and the true Democracy were dedicated to a specie currency. While he has one long endnote on the subject, he really avoids the details of this important fight. But there was much more in Jackson's fascinating farewell than his remarks on specie—he took more pride in bringing down the pillars of the American System, preserving a strict construction of the Constitution, and establishing a "light and simple" government. Wilentz insists that *laissez-faire* was not Jackson's intent and talks vaguely, as did Schlesinger, of federal government control over currency and credit, although he finds no contemporary of Jackson who spoke in such modern language. There is no way in which anyone could see the Independent Treasury as a modern central bank. Wilentz might have noted that the 1840 platform of the American Democracy represented a cave-in to the Calhounites, who he sees as the true enemies of the rise of democracy. Wilentz does acknowledge that some of his radical democrats "played ball" with Calhoun, but he never quite explains why. His discussion is mostly spin. He does note the Gag Rule often, but never quite explains its politics, since it represented a compromise by his favorite Democrats, who rejected the extreme Calhounite position.

At this point, toward the end his discussion of the 1830s, Wilentz interjects his interpretation of what he has elsewhere called "Jacksonian antislavery." [23] (Wilentz's views have been more fully developed by his student Jonathan Earle in a prize-winning book.[24]) Certainly one of the main lines of criticism of Jeffersonian Democracy and Jacksonian Democracy has been their association with slavery, since both Jefferson and Jackson were large slave holders and had their voting base in the South. Gary Wills, somewhat unfairly, called Jefferson the "Negro

President." [25]

It is thus very crucial to his theme that Wilentz puts forward the idea that the really important antislavery voices came from neither the evangelical-rooted abolitionists nor the anti-slavery Whigs, but dissident northern Democrats generally associated with Van Buren. Wilentz does discuss, at some length, the contribution to the abolition movement made by black Americans, but the thrust of his argument dismisses the abolitionists and emphasizes the contribution of Jacksonian Democrats to the eventual Free Soil movement and Republicanism in the 1850s. Schlesinger had made a brief argument of this nature with a handful of examples. Here, as elsewhere, Wilentz does not write anything that is false, but in it all leaves a totally false impression. While he uses terms such as "more" or "a significant portion of," which are quantitative statements, he adamantly refuses to responsibly quantify or use the work of other scholars who have.

We know an awful lot about who embraced abolitionism and who constituted the softer antislavery supporters in the major parties. From numerous historians, like Michael Holt and William Gienapp, whom Wilentz selectively cites; Ron Formisano, who gets a footnote for an article on women and the Dorr War; and Joel Silbey, who is not noted, we know fairly well how people moved from the parties in the Second Party System into the new parties of the 1850s.[26] It is not as Schlesinger or Wilentz have said.

As the story of democracy continues, Wilentz has trouble with the new-born Whigs—the Democratic Whigs as they called themselves, men like Samuel Seward, Lincoln and Horace Mann. He insists that the Southern Whigs were represented by John Tyler and the eccentric Henry Wise, who even Thomas Ritchie did not think was a Whig. Wise, described by his biographer as "a good southerner," conned Tyler into making Calhoun the Secretary of State and reemerged as a Democrat. He was the Democratic Governor of Virginia who presided over the execution of John Brown. In this mass of detail, Wilentz seems to have missed that it was Tyler's own congressman, John Minor Botts, who wanted to impeach him, and that the editor of the Richmond *Whig*, John Hampton Pleasants, was killed in a duel by Ritchie's son over Pleasants' mild antislavery views. Botts actually voted against the Gag Rule, but Ritchie and the true Jacksonians supported it. There is no dependable information in this book on them. But then

there was nothing in Schlesinger except Democratic delusions.[27]

Jefferson's ideas on slavery were not accepted in the Virginia that gave Jackson more than two-thirds of its vote. And it was not until 1851 that Virginia came into the nineteenth century and altered its constitution in line with his thoughts on suffrage and representation. That Jefferson's own state, which was clearly Republican and then Democratic, was not very democratic causes Wilentz no problems. When he deals with the final democratization of Virginia in 1851, he footnotes my book, but ignores that the Whigs favored white manhood suffrage more than the Democrats. In other words, in the constitutional changes of the late 1840s and 1850s, the parties' positions were not much different than what I quoted from Williamson.[28]

In the wave of mid-century constitutional conventions that included Virginia's, the questions were nearly the same everywhere. A Democratic measure involved the election of judges, which in theory is democratic, but the way it worked in Pennsylvania was not particularly so. I am not sure if the Democrats' push for extending the executive's veto was more democratic than the Whigs' emphasis on the legislature's prerogative. This does not square with Wilentz's equation of democracy with the Pennsylvania's 1776 Constitution. The Democrats wanted to make government small and limit the length of legislative sessions. A popular proposal was that they meet only every other year. The idea that the states should not charter banks or corporations was completely in line with practically having no government at all and almost everywhere was rejected in favor of "free banking." But New York introduced "free corporations." Wilentz does not want to get into this rats' nest of economic democracy.

Following Schlesinger's lead, Wilentz sees the antislavery Democrats creating the Republican Party. I agree with him and with Roy Nichols that the F-Street Mess forced Stephen Douglas into repealing the Missouri Compromise.[29] But these were Jacksonian Democrats who were doing this, and half of the Northern Democrats voted with them. Most favored Manifest Destiny, which Wilentz thinks is democratic and the Mexican War, about which Wilentz is ambivalent. Somehow he wants to read James Polk—"Young Hickory" and the floor manager of the attack on the Bank of the United States—out of the Democratic Party, even though most historians have seen

Polk as an extension of the Jacksonian tradition since his policies were those of Jackson. If he has problems with Polk, Wilentz has even more problems with Lincoln, a real Whig and a true democrat. In the last part of the book, Wilentz has trouble with Lincoln opposing Polk on the Mexican War, and taking so long to leave the Whig party. It was as if Salmon Chase forced the reluctant Whig, Lincoln, into democratic decisions.

This is the Progressive historians' old problem with Lincoln, whom they noted was a railroad lawyer. The centerpiece of this story of the Republican Party is the Dred Scott Case. Andrew Jackson appointed the Chief Justice, Roger Taney, who wrote an opinion that Jackson would have agreed with. We know Taney held very few slaves, but that he was one of Jackson's minions. Jackson did appoint one of the dissenters, John McLean, who had been in John Quincy Adams's cabinet. The rest of the Court majority were either his or other Democrats' appointees. It is almost impossible to believe that Jacksonian "Democracy" did not lead to Dred Scott. This poses a huge problem for Wilentz's narrative.

Since Wilentz does not believe in quantitative analysis of voters, the U.S. Congress or the state legislatures, he sometimes gives false impressions about past behavior. Yes, there were many Free Soil Democrats who became Republicans, but they were a small part of the party. He does not do much with the Know Nothings. Like most traditional historians, he is hostile to them. He refuses to acknowledge their contribution to the rise of democracy, which can be seen in their activity in the states. Most working-class Democrats came to Republicanism through the American party or because of their hostility to Irish Catholics. In the "Hidden Depression" of the early 1850s, many sought a friendly home. Over the next few elections, they did support the Republicans, along with those Whigs who no one thinks were there. When Wilentz wants to, he quotes Gienapp, but when he wants to make other statements he ignores the reality of what Gienapp writes and will not fight with him.

Most of the data seems to show that more Democrats went through the Know Nothings than through the Free Soil movement on their way to becoming Republicans. Remember there were many Free Soilers who had been Whigs. While we all know that in its early years the Republican Party put forth ex-Democrats to get the votes of Democrats

for the new party, any clear analysis shows that the Republicans were dominated by Wilentz's Progressive Whigs, and their policies were implemented by the 37th Congress that "modernized" America. They were also the center of the Radical Republican faction that tried to change the racial system of the country and fought against the Democrats who proclaimed themselves to be the defenders of the white South.

There are many questions one must ask about this book. Since Wilentz never defines what "democracy" is, we never know what he is talking about. While we both agree that the expansion of suffrage and more equal representation are part of it, I am not sure that either hard money or free trade is essentially democratic. Higher tariffs and lower tariffs only benefit certain groups. My friends across the street at the Steelworkers of America want to keep out foreign steel and keep their jobs. The South Carolina slaveholders and New York merchants wanted low tariffs. Wilentz does not describe how the Republicans created a new national banking system based on the idea of free banking that the Whigs had sponsored. It was part of the way that Republicans modernized America. It was a neo-American System and a turn away from the Jacksonian world. And it was democratic or at least part of a democratic program.

Wilentz tells us more than we want to know and often less—all of us know most of this—and he never gets to the point. What is democracy? Just talking about democracy does not do anything. But if he wants to discuss the rise of democracy at least he has to explain what democracy is.

Historians are citizens and have every right to talk about our public officials, and sometimes they know American history a bit better than our presidents do. Actually this book seems less politically motivated than *The Age of Jackson*. It is a rousing paean to Jefferson, Jackson, and, to a lesser degree, Lincoln, but has nothing to say about contemporary politics. It also is hardly post-modernist as one of Wilentz's critics said about one of his articles. This is very well-written traditional Progressive history. It has all the same heroes and the same plot with which we are familiar. The problem with this book is that Wilentz does not tell professional historians anything they did not know. More importantly he simply does not care to come to terms and argue with the vast body of literature with which he does not agree. His readers deserve as much. He has criticized President George W. Bush correctly for not having any idea of what

democracy in the Middle East might be.<sup>[30]</sup> But here Wilentz fails to tell us what democracy in the Early Republic was or might have been.

#### Notes

[1]. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[2]. Eric Foner: *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); and *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998). George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1814* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971).

[3]. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945).

[4]. Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991); Douglas R. Egerton, *Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989). I am not saying Wilentz has not read all these books, I am criticizing his use of them. Essentially I am criticizing his sense of what history is and how it should be written.

[5]. David S. Muzzey, *A History of Our Country: A Textbook for High School Students* (Boston: Ginn, 1950 ed.); Harold Underwood Faulkner, *American Social and Political History* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1946); and Faulkner and Tyler Kepner, *America Its History and People* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1934).

[6]. Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic Is the Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1913); and *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1915).

[7]. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: First Term, 1801-1805* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970); and *Jefferson the President: Second Term, 1805-1809* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974).

[8]. Forrest McDonald, *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976).

- [9]. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- [10]. Leonard W. Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).
- [11]. Roger G. Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land Farmers, Slavery and the Louisiana Purchase*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Another Yale political scientist, Bruce Ackerman, has made a better argument than Wilentz in *The Failure of the Founding Fathers: Jefferson, Marshall, and the Rise of Presidential Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- [12]. This argument was summarized by Robert Lively, "The American System" *Business History Review* 29 (March 1955). See also William G. Shade, "Louis Hartz and the Myth of Laissez Faire," in *Pennsylvania History* 59 (July 1992).
- [13]. Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- [14]. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 181.
- [15]. Wilentz's longest comment on Benson is in note 36 on page 840. There are several notes to Benson, but Wilentz never addresses his arguments. Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
- [16]. Craig and Mary L. Hanyan, *De Witt Clinton and the Rise of the People's Men* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Alvin Kass, *Politics in New York State, 1800-1830* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965); and Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801-1840* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965, ed.).
- [17]. Charles Sellers is cited from his "blurb" on the paperback edition of *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (New York: Athenaeum, 1964).
- [18]. Lee Benson, "Research Problems in American Political Historiography," in *Towards the Scientific Study of History: Selected Essays* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), 40-50. This article first appeared in 1957.
- [19]. Francis Paul Prucha, "Andrew Jackson's Indian Policy: A Reassessment," *Journal of American History* 56 (1969), 527-539.
- [20]. *Register of Debates, 22nd Cong. 1st Sess.*, 1325. This is often quoted and often changed slightly.
- [21]. Thomas Payne Govan, *Nicholas Biddle: Nationalist and Public Banker, 1796-1844* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).
- [22]. Paul McAllister, "Missouri Voters, 1840-1856: An Analysis of Antebellum Voting Behavior and Political Parties" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1976); John M. Rozette, "The Social Base of Party Conflict in the Age of Jackson: Individual Voting Behavior in Greene County, Illinois, 1838-1848" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1974); and Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) provide an extensive bibliography of the studies on individual voting.
- [23]. Sean Wilentz, "Slavery, Antislavery and Jacksonian Democracy," in *The Market Revolution on America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 202-223.
- [24]. Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- [25]. Gary Wills, *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 2003).
- [26]. Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978); William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Ronald P. Formisano's, "The Role of Women in the Dorr Rebellion," *Rhode Island History* 51 (August 1994), 89-104, is a small dot on the body of the man's work that Wilentz sometime cites, but refuses to confront. Wilentz ignores Joel Silbey. Of Silbey's many books see *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University press, 1985); and *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

[27]. Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Gene Wise, "Political 'Reality' in Recent American Scholarship: Progressives versus Symbolists," *American Quarterly* 19 (Summer 1967).

[28]. William G. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824-1861* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 278-279. Wilentz follows what I said. Looking at all the votes, however, the Virginia Whigs favored universal white manhood suffrage slightly more than the state's Democrats.

[29]. Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948); and *The Invention of the American Political Parties: A Study in Political Improvisation* (New

York: Macmillan Company, 1967). This is one example where Wilentz uses an historian when he wants to and ignores him when it is convenient. Nichols was well known for his reference to Jackson as a "caudillo" and his administration as "caudillo" politics.

[30]. Larry De Witt, "Should Historians Try to Rank Presidents?" *History News Network*, May 21, 2006. At the time Wilentz responded with, "Of Course Historians Can Offer Their Assessment of Bush's Presidency." Most historians envy Wilentz's position as a public intellectual writing in the *New Republic*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. He has written several articles attacking Bush, but the one closest to this review was, "Bush's Ancestors" in *New York Times Magazine*, October 16, 2005, pp. 18-22. I agree with Wilentz's present politics and not his historical analogies.

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<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

**Citation:** William Shade. Review of Wilentz, Sean, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. August, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12169>

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