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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Ballard C. Campbell. *The Growth of American Government: Governance from the Cleveland Era to the Present.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. x + 289 pp. \$15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-20962-7; \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-32871-7.

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Published on EH.Net (September, 1997)



Ballard Campbell has written a solid and yet fundamentally disappointing history of American government since 1887. We need a critical synthesis of our current understanding of the history of American government during the last hundred years. The size and role of the government, traditionally a source of controversy in the United States, has been brought to the forefront of debate both by developments within our own polity and by the divergent fortunes of the different former socialist economies. The difficulties faced by former communist countries as they build the institutions of a free society have brought a new appreciation for the historical process that created a government able to oversee the capitalist economy and the distribution of both opportunity and wealth within the market framework.

In the United States, all sides in the numerous partisan controversies over the role of government in economic, social, and private life turn to the “lessons” of the history of our government, including the phenomenal expansion of government in the twentieth century. The popular interest in government is reflected in recent interest among economists and political scientists on the history of government and the historical role of government in the United States. However, the field remains fragmented, cut both by divisions between ideologies and by divisions between disciplines. A volume that provided a critical and synthetic introduction to the current understanding of and debates in the history of American government in the twentieth century would be a book few economists, historians, or political scientists could afford to ignore. Ballard Campbell’s book, although a solid effort, is not the book we need.

The Growth of American Government leaves out or

touches only lightly on many of the most interesting aspects of the growth of government, especially from the point of view of an economist. The discussion of the rise of Federal regulation is cursory, as is the discussion of the role of the courts. The discussion of macro-economic policy, fiscal or monetary, is non-existent. The discussion of local government is limited, although this is perhaps due more to the state of the literature on local government than it is to the desires of the author. There are also few international comparisons between growth of U.S. government and government in other industrialized nations. Nevertheless, the primary focus of the work—the growth of Federal spending, the concomitant changes in taxation, and the rise of the Federal government as defender of the civil rights of citizens against the depredations of State governments and fellow citizens—provides more than enough material for a book.

Unfortunately, Campbell saddles himself with two stylistic constraints that undermine the presentation of the subjects he does address. First, he adopts an “omniscient” voice. Second, he eschews any statement that might smack of partisanship. Copious footnotes and a thorough, annotated bibliography (the best part of the book) make it clear that the author is aware of debates and controversies in the historical literature, but the text is written as if all facts and conclusions were indisputable. To avoid taking sides, the author limits himself to statements that are basically indisputable. The result is a narrative description of the gradual increase in government responsibility, with no satisfactory discussion of either causes or consequences of the changes.

The rhetorical choices make it hard for the book to draw on more than the historical literature. A produc-

tive discussion of the political science and economic history literature on American government depends on the ability to present hypotheses and propose empirical tests. Neither are possible within the rhetorical constraints Campbell has imposed on himself. As a result, although the author promises to present "The course and causes of growth" (Chapter Two), his explications are limited to presenting a list of the less controversial potential causes for each change in American government. The usual suspects are collected, not evaluated.

But in the end it is the decision to avoid any suggestion of partiality that fatally undermines the book. There would be a place for a readable history of the what and when of the growth of government, even if it were necessary to go elsewhere for the causes. Campbell's book does cover a lot of information. However, by avoiding discussion of the consequences of the growth of govern-

ment, good or bad, Campbell has written a boring book. When an author, in his desire to avoid partiality, not only avoids taking sides but also refuses to acknowledge that differences of opinion are possible, the result is a text drained of any enthusiasm for its subject. To argue that the growth of government mattered means, at least temporarily, taking a side or openly acknowledging the depth of the controversies inherent in the topic. Ignoring the chasms in the field produces a text as flat and banal as a high school civics course. The reader is left, at the end of the volume, with the odd sense that government did not and does not matter.

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Citation: Rebecca Menes. Review of Campbell, Ballard C., *The Growth of American Government: Governance from the Cleveland Era to the Present*. EH.Net, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

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