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Williamjames Hull Hoffer. *To Enlarge the Machinery of Government: Congressional Debates and the Growth of the American State, 1858-1891.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. xiv + 258 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8655-3.

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Congress and the Making of the Second State in America

This book describes American state formation from the eve of the Civil War to the dawn of the Progressive Era. Between the minimal national state of the antebellum period and the more robust leviathan that emerged in the early twentieth century, Williamjames Hull Hoffer argues, there was a "second state." This national government engaged increasingly in "supervision, sponsorship, and standardization," but only in a limited way (p. 113). Based on close readings of congressional debates, *To Enlarge the Machinery of Government* shows that throughout this period, most legislators were reluctant statists. Even as they created a variety of new governmental organizations and programs, congressmen sought to avoid the growth of national bureaucracy.

Hoffer's main project in the book is to explain how, in the late nineteenth century, members of Congress thought about government. To do this, he analyzes the published House and Senate debates on a dozen major bills that were considered between 1858 and 1891. Among these were bills that would create land grant colleges, the Department of Agriculture, civil service reform, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), and the federal circuit courts of appeals. By charting the origins of so many of the significant new governmental agencies and programs established during this era, the book makes a useful contribution to the literature on American political development. Scholars interested in the history of late nineteenth-century Congress will want to consult this book, as will those who seek summaries of the floor debates on this important legislation.

Because he has carefully considered congressional rhetoric from so many cases across a period of over thirty years, Hoffer is in a good position to generalize about legislators' assumptions about political economy and how these assumptions may have changed over time. He concludes that change happened slowly, via a kind of "punctuated evolution of ideas" (p. xii). Hoffer deserves praise for his honesty and care in describing transformations that were more incremental than revolutionary. Such patterns rarely make for compelling reading, but they are important and ubiquitous in human affairs. The problem here is that Hoffer's narrative of gradual evolution seems to have been predetermined, at least in part, by his focus on language. As Hoffer points out, to find continuity in congressional rhetoric over three decades is not too surprising, since "conceptual persistence is a part of human psychology" (p. 203). The book's findings are further slanted by a teleological approach in which the subject is defined at the outset as an intermediate phase in American political development. Given this starting point, it is not surprising that Hoffer concludes that his congressmen never quite arrived at the "administrative mentality" of Progressives and New Dealers but did accomplish "much of the preparatory conceptual work" that would serve as a foundation for twentieth-century reformers (p. 194).

Throughout the book, Hoffer emphasizes "the prevalence of law-oriented issues and legal thinking in the debates" (p. 143). Congress was full of lawyers, and it was lawyer-congressmen who dominated the floor discussions of important bills. Their approach to administration was lawyerly; it emphasized the role of courts, trusts, and legal expertise. This was evident, for example, in the organization of the ICC–and helps to explain the weakness of that body. Hoffer's arguments about what he calls "a lawyer-run state" may be important, but they are not fully satisfying (p. 160). The book leaves readers wondering whether lawyers and legalistic solutions were any less prevalent in Congress before or after this period, and whether American legislators differed significantly in this regard from their counterparts in other countries. Further research will be needed, in other words, to test and refine Hoffer's observations about lawyerly admin-

istration.

Many weaknesses of this book can be traced to a one-dimensional research design, which is audacious in its modesty. This book is based almost entirely on the published debates found in the *Congressional Globe* and *Congressional Record*, leavened with biographical sketches of congressmen. The results are not impressive, especially when considered against the innovative work done in this field over the last generation by political scientists, including Stephen Skowronek (*Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* [1982]), Richard Franklin Bensel (*Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* [1990] and *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900* [2000]), Elizabeth Sanders (*Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* [1999]), and Daniel P. Carpenter (*The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* [2001]). These scholars have pointed the way to a variety of sources and analytical techniques that historians need to do more to employ. Despite Hoffer's protests to the contrary, it is hard to believe that this book would not have been strengthened by more formal consideration of party and region as variables, or the use of a handful of manuscript collections or newspapers. By deliberately excluding some of the most relevant evidence that speaks to his central question about legislators' approaches to governance during this era, Hoffer ends up with answers that seem far too thin. Similarly, few readers will be convinced by Hoffer's defense of his decision to summarize the debates in strict chronological order. This choice has the effect of generating a dull, confusing narrative. Parts of the book suggest that Hoffer is capable of fine writing, but his narrative strategy keeps it mostly bottled up.

A related weakness is the book's limited dialogue with the historiography. While much of the relevant literature is cited in a helpful essay on sources, Hoffer seldom engages directly with it. It remains unclear, for example, how he understands the relationship between his own interpretation of postbellum national state expansion and that of Skowronek, who has described it as a kind of "patchwork." In his description of an antebellum "first state" dominated by parties, patronage, and the courts, Hoffer more openly endorses Skowronek's influential interpretations. In doing so, however, he disregards much of the most recent literature on early American political development (for example, the edited collection by Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* [2002] and Richard R. John's *Ruling Passions: Political Economy in Nineteenth-Century America* [2006]), which has reminded us of the importance of communications, war, and trade–areas in which the national state was especially energetic. By challenging traditional assumptions about the incapacities of the early American state, this recent work has made it harder to accept the sort of long-run story about the gradual rise of the national state that is assumed by Hoffer.

Thanks in part to its limits, as well as to its new contributions to our understanding of Congress's discussions of state building during the second half of the nineteenth century, this book should encourage new research in the field. Despite the valuable work of Hoffer and political scientists, we still do not know enough about the workings and development of the American state in the years that followed the end of the Civil War. Nor do we know enough about how the United States compared with–and interacted with–other national states during this period. For the moment, at least, this field remains fertile ground.

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