

Ballard C. Campbell. *The Paradox of Power: Statebuilding in America, 1754-1920*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021. 392 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7006-3256-5.

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Ballard C. Campbell's *The Paradox of Power* examines one of the most significant contradictions in early American history. For generations, scholars have depicted the early republic as a period in which ordinary Americans, awash in the republicanism of the late 1700s, embraced liberty at the expense of big government. However, Campbell maintains that "the history of public life in the United States records the emergence of an enormously powerful national state during the nineteenth century" (p. 1). Drawing from William Novak's *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (1996), Michael F. Holt's *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (1999), and Brian Balogh's *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (2009), Campbell rejects the notion of the early republic as a "golden age" of small government and laissez-faire economics. However, he does more than merely summarize the work of previous scholars. He uses the narratives of nineteenth-century Americans and statistical data to chart the growth of the American body politic at the local, state, and national levels. By casting his methodological nets as wide as possible, Campbell hopes that designating the state as the point of orientation can help

rekindle interest in the nation's civic past and fill in gaps in our understanding of it.

Campbell's first chapter defines American state formation as a complicated process involving geographical, military, economic, identity, and political capacity. He then charts the "situational" manner in which such power grew in response to external stimuli. Chapter 2 maintains that by the mid-1700s, the British North American colonies had assumed many of the capabilities of sovereign governments. Chapter 3 recounts how colonial governments and the Second Continental Congress took on additional powers to tax, purchase, or seize war materials; detain Loyalists; and prosecute the Patriot war effort. The shared sacrifices of the War of Independence also laid the seeds for American nationalism, as evidenced by the rise of national heroes, including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Fears of foreign domination and internal rebellion prompted the framers to override the short-lived Articles of Confederation and Confederation Congress with the US Constitution. The Constitution's provisions for control of foreign relations, the coining of money, and a federal judiciary that maintained jurisdiction over the state courts ensured that, in time, the federal government would begin to function as a natural, sovereign regime. As even the anti-Federalists

realized, “the Constitution contained the rudiments for building a powerful state (p. 54).”

As chapter 4 recounts, a booming postwar population, a business culture that encouraged technological innovation, and risk-taking dovetailed with state and federal initiatives to make incorporation easier, provide free land for transportation companies, and protect inventors' copyrights. Chapter 5 further develops this theme, noting that far from adopting a “night watchman” posture toward the American economy, state and federal governments worked actively with voluntary associations and private corporations in “collecting revenue, managing federal finances (including the minting of coins), adding territory to the republic and admitting new states, distributing the public domain, fighting Indians, delivering mail (to post offices, not yet to individual addresses), and maintaining a diplomatic posture that avoided entanglement with the major European powers” (p. 101). Chapter 6 reveals that as the federal government began to gain power over the course of the 1800s, it began to function as a “coercive state” that enjoyed a monopoly on force within its borders and that could in such circumstances as the War of 1812 and the US Mexican War act to compel rather than convince citizens to follow its mandates (p. 177). Chapter 7 examines how the Civil War increased the power of the Union government and Northern states to raise, feed, and equip millions of troops and punish deserters and Southern sympathizers. Even the Confederate government, mainly based on the US Constitution, increased its power to draft soldiers and seize war materials from private citizens. Chapter 8 likewise reveals how the communication and transportation revolutions of the postwar period contributed to boom-and-bust cycles, creating demands for banking and money supply reforms.

Chapter 9 illustrates that even during the reign of the forgotten presidents in the late 1800s, Republicans promoted federal support for eco-

nomic development. At the same time, southern Democrats increased state power over the lives of African Americans. Chapter 10 dismisses scholarship describing the Gilded Age as one of unrestricted laissez-faire economics, noting that state and federal bureaucracies slowly but gradually expanded their personnel and power while state and federal judges allowed increasing social regulation under states' police powers. Chapter 11 chronicles how Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson provided dynamic executive leadership in pushing through Congress progressive legislation in such areas as scientific farming, forest preservation, child labor, banking reform, and the creation of national parks. Chapter 12 recounts how the experience of World War I greatly expanded federal powers to place 2.7 million Americans in uniform, nationalized critical sections of the US economy, and restricted the rights of its citizens during wartime. New forms of data collection spearheaded by federal officials like J. Edgar Hoover allowed the federal government unprecedented power over individuals. Chapter 13 concludes with the observation that by the 1920s, the United States had entered a new century in which the governmental regulations created during World War I were institutionalized. Most Americans accepted the federal government's role in intervening directly to improve the lives of individuals, albeit in a pragmatic, piecemeal manner. As Campbell concludes, “the unintended consequence of these decisions was the expansion of a more powerful civic regime, reinforced by broadening popular support for America, the nation” (p. 528).

Overall, Campbell's *Paradox of Power* provides a practical overview of the growth of state power in the United States over the long nineteenth century. There are areas in which Campbell could have been more specific. For instance, at the beginning of each chapter, the vignettes of ordinary Americans instead of politicians and generals might have provided a more comprehensive account of how increasing state regulation influenced the lives of those at the bottom

and the top of American society. Likewise, an additional chapter on how federal and state regulatory power increased throughout the 1920s in response to the agricultural depression of 1920, the outbreak of the dust bowl, and the early years of the

Great Depression before the advent of the New Deal would have made a more natural ending for the book. Nevertheless, this is a solid, thorough work that should continue to inform the field of nineteenth-century political history for some time.

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