

areas of training, but he encourages those who choose to deal with areas of seemingly narrow concern and do so with care and skill.

These concerns are raised in the context of the history of the West. Sonnichsen is well aware that preservation of that history has its own problems: so much of it has happened so recently that it often does not seem like history at all. Fortunately, as he notes in the essay "Victims of Time," most pioneer communities cared that their own story be told and founded community institutions through which it could be recorded.

One group perhaps deserves more praise from Sonnichsen. As most who deal with researchers in western historical agencies can attest, there is a growing group of fine teaching historians who use the resources of such agencies and encourage their students to do likewise. These scholars, whose sense of collegueship goes far beyond the walls of academe, share their insights with—and brighten the lives of—the librarians and editors for whom Sonnichsen has such regard. They deserve his attention as well.

Idaho State Historical Society,
Boise

Judith Austin

The Evolution of American Electoral Systems. By Paul Kleppner, Walter Dean Burnham, Ronald P. Formisano, Samuel P. Hays, Richard Jensen, and William G. Shade. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp. xiii, 279. Tables, notes, figures, index. \$29.95.)

This volume contains essays by several prominent scholars who synthesize the results of recent vigorous work, much of it their own, in political history. In keeping with the emphasis on voting and parties, they use realignment elections to describe the last two centuries of American politics. The essays cover many significant topics, including the functions played by parties in the political system, the social bases of partisanship, partisan ideology, eligibility to vote, and why realignments occurred. The authors essentially present the state of the field, with a special emphasis upon the ethnocultural approach to voting and parties. As such, the book is indispensable to secondary level and college history and social science teachers and also to non-professionals with a serious interest in political history.

The perspective on electoral alignment eras leads those unfamiliar with the recent scholarship into new historical ter-

rain where many familiar landmarks lose some of their significance. For example, in his chapter on the second American system, William G. Shade describes Van Buren as looming far larger than Old Hickory in such important areas as the effect of his presidential candidacy on voting behavior, his contribution to the development of an ideology justifying political parties and party systems, and his role in organizing the Democratic party. Similarly, Paul Kleppner can write about the 1850-1892 period with scant reference to the Civil War except as a formative experience reinforcing the loyalty of Republican partisans in the North and of Democratic partisans in the South. To Walter Dean Burnham, the significant events in the Progressive Era largely lay in the changes in the rules of the political game—notably, registration laws, the Australian ballot, and the southern system of disfranchising laws. Thus, the precipitous decline in voter turnout during the System of '96 is far more noteworthy to Burnham than Mark Hanna's maneuverings, TR's thunderings, or Wilson's muddlings. The chapters by Ronald P. Formisano on the Federalist period and Richard Jensen on the post-New Deal Years also present perspectives in which the conventional "major events" no longer provide a useful guide to American electoral behavior.

Perhaps the most serious deficiency of the book lies in the authors' failure to view an "electoral system" as something other than an era bounded by realigning elections. A system is usually viewed as a set of interacting elements, not as a temporal period. The authors do not specify the component elements or state the nature of the relationships linking them together. As a consequence, the essays are seriously weakened on two counts. First, the analysis of each era is without adequate focus—there is no clear statement of which phenomena are to be explained, no discussion of the causal factors to be drawn upon to explain the phenomena, and no development of a research design aimed toward thoroughly measuring the relative effects of such factors. Second, the chapters vary substantially in their coverage of electoral politics. Some aspects of the electoral system discussed for one era are not treated fully elsewhere. Because a defined system is not explicitly followed through time, the promise of the title of informing one about the "evolution" of electoral systems goes unfulfilled.

University of Louisville

Ray M. Shortridge