

and 1950s overshadowed by the disturbances of the 1960s. His complex analysis of the inner city "ethnics" who used violence to prevent racial succession, of the intellectual origins of urban renewal and redevelopment, and of the manipulation of politics and government will undoubtedly generate new and exciting discussions among urban historians. Indeed, his discussion of the strategic uses of white violence is especially provocative. The numerous photographs scattered throughout the volume add to its overall tone. *Making the Second Ghetto* is an important book full of original insight and is well worth reading.

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The Log Cabin Myth: The Social Backgrounds of the Presidents.

By Edward Pessen. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984. Pp. xii, 196. Bibliographical note, index. \$16.95.)

Edward Pessen, a prominent historian of nineteenth-century American urban elites, in *The Log Cabin Myth* investigates the family backgrounds, marriages, and prepresidential career patterns of this country's thirty-nine chief executives. Employing class categories introduced by W. Lloyd Warner and his associates over forty years ago, he concludes that American presidents came from economic and social backgrounds considerably more privileged than those of upwards of 90 percent of their fellow citizens. The following is Pessen's scorecard: upper upper class (Washington, Jefferson, Madison, John Quincy Adams, William Henry Harrison, Tyler, Taylor, Benjamin Harrison, Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Franklin D. Roosevelt); between the upper and lower upper classes (Polk and Kennedy); lower upper class (John Adams, Monroe, Wilson); between the lower upper and upper middle classes (Pierce, Hayes, Cleveland, Harding, Coolidge, Truman); upper middle class (Jackson, Van Buren, Buchanan, Grant, Arthur, McKinley, Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, Ford, Carter); middle class (Lincoln, Eisenhower, Reagan); lower middle class (Fillmore, Garfield, Nixon); and upper lower class (Andrew Johnson).

Pessen notes that this frequency distribution suggests "the slightly more plebian starting points of latter-day presidents" (p. 72). He attributes this development "to the slightly greater chances more available to persons born into the lower levels of the *upper* social clusters" (p. 72). The author underestimates the egalitarian trend of his findings. Of the seven presidents since Franklin D. Roosevelt, two originated in the middle class and one came from the lower middle class. These seven chief executives constitute 18 percent of the thirty-nine who held that office; yet, the post-World War II leaders account for two thirds of the presidents from

middle-class antecedents, one third of those from lower-middle-class beginnings, and three of the seven among the thirty-nine born into families of middle or lower social rank. Kennedy alone of the post-1945 presidents indisputably belongs in Pessen's upper-class categories.

As played by the author, presidential stratification is not a difficult game. He gathers information mostly from biographies of the presidents (see "Bibliographical Note," pp. 186-89) and does not document the individual assignments. Despite superficial research, sloppy methodology, and the possibility that other scholars might rearrange some of the class designations, Pessen correctly contends that the majority of these figures came from advantaged backgrounds. Indeed, he repetitively asserts that *The Log Cabin Myth* explodes the pervasive misconception of scholars and the public that government leaders stemmed from humble or middle-class roots. This claim properly belongs to the literary genre of dust jacket puffery. How necessary is a book that tells historians what they already know? The book also lacks substantial evidence that the public overwhelmingly misperceives presidential lineage.

The second main theme in *The Log Cabin Myth*, that political parties select presidential candidates for their sound (i.e., conservative) views, is as unexceptionable and banal as the thesis that these nominees come from the upper strata. However, Pessen draws dubious conclusions from his assumption about party nominations. He claims that men of wealth and high social standing are nominated for the presidency because they are more likely to defend the established order than are those from lower levels, whom the parties might otherwise prefer since they would be more electable candidates as self-made men. Finally, Pessen declares that the choice of well-born men signifies that "the people who rule are not *the people*" (p. 183). In reality, there are plenty of potential candidates of humble stock who are conservative. The fact is that for most voters the pedigrees of presidential nominees do not seem important. Hence, it is doubtful that these candidates are unrepresentative of the will of the electorate.

The chief distinction of *The Log Cabin Myth* lies in its being slender in size and thin in substance, yet inflated in its claim to originality and padded by repetitive biographical detail. Its natural format would have been as a New York *Times Magazine* article instead of as a Yale University Press book.

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