

The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945. By Barry D. Karl. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. x, 257. Index. \$22.50.)

The subtitle of *The Uneasy State* implies an encyclopedic history of the United States for those thirty years that encompassed two world wars and a massive economic collapse; instead, Barry D. Karl has produced a highly interpretive work that probes the struggle of the American people to adapt their government to the challenges presented by industrialism and technology. He finds their attempts to develop workable adjustments complicated by the ambivalence Americans have always displayed between their desire for local control and the need for national policies. Karl clearly deplores their reluctance to surrender local political prerogatives in view of the international and technological problems that they encountered.

The author excels in his analysis of Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt and in his comparison of their attitudes and perspectives. The book also makes an important contribution to locating the New Deal in its historical perspective by successfully relating it to its Progressive antecedents. Karl attempts to counter "the myth that the New Deal was a liberal reform crusade that was finally defeated by a conservative minority and that it stands somewhere in the wings, waiting to reenter the stage on which American history is played" (p. 237). He believes that although the New Deal changed popular perceptions of the federal government in the management of public policy and of the president as the prime manager of programs, it was the chief deterrent to the changes reformers have repeatedly called for in American government because Roosevelt was essentially a professional politician who always sought a political rather than an "administrative" solution to the problems he faced. A political solution in the American system meant the preservation of local political influence.

Because Karl's purpose is interpretation rather than comprehensiveness, his treatment of the period is somewhat uneven. Perhaps because of his focus on interpretation and his use of facts primarily to illustrate his various arguments, there are some lapses in accuracy, but these are minor matters that do not diminish the effectiveness of this fresh and original look at the New Deal.

*Purdue University Calumet,
Hammond, Ind.*

Alfred D. Sander