

attempts to stem the epidemic. Between seventeen and twenty thousand people died in the United States, as many as six thousand in Memphis, Tennessee, alone. More than one physician echoed the traditional lay belief that this dread fever, signalled by a distinctive yellow cast to the skin, was the "King of Terrors."

Khaled J. Bloom has written a careful, well-informed account of this epidemic, based principally on the disease's impact on Memphis and New Orleans. He makes good use of the many public documents produced by physicians, public health officials, and city governments who tried to understand what was happening to their communities and what possibly could help. Relying on these sources, along with newspaper and medical journal accounts, Bloom tells a story somewhat familiar to students of epidemic disease. It is a story of two intersecting plots. First, there were the competing etiological explanations of the disease (insects were mentioned by some observers as possibly important, but only among a welter of other speculations) and, second, the haphazard attempts to formulate government measures of control (covering the streets and the trees with carbolic acid wash, for instance).

Bloom's is a straight-ahead outlook in which the disease itself is the protagonist, outwitting causal explanation and prevention at every turn. Indeed, at times yellow fever almost seems to have a kind of intelligence of its own, so strong is Bloom's vision of its power and its path through the South. This focus, while dramatic and clear, sometimes tends to draw attention away from human agency. For example, the reasons why public health policy did or did not change during the course of this epidemic (and a milder one that followed in 1879) are not clearly explained, nor are the points of view of ordinary citizens and their physicians much discussed. Although yellow fever morbidity and mortality in terms of race (as a key to the South's social and cultural distinctiveness) are mentioned, they are not interpreted at length.

This foreshortening of the social context for disease notwithstanding, Bloom's study rewards the reader with careful research, a clear storyline, and an admirable appreciation for those in the public arena who tried but failed to drive disease away.

STEVEN M. STOWE, associate professor of history, Indiana University, Bloomington, is completing a study of physicians, patients, and the burden of illness in the nineteenth-century South. He co-directs the university's Center for the History of Medicine.

Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892. By Jeffrey Ostler. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. Pp. xii, 256. Maps, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

In this well-researched book Jeffrey Ostler asks why the People's party was strong in Kansas and Nebraska but not in Iowa.

Why did Populism's prairie fire *not* leap eastward across the Missouri River?

His answer is that economic conditions do not fully account for the difference between Kansas-Nebraska's Populism and that of Iowa. Farmers were in trouble in all three states; conditions in eastern Nebraska and Kansas were not very different from conditions in western and central Iowa or, for that matter, in Missouri. "The crucial difference . . . was party competition" (p. 10), specifically that the Iowa Republican party absorbed or co-opted agrarian protest while the Kansas and Nebraska Republican party refused to do so. Farmers in Kansas and Nebraska had nowhere to go except to a third party; in Iowa farmer demands were espoused (at least moderately) by the Democrats and their fusionist affiliates.

Ostler sets the question and answer in his first chapter, then provides a balanced and accurate survey of farm economics across the three states. If a fault line existed between difficulty and disaster, it was along the 98th meridian, not the Missouri River; conditions in eastern Kansas and Nebraska were about as bad as in much of Iowa. After carefully examining debt levels, currency scarcity, corn prices, drought, freight rates, and mortgage frequency, Ostler affirms that economics underlaid third-party formation. But it was not the whole story; state level politics were crucial, too. The author then describes the Iowa situation between 1885 and 1889: how Democratic-Greenbacker fusion interrupted Republican complacency, and how the Iowa Farmers' Alliance successfully nudged some Republicans in the direction of railroad rate reform. With both parties receptive to some degree farmers were less inclined to form a third party.

In Kansas and Nebraska, however, Republican leadership was deaf in 1889 and 1890: "The failure of the GOP to make even modest concessions tipped the scales toward forming a new state party" (p. 111). Ostler justly credits women for some Alliance and People's party successes in Kansas and Nebraska though not in Iowa. In 1890 Kansas Republican Senator John J. Ingalls mocked the Alliance and was defeated, but Iowa Republican William B. Allison importuned the Alliance and was reelected. The two leading Iowa radicals, James B. Weaver and Luman Weller, feuded; the People's party of Iowa never got off the ground.

Based on extensive original sources as well as judicious assessments of the secondary literature, Ostler's book will quickly become part of the standard bibliography on midwestern Populism.

WALTER NUGENT is Andrew V. Tackes professor of history, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. He is the author of *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (1992).