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*Democracy in Session*  
*A History of the Ohio General Assembly*  
 By David M. Gold

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009. Pp. xx, 602. Illustrations, appendices, table, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

Accretions in federal power, profundity of policy issues, and occasional soaring rhetoric have made the U.S. Congress a showplace for those who would understand the legislative process. State legislatures, bounded by parochial interests and distended by sheer numbers, are poor relations. Yet, more than one hundred years after James Bryce's comment that "American publicists...have been too much absorbed in the study of the federal system to bestow much thought on the state governments," these "halls of the people" continue to touch the lives of ordinary citizens and provide a testing ground for national policy.

David M. Gold's *Democracy in Session: A History of the Ohio General Assembly* is a most welcome addition to the study of the state legislature. The book is at once a remarkably thorough analysis of legislative process and a compilation of historical anecdote, written in straightforward prose. Gold, an attorney for Ohio's Legislative Service Commission, is in a particularly favored position to offer insight into both the

professional processes as well as the personal idiosyncrasies of lawmaking.

The book, commissioned largely to coincide with Ohio's bicentennial, encompasses the vast majority of its material in parts entitled "The First Century" and "The Second Century." Short, but essential sections on "Background" and "The Third Century" provide a contextual framework. The narrative changes from a purely chronological format in the first chapter to a more thematic one by the second, yet given the comprehensive nature of this book, Gold has followed the only logical path.

In the body of the work, the reader will be acquainted with the policy, procedure, and structure of the General Assembly. Complementary chapters in the two major sections allow for comparisons. Thus, chapter six ("The Rules of Play") follows the course of bills from introduction to committee work in the early nineteenth century, while chapter sixteen ("Glasnost and Perestroika") does the same for the twentieth.

Gold performs a decided service in examining the growing and chang-

ing infrastructure of the General Assembly, making sense of a sometimes labyrinthine system that spawned stenographers, pages, clerks, and porters. Professionalization of the legislature is a recurring theme, as twentieth-century reformers created a reference department and bill drafting services.

The book does not ignore the personality of the legislature, and here, in fact, one can find the book's most memorable passages. Anecdotal accounts of the rituals of the General Assembly (e.g., seating of members, opening prayers, end of session antics) provide a flexible framework for the more clinical analyses of policy and procedure (e.g., apportionment, rural-urban voting). Gold introduces us to the men and women who made this body work, sometimes in spite of themselves. From Vern Riffe, the powerful, efficiency-minded Speaker of the House from 1975 to 1994 to Gus Kasch, a "perpetual rebellion expert" who "finally left his fellow lawmakers in peace when he died in 1946," the

author's selective use of individuals as illustrative of larger institutional trends is masterful.

A handful of mistakes should have been caught by a sharp editor. The author denies that Jacob Cox, governor from 1866 to 1868, served in Congress. Cox actually had a turn representing Ohio's Sixth District from 1877 to 1879. A brief citation to "Democratic governor Myers Y. Cooper" belies the fact that this governor was a Republican.

Nonetheless, Gold has produced as close to a comprehensive look at these "institutions of democracy" as is possible. Intensely readable, interspersing a wide-ranging synthesis (part-time rough-and-tumble body to full-time, professional institution) with highly specific anecdotes, *Democracy in Session* is a valuable contribution to the study of U.S. politics.

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## *Our Lincoln*

### *New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*

Edited by Eric Foner

(New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Pp. 336. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

*Our Lincoln* is a collection of eleven essays viewing Lincoln in the historical context of his times. The essays, written by leading scholars of Lincoln and the nineteenth century, demon-

strate that there remain fascinating areas for inquiry into the life of this complex American icon. In the introduction, Eric Foner identifies the theme that links all the essays to Lin-