leaders seem to have turned deliberately to reform as a means of retaining power in anticipation of the disappearance of wartime issues. Yet in most of the other eight states Republicans in positions of power were responsive to reform impulses and were generally ready to accept an expansive role for state government. Why institutional reform (other than black suffrage) at the state level did not become an effective partisan issue remains obscure. Limited perceptions in the face of socioeconomic change and a diversity of interests and values within the Republican constituency appear to have played a larger role than any subservience to vested economic interests.

Ironically, the state focus of these studies underscores the importance of the national scene for even the local politics of the postwar decade. Except in respect to Reconstruction and the Negro, issues did not define party lines but cut across them. As congressional Republicans advanced from equality before the law to equality at the ballot box, the national issue concerning black suffrage became dangerous and divisive, but no alternative promised to unite the party and advance its fortunes. Loyalty forged in civil conflict remained strong, but state Republican leaders increasingly turned from advocacy to patronage machines and the politics of accommodation.

_Hunter College and Graduate Center, LaWanda Cox
City University of New York_


It is generally believed by historians and laymen alike that black voters in the United States—where they were permitted to vote—were overwhelmingly Republican from the 1860s until the 1930s, after which period they have been overwhelmingly Democratic. According to the common view, there were a couple of instances in which this was not true, such as the presidential election of 1912 when many Negroes, including W. E. B. Du Bois, crossed over and temporarily supported Woodrow Wilson; but it was not until the New Deal era that the vast majority of black voters left the party of
Abraham Lincoln and joined the party of Franklin D. Roosevelt. It has also been freely acknowledged that the Republican hold on the black electorate was not so much a result of a beneficent racial policy or an organized effort to recruit Negroes as it was a consequence of the fact that black voters simply had no where else to go.

In this interesting analysis of northern Democratic party politics, Lawrence Grossman questions the traditional view. Beginning with the Ulysses S. Grant-Horatio Seymour contest of 1868 and concluding with the Grover Cleveland-Benjamin Harrison contest of 1892, Grossman traces the evolving posture of the Democratic party toward black Americans. He concludes that northern Democrats, contrary to the popular image, did in fact make a qualified but sincere effort to win black support. The “new departure” in Democratic policy, i.e., accepting the principle of congressional reconstruction in the South while undermining its enforcement, enabled the national party to make liberal overtures to potential northern black voters and, at the same time, to avoid alienating the southern wing of the party, the support of which was essential for the national ticket. These efforts were, of course, most successful in state and local elections. Moreover, the existence of a real two party system in the North made the appeal for black votes a pragmatic consideration. Unfortunately, it was not usually a case of Democrats offering positive alternatives to blacks so much as it was a case of Republicans taking the black vote for granted and doing nothing to deserve it. “The middle and late 1880's marked the high tide of Negro rebellion against Republican neglect,” Grossman states (p. 61). In other words the Republicans lost many black votes by default.

While Grossman’s book displays traces of its origin as a doctoral dissertation—a somewhat lockstep recitation of historical events in precise chronological order and extremely heavy and detailed documentation—it is, nonetheless, written with an obvious concern for engaging the reader's interest. On the negative side Grossman occasionally uses adjectives of questionable accuracy to underline his point, as when he identifies Representative Samuel Sullivan Cox of New York as a racial “moderate” (p. 15). Finally, in setting forth his central thesis in the preface, Grossman either commits a serious non sequitur, or there is a printer’s error. After cit-
ing the commendable northern Democratic success in the “search for Negro support,” the author suggests: “Northern Democratic racial liberalism helped to blunt and defeat Republican desires to safeguard Negro suffrage” (p. x).

California State College, Bakersfield          Forrest G. Wood


Since the appearance of his Sod House Frontier in 1937, Everett Dick has impressed his fellow historians with a vast array of subsequent studies. Here is another volume which will surely become a classic too. It is a study of Nebraska agriculture utilizing the motif of the Great American Desert, a description which was applied erroneously to the area west of the one hundredth meridian during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. Dick surveys the origin of the desert myth and traces the challenges facing Nebraska settlers in the period following the Civil War into the early twentieth century.

West of the one hundredth meridian settlers faced a topography increasingly devoid of trees, the lack of which posed problems with housing, fuel, and fencing. The tale of constructing homes on the treeless plains is fascinatingly told in the chapter on sod construction. Accompanying photographs of sodbusting plows, of the cutting and loading of sod bricks, and of various types of sod houses illustrate the hardships and hazards associated with those early dwellings. The chapter on fencing, drawn from traditional sources, examines the use of sod and osage orange for fences and discusses the impact of barbed wire on the farming and cattle industries. Since timber was also in short supply as a fuel source, settlers resorted to burning corn, hay, and “buffalo chip.” However important the sunflower was for Kansas, Dick maintains that its dried stalks were never widely used as a fuel in Nebraska.

The lack of timber explains why settlers in this region became early advocates of tree culture. One of Nebraska's