
Historians have tended to assume without questioning the beneficence of such twentieth-century developments as the expansion of government regulation of business, the progressive income tax and increased public services. The present work is a pioneering attempt to assess the economic impact of the income tax in Wisconsin. This study of the Wisconsin experience is especially illuminating not only because Wisconsin was the first state to adopt a comprehensive and effectively administered income tax, served as a model for other states and the federal government, and provided the only example, before the Great Depression, of a system of state income taxation that relied heavily upon the taxation of corporate profits, but because the Wisconsin progressives espoused the tax on the assumption—shared by reformers elsewhere—that the income tax would not retard the state's economic growth.

Brownlee's sophisticated analysis shows that the income tax had "an acute inhibiting influence on Wisconsin's growth." The unfavorable capital-cost differentials resulting from the imposition of the tax upon corporate profits were responsible for the lag in the state's pace of manufacturing development behind that of its region as a whole between 1909 and 1929.

And Brownlee goes on to reinterpret adoption of the income tax—and Wisconsin progressivism generally—as an attempt by the state's agricultural interests "to redistribute income in favor of agriculture and to create the agricultural service state" at the expense of the politically weaker manufacturers and of the economy as a whole. "Although cast in terms of the enlightened search for economic democracy within a capitalist system," he concludes, "the Wisconsin reform movement was an expression of the shortsighted self-interest of a politically powerful sector of the economy."

Brownlee's study is thus not only a significant re-evaluation of Wisconsin progressivism, but should, along with Albro Martin's path-breaking study of railroad rate regulation, Enterprise Denied: Origins of the Decline of American Railroads, 1897-1917 (1971), make historians more aware of the self-serving motivations behind and adverse economic consequences of much of what has passed for reform in twentieth-century America.

University of Nebraska


An example of the best of the "new political history," The Politics of Populism utilizes both traditional and quantitative sources to present the complex process of political realignment in a major western state. Firmly grounded in both theory and methodology, Wright ably documents the transition of Colorado from a consensual political system in the eighteen eighties to an issue-oriented political alignment by the turn of the century. Central to that realignment was the agrarian-based Populist movement which, by the mid eighteen nineties, had become an urban coalition of miners and industrial laborers who demanded a politics rooted in economic issues. A welcome and invaluable work for students of American politics.

University of Missouri-Kansas City


This is a collection of twenty-one brief articles on American Studies dissemination abroad. They tend to be descriptive rather than analytical. Moreover, they're very uneven in coverage because American Studies is very variously defined. Walker would have done better to have used his own words to give an analytical overview of the mostly bland material presented here; he could have included what substantive material there is in a couple of brief lists, charts or tables, and then referred the reader who wanted more detail back to these articles, most of which have already appeared in print in American Studies: An International Newsletter.


Neil examines the development of an American aesthetic between 1789 and 1815. Separate chapters are devoted to sculpture, painting and engraving, architecture and interior decorating, music and dance, and landscaping and sightseeing. Using periodical literature and the opinions of a few artists and intellectuals, he finds that only a few painters exhibited a distinctly American aesthetic.