

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2000

Review of *No More Free Markets or Free Beer: The Progressive Era in Nebraska, 1900-1924* By Burton W. Folsom Jr.

Harl A. Dalstrom

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Dalstrom, Harl A., "Review of *No More Free Markets or Free Beer: The Progressive Era in Nebraska, 1900-1924* By Burton W. Folsom Jr." (2000). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2114.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2114>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

No More Free Markets or Free Beer: The Progressive Era in Nebraska, 1900-1924. By Burton W. Folsom Jr. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999. Maps, tables, bibliographic essay, index. xiii + 182 pp. \$40.00.

In 1920 German Catholic voters in Saint Helena, Cedar County, cast seventy percent of their ballots for Marie Weekes, the Nonpartisan League candidate for Congress and a supporter of prohibition. What had driven beer-loving, anti-woman suffrage German-Americans to vote for the female candidate of an agrarian radical organization? Such major changes in Nebraska's political life are the subject of this book.

As its title suggests, Burton Folsom emphasizes the triumph of governmental socio-economic intervention over the principles of laissez faire. In a well-balanced, highly readable narrative, he analyzes the values of J. Sterling Morton, William Jennings Bryan, and George W. Norris—the key builders of Nebraska's political heritage—to explain the conflicting perspectives that animated the

state's political life in the early twentieth century.

Using voting returns from selected German Lutheran, German Catholic, Bohemian, Polish, and Scandinavian-stock precincts, Folsom traces the ethnic response to major political figures and issues. With background information from the late nineteenth century, he shows the familiar opposition of ethnic voters to woman suffrage and, with the exception of Swedish Nebraskans, to prohibition. Indeed, ethnic opposition to prohibition and suffrage buttressed others' loyalty to that party until World War I. In the meantime, Scandinavian voters took a reformist tack toward progressive Republicanism.

The war brought political reorientation in Nebraska. Although Bohemian-stock voters, contemplating an independent Czechoslovakia, continued to cast Democratic ballots, the repressive home-front actions of the Democratic administrations of Governor Keith Neville and President Woodrow Wilson repelled German-Americans. Even so, Folsom's tabular data show sharp voting differences between German Lutherans in northeastern and south central Nebraska between 1920 and 1924. He suggests that "agrarian unrest" partly explains why German Lutherans in the northeast cast "a more progressive vote" than did those in the south central part of the state, though a more thorough discussion would be helpful. His treatment of the highly contrasting responses of Bohemian and Swedish-stock voters in 1920 to Nonpartisan League gubernatorial candidate Arthur Wray, however, splendidly illustrates the linkage of culture and politics.

As Folsom says, "Nebraska was a farm state," and for practical reasons his voting data are "overwhelmingly rural." Although opportunities remain for primary research and synthesis on progressivism in Lincoln, Omaha, and smaller urban centers, this short book complements the works of Frederick Luebke and Robert Cherny on ethnicity and Nebraska politics. Folsom effectively integrates Nebraska's diverse political traditions with the

ethno-religious response to progressivism. His extensive tabular data are easy to follow, and the use of footnotes rather than endnotes is refreshing.

HARL A. DALSTROM
Department of History
University of Nebraska at Omaha