

Wisconsin and the Shaping of American Law

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and citizens who are interested in tracing Iowa's political and legal development. Historians will benefit in particular from the close attention to debates and proceedings in Iowa's three mid-nineteenth-century conventions. Students of Iowa government and politics will also come away from this carefully researched and well-written book with answers to numerous questions about the origins of institutions, rules, and processes that play a key role in how Iowa is governed.

Wisconsin and the Shaping of American Law, by Joseph A. Ranney. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017. x, 309 pp. Graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Dale Yurs earned an M.A. in history at the University of Northern Iowa in 2011. His master's thesis was "From a Weak Tribunal to a Branch of Government: The Supreme Court of the United States from 1789 to Marshall."

Joseph Ranney's book, *Wisconsin and the Shaping of American Law*, offers a new look at how state law made a valuable contribution to our national legal system. Through his chronological look at Wisconsin's legal history, Ranney puts the midwestern states on the forefront of legal history and shows how those states, particularly Wisconsin, created the system of laws that we enjoy today.

The book opens with a discussion of how the newly created nation built a legal system to span its entire territory. After winning independence from the British in 1783, the United States gained large amounts of land west of the Appalachian Mountains. The question became how to maintain law and order in the new territory. The civil law systems of the French and Spanish, who occupied the territory prior to the French and Indian War, ran a rather loose ship. Distance limited those colonial powers' ability to micromanage their colonies. Therefore, Ranney argues, those in positions of authority required only a rudimentary knowledge of the law. Once the territory came under British control, the French and Spanish civil law systems became obsolete and a new legal system had to be fashioned. Responding to this need after independence, the new American government created the Northwest Ordinance. The progressive nature of the ordinance, exemplified in its bill of rights and the prohibition of slavery, created a new legal culture in the Midwest, one that the national legal system later adopted.

Ranney further shows how the Midwest's progressive nature developed throughout the Jacksonian period. He explains how the midwestern states embraced the premises of Jacksonian jurisprudence, especially expanding rights and opportunities. The ideals of the Jack-

sonian era influenced Wisconsin's constitution-writing process. The initial document the convention produced showcased broad social and political rights, including suffrage, homestead exemptions, and women's rights. Ranney supports his claim that the Midwest led the march toward equal rights, even though the convention did not ratify all of those rights at once.

The Midwest, and Wisconsin in particular, continued this march. Wisconsin made the bold move to challenge the federal Congress's authority by declaring the Fugitive Slave Act unconstitutional. After the abolition of slavery, Wisconsin enforced antisegregation laws. Throughout the Progressive Era, the Midwest produced leaders like Robert M. La Follette, who led the Progressive movement.

Ranney also shows how conservative as well as liberal ideas display the midwestern influence on national legal culture. Wisconsin falls on the conservative side of the issue of school vouchers, but remains on the forefront of shaping legal history. Through his many examples throughout the book, Ranney illustrates that the politics of the issue matters less than the idea of individual freedom.

Ranney has made a valuable contribution to the historiography of American legal history. Throughout the book, he uses sound logic and strongly supports his claims. His research brings to light many state laws and cases that lift the ideas discussed in the book out of obscurity. Readers will come away with a new appreciation for state legal systems and their history. Historians usually show how legal trends stem from the U.S. Supreme Court and the federal Congress; Ranney flips this notion and shows how states, particularly those in the Midwest, have pushed legal trends.

I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys legal or state history. Ranney points to a variety of interesting cases and laws that stimulate thinking and offer a fresh look at legal trends. The book also stimulates pride in the Midwest. Normally we think of the coasts as driving trends, but here we see the Midwest at the forefront and having a lasting impact on the entire nation.

The Great Medicine Road: Narratives of the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, Part 3, 1850–1855, edited by Michael L. Tate. American Trails Series 24. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Co., an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. 312 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer J. T. Murphy is professor of history at Indiana University South Bend. His research and writing have focused on frontier settlement, the