

Congress and the King of Frauds: Corruption and the Credit Mobilier Scandal at the Dawn of the Gilded Age

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introduction, his object is not to describe the formal policies or congressional laws that went into the construction of the programs but to examine their origins and agendas as examples of “governmentality,” a neologism coined by the late French philosopher and political historian Michel Foucault that refers to the often subtle and unobtrusive ways those in power attempt to mold the consciousness and actions of people to solve problems that the leaders deem of local or national concern.

Biolsi has organized his book as a series of case studies. In chapter one he discusses the way the government reduced the Rosebud Lakotas’ lands in order to make them available to non-Indian settlers. He places both processes within the contexts of the democratic values of white homesteading and Indian allotment. In chapter two he examines the strategies of governmentality that were deployed in order to re-engineer Indians into modern citizens and transform white farmers into good businessmen. The next case study illustrates how the governmental processes associated with the New Deal in South Dakota illustrate that “liberalism with its impulse not to govern too much has been historically accompanied by a process of reform guarding against governing too little” (129). The following chapter contrasts New Deal reformers’ views of policies needed to confront the Great Depression and drought with those of white and Indian South Dakotans they sought to convert into “New Deal subjects.” Chapter five details how, during the Cold War, the relatively sparsely inhabited region of western South Dakota was economically and socially devalued in order to make it a suitable site for ICBM silos, thus drawing potential Soviet nuclear attacks away from the country’s more densely populated and valued areas. In his final chapter, Biolsi discusses the legal-political apparatuses designed to protect the voting rights of racial minorities and the recognition of treaty rights and tribal sovereignty and how they came into conflict during the process of organizing Todd County on the Rosebud Reservation.

The essays in *Power and Progress on the Prairie* are not easy reading. Each is densely packed with historical details that the author employs to meticulously build his case. Although the cases are specific to South Dakota, the book’s theoretical framework and its lessons make it important reading for Iowans and all citizens of the nation’s heartland who will be able to discern the workings of governmentality in their own states and lives.

Congress and the King of Frauds: Corruption and the Credit Mobilier Scandal at the Dawn of the Gilded Age, by Robert B. Mitchell. Roseville, MN: Edinborough Press, 2018. xi, 214 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$22.95 paperback.

Reviewer Mark Wahlgren Summers is professor of history at the University of Kentucky. His books include *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (2004) and *The Era of Good Stealings* (1993).

Just after the Civil War, America entered an age of iron—and steal. The Great Barbecue, the Era of Good Stealings, the Blackout of Honest Government: nobody has a kindly word to say for Gilded Age governance. But for scandal, nothing could match Credit Mobilier and the sensational hearings that followed its exposure. Now Robert Mitchell tells the story as excitingly as the testimony and newspaper reports made it at the time and with a thoroughness unmatched by any previous account.

Credit Mobilier was a construction company for the Union Pacific Railroad, as it built its way to California. Overcharging for supplies and labor, they guaranteed investors a king's ransom at taxpayer expense. Top names in the U.S. House and Senate shared the profits, thanks to Congressman Oakes Ames's spread of stock on suspiciously generous terms, sometimes for no money down. In return, the profiteers could count on powerful friends and sleepy watchdogs in Washington. It worked like a charm until a lawsuit put the whole nasty business onto the front pages of an increasingly alert and activist press. Over the winter of 1872–73, one member after another had the chance to lie, bluff, equivocate, and be exposed before the House and Senate, including the House minority leader, the vice president, the vice president-elect, and Iowa Senator James Harlan, his pieties no longer able to cover his pursuit of pelf. Newspapers whitewashed, exonerated, or blackened, as their party preferences dictated. Committees eager to do just enough justice but not a bit more missed some damning facts and skirted over others, but, then, neither House nor Senate was keen for more than a wrist-tap on a handful of scapegoats.

It makes a fascinating story, with a shabby and occasionally lurid cast of characters both on the floor and in the press gallery. Less noticeable, perhaps, but given their due in this sympathetic and dispassionate account are those lawmakers like James F. Wilson of Iowa, government director on the Union Pacific, and "Black Jack" Logan of Illinois, often rated a spoilsman of ravening appetite, who were tempted to enter Credit Mobilier and either refused or got out as soon as they smelled something wrong.

General readers will have no complaint with Mitchell's account and historians only quibbles. By concentrating so much on one scandal, Mitchell may have missed the context of the times. Credit Mobilier was not so much a shock as a confirmation of what critics had been saying all along about Americans having the worst government that money could buy. Even as the hearings advanced, revelations broke about the

buying of Senate seats and stealing of elections. Rival governments, each claiming a majority, jockeyed for control in Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas. In this case, context would do more than enrich; it would inform. One could argue, for example, that the most visceral outrage against thieving that congressmen faced did not come from Credit Mobilier but from their acceptance of a retroactive pay hike, and, contrary to the impression that Mitchell may leave, the scandal of '73 had almost become an afterthought within three years: for muckrakers, there was treasure everywhere. All true, but that makes Mitchell's contribution no less useful. Then and since, Credit Mobilier *was* the "King of Frauds," and for a revelatory moment in stripping the gilding from the Gilded Age, readers should give this book a royal welcome.

The Elocutionists: Women, Music, and the Spoken Word, by Marian Wilson Kimber. Music in American Life series. Urbana, Springfield, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xvii, 324 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Paige Lush is director of bands and instructor of music at McHenry County College. Her research and writing have focused on the role of music in the chautauqua movement.

It is not entirely surprising that elocution has received little scholarly attention relative to other Progressive Era American phenomena. It was performing written word, but not exactly acting. It could be musical, but was not exactly music. By the early twentieth century it was derided as trite and dated by many performers, some of whom were arguably still practicing (repackaged) elocution. And many of its leading figures were women, often professional performers who specialized in reinforcing traditional gender roles, despite their very presence on stage challenging those same conventions. Marian Wilson Kimber's *The Elocutionists* provides a much needed examination of the elocution movement in the context of turn-of-the-century America.

Kimber's analysis of women's dialect recitations offers valuable insight into women's place on the stage and in broader performing culture. The use of child dialect to reinforce maternal roles for girls while also providing a voice of rebellion against those same social structures is an intriguing paradox that Kimber explains thoroughly without becoming tedious. Her description of the career of child-dialect specialist Kitty Cheatham provides valuable insight into the relationship of the spoken-word performer in general, and the dialect speaker in particular, with the audience. For instance, Kimber quotes from a *New York Times* review stating that Cheatham's performances "seem to appeal