

George W. Norris: the Triumph of a Progressive, 1933-1944

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"George W. Norris: the Triumph of a Progressive, 1933-1944." *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1980), 332-333.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8697>

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THE ANNALS OF IOWA

George W. Norris: The Triumph of a Progressive, 1933-1944, by Richard Lowitt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978. pp. xiii, 493. \$20.00.

A worthy addition to the "great man" style of American political biography, Richard Lowitt's *George W. Norris: The Triumph of a Progressive, 1933-1944* concludes a massive project commenced two decades ago. Previous volumes, entitled *George W. Norris: The Making of a Progressive, 1861-1912* (1963) and *George W. Norris: The Persistence of a Progressive, 1913-1933* (1971), laid the foundation for this work, a story of continuing struggle and success.

Like the preceding volumes, *The Triumph of a Progressive* depends almost entirely upon primary sources and organizes the data in a topical manner. Thus, the reader finds succeeding, tightly-knit chapters that concern different major subjects, but all of which fall into the same general time-frame. The work proceeds chronologically and takes Norris from the 100 Days of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term in 1933 to the senator's death in Nebraska at age eighty-three. A small section of photographs, germane line drawings, and maps divides the narrative. The book itself reveals excellent attention to editorial detail; sturdy binding and clear printing compliment the scholarly presentation.

Lowitt provides a traditional political biography; he acknowledges his empathy for his subject in the "Preface" and discusses Norris with admiring prose. Describing the senator as an "outstanding progressive strongly interested in curbing privilege, rooting out corruption, promoting greater efficiency, and modifying established governmental procedures so that equality of opportunity and democracy would not disappear from the American scene" (p. 473), the author accentuates the positive. Norris's opponents, on the other hand, do not fare well; Lowitt impugns their motives and sees them as roadblocks to progressive goals. He refers repeatedly to the close relationship between Norris, ostensibly a progressive Republican, and President Roosevelt, the Democrat, as an alliance of the like-minded. In essence, the biography accurately reflects its subtitle; Norris saw many of his objectives become reality. In the end, he triumphed.

Elements in Norris's senatorial career which Lowitt singles out for special attention include the construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the effort to provide relief for Nebraska farmers beset by depression and drought. Throughout the book, the senator's interest in water conservation and development projects meshes with his antipathy for the "power trust." Norris believed that man could

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strive to improve and perfect nature and thereby build a better life for himself; he therefore worked to facilitate that striving through public works and private liberty. The better life he sought could be measured in material goods, and Norris's struggles aimed to use Federal money to spread the wealth through jobs, projects, and programs.

As he tells this story of success, Lowitt refrains from analyzing the darker impacts of Norris's progressivism. At no time, apparently, did Norris consider the negative environmental impacts of water resources development or the ultimate problems for small, family-farm agriculture brought by dependency on irrigation. He was, in other words, imprisoned by the panaceas of his day and did not look beyond them. Likewise, the author describes a charismatic leader, but does not explain why he did not build an organization to carry on his struggle, a seeming inconsistency in a life ostensibly devoted to the future of the nation. Indeed, Norris's continuing inability to bring either Nebraska party to his way of thinking detracts from the believability of the biographical portrait of a consummate politician, and instead opens the door to speculation about the self-centeredness of his politics. Lowitt neither elaborates upon nor explains this important inconsistency.

Despite the unanswered questions raised by the biography, Lowitt leaves a strong picture of Norris as a man whose great integrity and courage deserve emulation. His consistent devotion to lifelong goals and his ability to be flexible as times changed gave Norris national stature during an age when charismatic leaders ranged through the American scene. Though traditional and hardly critical, this biography will become the standard reference for its subject and should find a place in every well-rounded political history collection.

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Women of Minnesota: Selected Biographical Essays, edited by Barbara Stuhler and Gretchen Kreuter. St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 1977. pp. 402. Illustrations, notes, index. \$12.00.

A collection of biographical essays dedicated to increasing "our knowledge about the contributions of women in our society," *Women of Minnesota* succeeds in its purpose. The editors, Barbara Stuhler and Gretchen Kreuter, have chosen seventeen women for considera-

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