

The Great Silent Majority: Missouri's Resistance to World War I

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every midwesterner) will recognize much that is familiar in this delightful book.

The Great Silent Majority: Missouri's Resistance to World War I, by Christopher C. Gibbs. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988. x, 174 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PETER L. PETERSEN, WEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

In this provocative little book, Christopher C. Gibbs, a historian and free-lance writer, claims that a majority of Missourians opposed American participation in World War I from its beginnings all the way to the Armistice on November 11, 1918. They manifested this opposition by not cooperating with war bond drives, military conscription, and campaigns to augment food supplies by increasing production and reducing consumption. To use a pejorative word from that period, Gibbs says "slacking" was the common response of most Missourians to the war effort.

Why did Missouri's citizens react this way? Gibbs finds explanation for their behavior in the attitudes of "localism, faith in democracy, and anticorporate sentiment," which "were deeply rooted in Missouri and underlay the responses to the war of many, perhaps a majority of the people in the state" (6). These factors, then, more than the traditional linkage by historians of opposition to ethnicity and radical political beliefs, define the antipathy of many Missourians to the war. Most residents of the state, Gibbs asserts, thought the president and Congress were more willing to listen to the "special interests" who stood to benefit from the conflict than to the wishes of "the people" who opposed it.

During the prewar period, the forces of modernization, led by Frederick B. Mumford, dean of Missouri's College of Agriculture, had struggled with only limited success to get farmers to "abandon primitive methods and the constraints of a local market economy" (20). But with war came new opportunities for the modernizers. Mumford, for example, headed Missouri's Council of Defense and served as the state's federal food administrator. Now able to cloak their campaign in the red, white, and blue of patriotism, they waged a relentless assault on the defenders of traditionalism. Even though the traditionalists were finally muzzled, they continued to resist wartime mobilization. Because this resistance, with the exceptions of the bitter Lead Belt strike of 1917 and a general strike in Kansas City the following year, was increasingly passive, Gibbs believes that historians have mistakenly equated silence with majority support for the war.

Unfortunately, this ambitious thesis rests on a weak foundation. Gibbs has researched local newspapers, the files of the Missouri Council of Defense and other wartime organizations, and several letter collections, but the documentation is quite limited in scope, frequently anecdotal, and occasionally suggests a contradictory interpretation. Do reports of suicides, self-mutilations, and hastily arranged marriages support the view that Missourians had an unusual proclivity for avoiding military service when Gibbs's own statistics indicate that they volunteered at a rate more than seven percent above the national average while their requests for deferments were within national norms? His account of widespread nonparticipation in bond drives is also less than convincing.

One of the most intriguing statements in the book comes in the introduction, where Gibbs reports that "limited research" he conducted in the eight states bordering Missouri indicates "that Missourians were not alone in their opposition and refusal to participate" (viii). Although he makes no specific reference to Iowa, there are some superficial impressions that he may be correct. During the months before the 1916 gubernatorial contest between Republican William Lloyd Harding and Democrat Edwin T. Meredith, Iowans engaged in a lively debate over the respective merits of bureaucratic centralism (modernization?) and local democracy (traditionalism?). At the center of this conflict were two organizations, the Greater Iowa Association and the United Taxpayers League. Whether the Iowa experience—seemingly a conflict between those who wanted greater efficiency and others alarmed by the loss of local autonomy—parallels events in Missouri remains unclear, but after 1917 American involvement in the war certainly accelerated the process of economic and political centralization. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to look at Iowa during the war and determine whether Gibbs's thesis has wider implications. By challenging historians to reexamine old assumptions, Gibbs has written an important book. Even if additional research fails to substantiate his views, all of us who are interested in the response of midwesterners to World War I are in his debt.

The Mild Reservationists and the League of Nations Controversy in the Senate, by Herbert F. Margulies. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989. ix, 300 pp. Tables, bibliography, index. \$39.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY FREDERICK C. ADAMS, DRAKE UNIVERSITY

Professor Margulies is convinced that if the United States had joined the League of Nations, "the process by which Americans adjusted to

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