

## BOOK REVIEWS

William W. Boyer and Edward C. Ratledge. *Pivotal Policies in Delaware: From Desegregation to Deregulation* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2014). Pp. 246. Cloth, \$80.00.

Nelson Johnson. *Battleground New Jersey: Vanderbilt, Hague, and Their Fight for Justice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014). Pp. 259. Cloth. \$29.95.

John J. Kennedy. *Pennsylvania Elections* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2014). Revised edition. Pp. 222. Paperback. \$32.99.

Students of politics must contend with an inescapable irony: American democracy requires an electorate actively engaged with the making of policy, but most citizens, regardless of the era, hate politics. Then again, perhaps it is not ironic. As the old adage goes, you may like sausage, but you do not necessarily want to see how it is made. Dining on Middle Atlantic politics is not for those with delicate digestive systems.

Attorney and legal scholar Nelson Johnson, who achieved acclaim with *Boardwalk Empire*, is the nation's foremost bard of New Jersey political corruption. In *Battleground New Jersey*, Johnson wonderfully describes the Captain Ahab/Moby Dick relationship between Jersey City Democratic boss Frank "I am the Law" Hague and gentleman lawyer, reformer, and professor, Arthur Vanderbilt. There is dedication, and then there is obsession. Vanderbilt spent decades futilely trying to bring down Hague's venal organization. Only death ended the duel.

Hague, like many other Irish Catholic politicians on the East Coast who clawed their way to the top, served his tribe. In Boston, New York City, and

Jersey City, the Irish had no problem excluding other ethnic Catholics, as well as Jews, blacks, and middle-class Protestants, from patronage and leadership positions. As Johnson emphasizes, in Hague's world Protestants were congenital oppressors who needed to be wrung of every cent they had stolen from working-class Irish Catholics. Others were to fall in line, grateful for the grandiose hospital Hague built—a temple that generated kickbacks to favored contractors and that employed enough Irish loyalists to add another suburb to Dublin.

During the 1930s Hague's Irish police force famously beat and arrested industrial union organizers. While many of those union activists may have been fellow Catholics and Democrats, Hague did not tolerate potential rivals to his absolute power. Hague had cause to defend his political power so brutally: it was the source of his wealth. As George Washington Plunkitt of New York's Tammany Hall Democratic machine had observed a generation earlier, "I seen my opportunities and took 'em." The difference between Plunkitt and Hague, however, was that Plunkitt recognized there were moral and practical limits to corruption. Building shoddy, overpriced, bridges and orphanages would come back to haunt a politician, at election time or at Heaven's gate. Hague knew no limits.

Hague's nemesis, Arthur Vanderbilt, was the quintessential good government advocate; the kind of reformer that Plunkitt contemptuously referred to as a "good-goo." Vanderbilt, however, had difficulty arousing the public against Hague. The problem was that to upper-class Protestant Republicans like Vanderbilt, good government often translated into no government for unemployed workers, the impoverished, and the victims of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination. It would take a younger generation of reformers, one willing to compromise across the political aisle, to clean up Jersey City.

Political machine bosses are one aspect of politics; another component is the conception and execution of public policy. Political scientists William Boyer and Edward Ratledge use Delaware as the backdrop for understanding public policy initiatives over the recent decades. Although Delaware is easy to overlook given that the state is comprised of just three counties and is often mistaken for Philadelphia's backyard, there are important geographical and demographic differences that make for a potentially rewarding study.

Boyer and Ratledge examine ten public policy issues ranging from racial desegregation in the 1950s to business deregulation in the 1990s. If anyone

ever wondered why Delaware became a national center for the incorporation of businesses, or doubted the political influence of a wealthy, paternalistic family (the DuPonts), *Pivotal Policies in Delaware* provides answers.

There are, though, two quibbles. First, the authors could have delved more deeply into Wilmington's crime statistics, rather than framing law and order as a white backlash issue. When controlled for population size, Wilmington (71,000) not only ranks among one of the most violent cities in the United States, it also has one of the lowest arrest rates for homicide. Nearly all the victims of crime were, and continue to be, African American. These facts have been true for years. Famously, anonymous Internet posters not only warned Wilmington residents about cooperating with police investigations, they posted the names and addresses of those who had assisted law enforcement. Since such information is typically closely guarded by police and the district attorney's office, serious questions about public safety in Wilmington may be raised.

A second issue is Boyer and Ratledge's heavy reliance on Wikipedia as a research source. While political journalists have embraced Wikipedia as a quick reference tool, historians have been leery of using a site that is not peer reviewed for accuracy and which allows anyone to edit information. If one is going to cite a public law ruling, it is preferable to read the actual case, rather than its Wikipedia synopsis.

To most Americans, politics is not about public policy issues or political machines; it comes down to elections and voting. In *Pennsylvania Elections*, John Kennedy has compiled Keystone State election statistics since 1950. He also provides a useful historical analysis of geography and demography, and the ways in which both shaped electoral outcomes.

Looking at election trends and results over several decades sharply underscores the fact that as Pennsylvania's population growth lagged behind much of the country, and its economy experienced wrenching deindustrialization, the state lost political clout.

On the other hand, what Democratic political strategist James Carville said about the Keystone State in the 1980s has largely remained unchanged: Pennsylvania is two cities with Alabama in between. Unpacking that observation is what makes being a student of American politics so much fun.

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