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DEMOCRACY: THE THRESHOLD OF FREEDOM, by Harold F. Gosnell. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948. Pp. vii, 316. \$4.00

Robert J. Harris

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Book Reviews

DEMOCRACY: THE THRESHOLD OF FREEDOM, by Harold F. Gosnell.
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The title of this book is something of a misnomer insofar as it may imply that the author is primarily concerned with an analysis of the theory and practice of democracy rather than with specific segments of the democratic process such as the suffrage, elections, electoral behavior, and representation with a beginning chapter on consent and compromise and two concluding chapters dealing respectively with the competence of the voter and democracy and values. Although the author says little that he or other students of the electoral process have not said before, he brings to his general treatment of suffrage and electoral problems a rich and mature scholarship and his socio-statistical approach with which readers of his *Grass Roots Politics*, *Negro Politicians*, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model*, and *Getting Out the Vote* are already familiar. The principal merit of the volume is that it analyzes in a concise manner certain theories of suffrage and representation and points to the difficulties and deficiencies of each.

The volume is also useful in dispelling illusions concerning the efficacy of the suffrage to cure all the ills of a group and in disposing of the fiction of the omniscience of the voter. In discussing the extension of the suffrage, Mr. Gosnell shows in instance after instance how the ballot has been only one step, and often times a short one, toward improvement in the status of the poor, the women, the Negro, and the foreign born. He also treats effectively the anti-democratic results of the long ballot which, though based on extreme democratic theory, actually places an impossible burden on the voter and vests the sovereign choice of many officials in the organization or the machine. In this connection, the author makes good use of the numerous constitutional amendments periodically inflicted on Louisiana voters under a constitution which has already achieved the detail and variety of a Sears, Roebuck catalog while lacking both the pictures and interest characteristic of this enterprise. In his discussion of representation the author pursues his sociological method to describe the representative and his relationship to his

constituency, and he provides interesting and significant data on the occupations of legislators.

Altogether Mr. Gosnell has produced an interesting and provocative book which should prove useful to anyone interested in the electoral and representative processes. That the author raises more questions than he answers is a tribute both to his wisdom and his power of calm analysis.

ROBERT J. HARRIS*

CONSTITUTIONAL DICTATORSHIP, by Clinton L. Rossiter.[†] Princeton University Press, 1948. Pp. ix, 314. \$5.00.

This book is motivated by the belief that "we must cease wasting our energies in discussing whether the government of the United States is to be powerful or not. It is going to be powerful or we are going to be obliterated. Our problem is to make that power effective and responsible, to make any future dictatorship a constitutional one." (p. 314) It is toward a solution of this problem that this book is directed. Professor Rossiter shares the assumption made by many people that "the complex system of government of the democratic, constitutional state is essentially designed to function under normal, peaceful conditions, and is often unequal to the exigencies of a great national crisis." (p. 5) The corollary is likewise assumed, that in times of crisis democratic government "must be temporarily altered to whatever degree is necessary to overcome the peril and restore normal conditions." (p. 5) Crisis government must thus be strong but with limitations. It must have no other purpose "than the preservation of the independence of the state, the maintenance of the existing constitutional order, and the defense of the political and social liberties of the people." (p. 7) A government that satisfies these conditions is one that Professor Rossiter thinks must approach, if it does not equal, a "constitutional dictatorship."

The term "dictator" here and throughout the book is used in the sense in which that office functioned in the Roman Republic where the creation of a dictatorship "involved the legal bestowal of autocratic power on a trusted man who was to govern

*Professor and Head of Department of Government, Louisiana State University.

†Professor Rossiter received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1942 and has been Assistant Professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University since 1947.