

JON LAWRENCE. *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 328. \$59.95 (cloth).

When the Palace of Westminster burned down in 1834, crowds on the other bank of the Thames cheered and jeered as the flames flared. That spirit of popular rejection and irreverence toward the political elite lives on today (June–July 2009). As taxi drivers now pass the House of Commons, its reputation in tatters because of the MPs’ expenses scandal, they shout out to booted and suited types entering the Palace, “Pay it all back, mate.”

In his history of British electioneering, Jon Lawrence has tracked the ebbs and flows of rejection and irreverence by voters and nonvoters toward British politicians and their ways since the middle of the eighteenth century. His tracking does not show a mighty river of democracy flowing on uninterruptedly to greater public participation; rather, its waters snag up against sandbanks and swirl into crosscurrents. In the modern period, Lawrence demonstrates that since the 1960s, the meeting of voters in any significant numbers with politicians during an election has depended on the outcome of turf wars between parties and broadcasters. The parties want the risk-free delivery of favorable publicity; the broadcasters seek critical coverage of topical issues so as to make politicians “accountable.” He argues that the broadcasters set the agenda for the 1966 and 1970 UK general elections and that by the 1990s, with the withering of local campaigning, the broadcasters had the politicians talking to voters in their homes from studios or via direct feeds from outside locations. On their side, politicians sought favorable publicity via private negotiations with broadcasters over control of who is in the studio audience, preagreement on questions, street walkabouts and canvassing surrounded by party faithful, and planted questions and hecklers, all planned and policed by party spin doctors. But while acknowledging their contributions to public participation, Lawrence points out that British broadcasters’ democracy-friendly behavior is on their terms: voters have got to be “newsworthy,” articulate, and diverse by ethnicity and gender; get past vetting by telephonists; ask short questions rather than make arguments; and be subject to time delays in their contributions during phone-ins to weed out those who want to contribute otherwise. In this critique of broadcasters, he is refreshing by pointing to the motes in the eyes of media types who claim to hold the powerful to account in the name of the people. Yet he still gives pole position to them rather than to the people or politicians when it comes to securing “the future of our democracy” (254).

But this is still too much faith in broadcasters. Lawrence has called the “vision” of British public service broadcasters a “strongly paternalist” one (245), and he queries whether even now they “possess sufficient commitment to public participation” in elections (251). Further, if he means “broadcasters” in the narrow sense of program executives, he is cutting out broadcasting journalists. If he is including them, he is squeezing out print journalists. Is he counting in the political bloggers, the citizen journalists? Moreover, broadcasters are paid professionals who, in Britain, either execute the preferences of their commercial masters or enact the interpretation of the public service remit in ways decided by their editors in chief. Lawrence’s case is arguable, but if we lived in Berlusconi’s Italy, I think we would hesitate to put any faith at all in broadcasters to secure our democracy.

Electing Our Masters starts with the eighteenth-century hustings, when rival candidates stood high up on platforms before voters and nonvoters in towns and country, whipping up support for nomination by a show of hands before voters passed on to openly cast their votes. It was a rough-and-tumble business, rowdy and drunken, with music and marches keeping the gladiatorial atmosphere pumped up. The town of Horsham, Sussex, was reported to be “awash with drink” for the six weeks preceding the election of 1847, and in Beverley, Yorkshire, poll day in 1868 saw “continual fighting in the streets” (31).

Generations of Britons have known about this behavior because they have enjoyed *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens (1837; repr., Oxford, 1988) and, in it, his account of

the fictional Eatanswill election, boisterous rather than drunken and violent like both Horsham and Beverley (142–59). They remember the hapless Mr. Potts, toady to his Blue betters; editor of one of the town's two partisan newspapers; and gusher of vacuous, pompous propaganda all over the rotten borough. The townspeople got their public participation in the election by a small minority doing the voting, and the majority enjoying the roughhouse of bands, banter, beer, and bribery. It was not, however, by listening to that early media type Potts that the electoral Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 got through a reluctant Commons. It was Britons' rejection of and irreverence toward their "betters" at the hustings and in civil campaigns that did the heavy lifting for an expanding franchise. Likewise, it will be voters, probably through interactive media, who break up private, unaccountable deals between politicians and broadcasters to become masters and mistresses of their own electoral participation. Lawrence has written his full, revealing, and very readable history of British electioneering before those Westminster taxi drivers put up two fingers to their "betters" in the Commons. The MPs' expenses scandal has made British voters more jeering and rejecting of their political class now than at any other time in living memory. Those are very strong emotions to make people vote, independently of whatever access to politicians broadcasters negotiate.

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MARTIN J. WIENER. *An Empire on Trial: Race, Murder, and Justice under British Rule, 1870–1935*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv+255. \$25.99 (paper).

Richard Price, in his concise assessment of the new imperial history, asserts that law remains one of the most prominent "blind spots" within it ("One Big Thing: Britain, Its Empire, and Their Imperial Culture," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 [July 2006]: 607). With *An Empire on Trial*, Martin Wiener joins several other major scholars who have attempted to address this critical (although narrowing) gap in the historiographical record. Wiener deftly uses criminal law in the empire and the controversial trials for interracial murder as avenues to explore the dynamics of imperialism and the ideas and practices that linked the people of Britain's colonies to the political and legal institutions that comprised the empire's formal framework. The result is a complex, fascinating, and sometimes controversial book.

An Empire on Trial is a departure for Wiener, who has established himself as one of the premier scholars of British law and legal culture and the foremost scholar on murder but, until this point, had yet to take the imperial turn. What is particularly impressive about the author's approach to his new arena is his choice to examine the contest and conflicts surrounding interracial murder across a geographically and chronologically broad span. His analysis begins with interracial murder on British ships at sea in the mid-nineteenth century and ends with a brief chapter on the murder trial of Thurmann Grant, a lumber-mill owner accused of killing one of his black employees, which took place in British Honduras in 1934. Major chapters are devoted to Queensland (1869–89), Fiji (1857–85), Trinidad and the Bahamas (1886–97), and Kenya (1905–34), while India (1899–1922), because of the complexity of its legal system and its significance in the British Empire, is the subject of two chapters.

Although Wiener follows a contiguous and overlapping chronology across the book and does trace, when possible, the movement of specific legal policies and the officials who enforced them between different parts of the empire, both of these organizing elements are secondary. Rather, the disparate regions and periods addressed are forged into a cohesive whole through the focus on a single overriding question: "What in fact happened when the contrasting 'principles'—of equality and liberalism on the one hand, and inequality and

While this book's panoramic review of electoral politics is a strength, it is also a weakness. As a political scientist, I found myself drawing breath at some of the sweeping conclusions drawn on the basis of quite flimsy anecdotal evidence. One example is Lawrence's argument that MPs are increasingly turning to local constituency surgeries as a substitute for local campaigning. While it is true that almost all MPs now run surgeries, surveys of the electorate and analyses of constituency spending data show that local campaigns are very important in influencing the vote in contemporar...Â By Jon Lawrence Oxford University Press 344pp Â£30.00 ISBN 9780199550128 Published 26 March 2009. Please login or register to read this article. Register to continue. . Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 328. \$59.95 (cloth). When the Palace of Westminster burned down in 1834, crowds on the other bank of the Thames cheered and jeered as the ames ared. That spirit of popular rejection and irrev-erence toward the political elite lives on today (Juneâ€“July 2009).Â In his history of British electioneering, Jon Lawrence has tracked the ebbs and ows of rejection and irreverence by voters and nonvoters toward British politicians and their ways since the middle of the eighteenth century. His tracking does not show a mighty river of democracy owing on uninterruptedly to greater public participation; rather, its waters snag up against sandbanks and swirl into crosscurrents. item 2 Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair, Ve 2 -Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair, Ve. Â£25.69. Free postage. item 3 Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair by 3 -Electing our masters: the hustings in British politics from Hogarth to Blair by. Â£19.98.Â Jon Lawrence is lecturer in Modern British History at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Emmanuel College. He has written widely on the social, political and cultural history of modern Britain, and is the author of Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914 (1998) and, with Miles Taylor, Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820 (1997).