



William Goebel: The Politics of Wrath (Kentucky Bicentennial Bookshelf)

James C. Klotter

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The turbulent career of William Goebel (1856–1900), which culminated in assassination, marked an end-of-the-century struggle for political control of Kentucky. Although populism had become a strong force in the nation, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and ex-Confederates still dominated the state and its Democratic party. Touting reforms and attacking the railroad monopoly, Goebel challenged this old order.

A Yankee in a state that fancied itself southern, Goebel had to depend on a strong organization to win votes. As "The Kenton King" he created a new style of politics. To some he was a progressive reformer; to others, a tyrannical machine boss. His drive for power and his enemies' fierce opposition aroused violent political factionalism. Goebel's fateful duel with a rival, his partisan election law, and his ruthless convention tactics led to the bitterly contested gubernatorial election of 1899 that resulted in his murder.

Although the full truth about the murder was never revealed in nearly a decade of trials and the advent of progressive politics was long delayed in Kentucky, Goebel's death did relieve the state's political turmoil and induce some legal reforms. Using new sources and fresh perspectives, James C. Klotter portrays Goebel's tumultuous era and discovers the real man within the obscurity of his conflicting images.

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