

We occupy a middle position geographically, being neither North nor South nor East nor West, and I wonder if this may not have encouraged us to prefer middle positions generally.

I first thought of this when, back in 1948, after three decades in which liquor was the central issue of our politics, we finally repealed by a sizable majority our state Prohibition amendment. Our Legislature then had to replace our bone-dry law with some sort of legal control. The "extremes" of a state liquor monopoly (which was deemed "socialistic") or private liquor stores and open taverns (which violated our puritan pieties) were rejected as we put together what Capt. Harold H. Huckins of the Wichita vice squad called the "worst example of ambiguous legislation to come off the state press" -- though I think he overstated the case. It provided for privately owned package liquor stores, but prohibited public drinking save in "private clubs" -- a provision, said Captain Huckins, which was bound "to increase the popularity of the rest room as the Kansas cocktail bar for the common man."

What is illustrated here, in my opinion, is a great disadvantage of the "middle-of-the-road" attitude when adhered to as steadfastly as it is by the typical Kansas mind. It tends to eschew an objective analysis of problems and a creative application of principle to their solution in favor of simple measurements of prevailing pressures -- and these are nearly all heavily weighted toward the status quo or well-organized private interests. It also leads to the belief that there's an inherent virtue in dead centers and halfway measures, even when dealing with such clear issues as "McCarthyism" -- as though "truth" were to be found halfway between valid statements and malicious lies, or "justice" halfway between demonstrable right and wrong.

Yet Carl Becker loved Kansas -- and so do I. It was precisely because he loved her that he wrote as he did and that he would deplore, as I do, the manner in which this once gay and gaudy old girl (she was still so when Becker wrote of her) has become relatively sad and drab. I deplore the relaxations of those vital tensions between puritan piety and Wild Western bravura, between idealism and pragmatism, between hell-fire religionists and E. Haldeman-Julius free thinkers.

Almost the only largely effective tension in the Kansas of 1954 seems to be between eastern and western Kansas. Here are found considerable differences in economics and temperament; they seem reflected somewhat in a raging factional fight within the Republican party as Lieut. Gov. Fred Hall of Dodge City leads what is billed as a "revolt" against the "palace guard" of Governor Ed Arn, whose candidate is George Templar, former United States Attorney for Kansas. But I'm afraid this tension is hardly great enough to stimulate much creativeness.