
This standard, bulky two-volume work which appeared originally in 1933 has been faithfully reprinted by Da Capo Press. Nothing has been added (no new introduction or word of appreciation to the late Professor William Ernest Smith); nor has anything been taken away. Smith's labor of love, as far as this reviewer knows, is still, deservedly, the major published work on the Blair family in American politics.

Readers with a large appetite for details of the family or for the now familiar twists and turns of the last century's party politics will find this a compendium of information and a running account of political history from the Age of Jackson through the end of Reconstruction when death finally removed the Blairs from national politics. Throughout these sixty years Francis Preston Blair and his two sons, Montgomery and Frank, Jr., both of whom were lawyers, were closely involved in politics. They were a closely-knit family, able always to see eye-to-eye on major issues, and equally energetic and ambitious for Frank whom they hoped to see in the White House some day. But it was Blair, Sr., who made the greatest impress on American history. Andrew Jackson brought him to Washington in 1828 to popularize Jacksonian democracy through the Globe. Like Amos Kendall, the other famous member of Old Hickory's Kitchen Cabinet, Blair (or "Blare," as Jackson called him) came from Kentucky where he had learned to "trust the people" and distrust large banks. He was, by Kentucky standards, a gentleman: he owned a plantation, kept slaves, lived like a man of means — Kentucky means, that is, for he had little sympathy for Calhoun's slavocracy or Clay's neo-Federalism. Earlier, it is true, Blair had sided with Clay, but when Jackson's star ascended Blair made his move. In Jackson's Washington, Blair and the Globe lauded the President, assailed his enemies, railed at the Bank of the United State, and smiled on Jackson's friends, particularly Van Buren and Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri who took Frank Blair under his arm and smiled on him and helped him gain a firm foothold in Missouri politics. (Montgomery remained at the family estate, Silver Springs, in Maryland.) By the 1840's, though, the new Jacksonians led by James K. Polk dumped the elder Blair for his continued allegiance to the Van Buren wing of the party.

From first to last, the Blairs were unionists who would not back down. But like other unionists and ambitious men they had to contend
with the vicissitudes born of sectionalism and party realignments. In the 1830's they loathed the Whigs and Abolitionists, but found the Free Soldiers to their liking in 1848; 1852 brought them back to the Democracy of President Franklin Pierce, slaveowner. In 1856, when the slave South captured the party, the Blairs became Republicans, championing Fremont and the non-extension of slavery. They were never sympathetic to the Abolitionists, to be sure, but they supported Lincoln and became his ardent defenders during the war. Lincoln in turn relied on all three: Blair, Sr., for counsel; Montgomery for service as his Postmaster General; and Frank for support in Congress and on the hustings. Later, during "Radical" Reconstruction (Smith reiterates most of the standard myths of Reconstruction), the Blairs returned to the Democracy, cozied up to the former secessionists, and helped Frank win the party's vice-presidential nomination in 1868. Four years later, still unsatisfied but ambitious, the family helped Horace Greeley capture the Liberal Republican nomination when it became clear that Frank's past (including his two-fisted drinking) would prevent him from being nominated. Still not down, the family, even old Blair, looked ahead and hoped that Frank might win the imagination of one of the two major parties in 1876. But death ended all dreams, thus bringing to an end one of the most extraordinary family dynasties in America — a country that has not been known for family dynasties in politics.

Historians coming to his book today will (hopefully) appreciate its scope and scholarship. Smith loved documents (he lamented that publishing costs necessitated omitting more than half of his documentation) and he generously reprinted private letters from the Blair papers. Yet modern readers, even devout historians, will be put off by the book's length, particularly the repetitiveness brought on by an almost slavish devotion to narrative, a slavishness that forced him into a retelling of much familiar political and military history. His use of terms like "radical" for Jacksonians will be unacceptable, also. So, too, will his bias for the Blairs: Smith fell into the common trap of agreeing with the protagonists even when they changed their minds, as they did often. Readers of today will also be impatient with Smith's inability to grasp the subtleties and paradoxes of the era — such as the overwhelming prominence slavery gained even in the minds of pragmatic and not so subtle men, like the Blairs, who owned slaves but fought against slavery's expansion. Smith saw nothing incongruous in the family's attitude (common at the time) that slavery was "wrong" but that Abolitionism was worse. Modern readers will also
find distasteful Smith's subtle and unintentional racism which caused him to ignore blacks, or misspell their names (as he does with Frederick Douglass) or invariably to characterize slaves as "lazy" and "worthless" (e.g., I, pp. 383, 443).

These comments are not about "faults" — Smith was an able, conscientious scholar of his day. But history, like Thomas Hart Benton's Missouri River, has a way of rolling along, cutting into our assumptions and exposing crags and shallows where depth and smoothness were once assumed. But history is a wide river and it has room for the Blair family and William Ernest Smith's big book about them.

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Robert D. Marcus is Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has written an ambivalent book for those who enjoy political discussion. His readers must have a great deal of knowledge about the men and events mentioned before they pick up the book because Dr. Marcus does not expound upon their personalities, characters, or desires. Perhaps the book seems ambiguous because Dr. Marcus believes as he states in the preface, "There was no evolution from Garfield's humiliations of 1880 to Hanna's dominance in 1896, but a quite sudden revolution between the campaigns of 1892 and 1896. This was not the product of managers and organizers or of any superhuman genius on the part of Mark Hanna, but of the emergence of a Republican majority and the mass conversion of large corporations to Republicanism as a result of the triumph of silver in the Democratic party." This theory can be and was demonstrated in Grand Old Party by omission of events pertinent to the opinion of one who does not accept the theory. In the mind of this reviewer there is a vast amount of difference between demonstration and proof. Of such points are political discussions composed.

Readers who are familiar with Thomas Platt, Chairman of the New York State Republican organization, will no doubt be supplied with much material for a pro and con discussion of this man's merits