

of the time spent in port. This is bound to be a controversial point.

Western River Transportation is clearly intended for a limited academic market composed mostly of economic historians in general and econometricians in particular. The narrow focus, difficult literary style, and mathematical analyses do not lend themselves to a large reading public, which in turn raises questions about the orientation of the profession. Readers seeking a quantitative analysis of western river transportation will turn either to this book or to the five articles on which the monograph is based. Individuals desiring a more interesting, comprehensive history will continue to look to Hunter.

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The Presidency of James Buchanan. By ELBERT B. SMITH. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1975. Pp. xiii, 225. Preface, acknowledgments, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$12.00.)

There is a tired joke about James Buchanan that few teachers of American history can resist when they come to the Pennsylvanian's four years in the White House: "James Buchanan accomplished everything he set out to accomplish. Nothing!" Professor Smith's retelling of the familiar story of Buchanan's administration is not likely to put that quip to rest; nor is it likely to cause historians to raise their estimate of the man. Smith does not try to overturn Buchanan's reputation as an ineffective president — in fact, he outlines his failures as a party leader. Rather he seeks to amend our notion of Buchanan to read that he was "neither indecisive nor weak." His helplessness in halting the downward spiral of "Bleeding Kansas" into "Bleeding America" was not due to any lack of political principles. He was, from first to last, a pro-Southern unionist. A bachelor, whose life was mainly a public one, whose closest friends were slaveowners or pro-slavery sympathizers, Buchanan's deepest emotional attachment was to a strong (even imperialistic) America, half-slave, half-free, with the balance tipped ever so slightly to the slavocracy. In this he was sincere, says Smith, and in this he was constant. The president failed, in other words, because his principles failed.

Buchanan had been for Clay in 1824, but in 1828 he discovered the bold leadership of Jackson. Buchanan remained a Jacksonian to

the end. The problem, it seems clear, was that Jacksonianism by the 1850s was morally and imaginatively bankrupt. What had once been dynamic was now tired; what was once fresh was now stale. What had been bold nationalism in Jackson's hands as he put down the South Carolina Nullifiers was inept unionism in Buchanan's. Put another way, his unionism was a thinly disguised, dull standpattism, no matter how sincerely held. So, Buchanan did set out to accomplish something. But it proved to be the impossible, as Lincoln, whom he woefully underestimated and could not understand, knew. The difference between Buchanan and Lincoln is the difference between moral obtuseness and a tragic sensibility.

Professor Smith's brief book is part of a series on American presidents aimed at synthesis rather than original scholarship. Smith offers little that is new — as he modestly acknowledges in his references to standard accounts and to Philip S. Klein's exhaustive 1962 biography. Smith's judgments are balanced; he is not particularly sympathetic to the man as one might expect, given his interpretation. Unfortunately, the book is mostly descriptive narrative, with little analysis of the sort found, say, in Joan Hoff Wilson's recent and brilliant biography of Herbert Hoover (1974) or in John Morton Blum's distinguished, brief study of *The Republican Roosevelt* (1954). Historians of the behavioral school will find nothing of interest. Nor is the book particularly well written. The prose is flat but adequate.

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Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics During Reconstruction. Edited by JAMES C. MOHR. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Pp. xvi, 200. Acknowledgments, introduction, notes, historiographical note. \$11.95.)

This collection of essays surveys Republican politics in nine Northern states after the Civil War and constitutes yet another manifestation of recent scholarly efforts to attack the Reconstruction era from a new perspective. James C. Mohr (Maryland, Baltimore County), the editor and author of the essay on New York, feels that academe has largely ignored the Northern states during this period. He argues, correctly, I think, that a regionally balanced portrait is not only mandatory, but also long overdue. All the essays (only one