Instead of the Era of Good Feelings, the period ought to be called the Era of Corruption. From the president and the Cabinet down to officials in the states, there were shocking revelations of malfeasance in government, which angered and frightened honest people. Over and over Remini hammers at his thesis, and in overstressing it he makes it dubious. The election of 1824 was a struggle over "liberty, public virtue, and centralized power in the federal government" (p. 80); Jackson's victory four years later affirmed the public's "demand for the restoration of morality and virtue to civic life, and a reform of those practices that had corrupted officials, expanded government, and endangered freedom" (p. 148). Other issues—the bank, internal improvements, the tariff, even slavery—Remini believes were secondary. Whether the Era of Good Feelings was as corrupt, or the Jacksonians as virtuous, as Remini concludes is open to challenge. After all, whereas John Quincy Adams's Tobias Watkins absconded with $7,000 from the Treasury, Jackson's collector of customs at New York, Samuel Swartwout, made off with over a million.

This is an interesting and important book. Remini has benefited from the advances in Jacksonian scholarship since publication of Marquis James's two-volume biography and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *Age of Jackson*. In addition to the expanded secondary literature, the author has profitably used the documentary collections now available, especially the Jackson papers at the Hermitage.

The most unfortunate aspect of the volume is its prose. Remini obviously wants to establish rapport with the reader through a conversational style. He achieves that, but at the cost of craftsmanship and grace in his writing. It seems unnecessary, for Remini is ordinarily a very fine writer. Despite this, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom* is a valuable contribution to Jacksonian historiography.

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American Farmers: The New Minority. By Gilbert C. Fite. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. Pp. ix, 265. Table, illustrations, notes, index. $19.50.)

Gilbert C. Fite's volume is one in a series on *Minorities in Modern America*, edited by Warren F. Kimball and David Edwin Harrell, Jr. In discussing the transition of farming activity from majority to minority status in the American economy, primarily since 1920, the author focuses on the productivity

factors which led to this change and the efforts by farmers and their political spokesmen to counteract these forces. While his approach is essentially that of an institutional historian, he is concerned, perhaps fundamentally, by the shifting national priority perceptions evidenced in the growing dominance of consumer interests during the past twenty years. His somewhat startling conclusion is that, "In all likelihood, the nation's agrarian heritage will lose most of its significance and meaning within another generation" (pp. 240-41).

Fite has directed his survey primarily to the general reader, rather than to specialists in agriculture, economics, politics, or agricultural history. He presents an excellent synthesis which academicians, also, may find highly useful in surveying overall trends of agricultural development and governmental policy relating to it. His first two chapters afford chronological and regional background summaries of the setting as small-farm America moved out of the "Golden Era" that ended with World War I. The body of the text centers upon the subsequent agrarian organizational effort in pursuit of governmental assistance, the legislative relief programs as revised to date, the management changes that marked the survival of commercial and agribusiness operators while more traditionally diversified competitors were squeezed out, and finally the "boom-bust" experience of the 1970s, which led the less than 5 percent of the population remaining in agriculture to hone, through "tractorcades," new skills in minority, special interest politics.

The author finds that the power of farmers through the period of mounting crisis has remained "fragmented not only among commercial producers, but between large farmers and small part-time operators" (p. 241). Increasingly, also, they have felt a closer identity with the interests of business than with those of labor. For a century or longer, however, they have derived their strongest support from the mystique of rural ideals and value systems cherished by a society that no longer had "to make a living on the farm" (p. 238). What will be the effect, Fite queries, as those emotions and traditions fade?

Fite is too sound an economic historian to discountenance the trend toward commercial viability, but his personal sentiments are seldom far removed from the tenets he denominates as "agricultural fundamentalism." He defends agricultural colleges in their emphasis upon farm productivity on the ground that they "never viewed their role as that of a social agency" (p. 187) to aid small farmers in making a living; yet he argues

that "different tax, credit, and price-support policies . . . a generation earlier" might have retarded the concentration of farm ownership evident today (pp. 220-21). He repeatedly laments that "farmers did not possess that most basic right in business of being able to set the price of their product to cover costs and also leave something for labor and return on investment" (p. 236). He never recognizes that generations of marginal businessmen in all lines of endeavor have been driven out of the competitive market for want of the same "basic right."

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The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870. By Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 247. Figures, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, $20.00.)

According to Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, the common school was a potent force in reducing illiteracy and promoting social mobility in nineteenth-century America. Together with newspaper editors and a wide range of publishers, whose livelihood presupposed a literate citizenry, educators prepared youth for a world increasingly dominated by print. Even though Horace Mann and other reformers exaggerated the economic benefits of becoming literate, illiteracy soon became a socioeconomic handicap. By 1870 illiterates could still rise economically, but "the chances of greater upward mobility were better for the literate person" (p. 194); hence, schooling was neither irrelevant nor inconsequential.

In tracing the rise of literacy and common schooling, the authors synthesize a diverse body of secondary literature and present a considerable amount of original research. Few historians will quarrel with the argument that religious values stimulated literacy in colonial America, that the founding fathers lauded education for its civic potential, or that common-school reformers shared a world view shaped by evangelical Protestantism. Even some of the sophisticated quantitative analyses in this volume produce predictable conclusions: that wealthier people owned more books than the poor and that population concentration greatly enhanced and nurtured literacy.

One of the most enlightening sections of the book examines how literacy was actually transmitted in the schools. The authors skillfully survey reading, writing, and spelling in the