

not oversimplify this process; he stresses that it created a "labyrinth of factories and tiny artisan establishments, central workrooms and outworkers' cellars, luxury firms and sweatwork strapping shops," and he takes pains to follow all the chambers and corridors of this "maze." If Wilentz admires radicals protesting the degradation that the wage relation imposed on workers' lives, he also offers fair-minded accounts of street preachers, temperance reformers, and other urban types. Many pages are devoted to increasingly confident proponents of competition and uplift, such as one who proclaimed in 1837: "In our bounteous land individuals alone are poor; but they form no poor class, because with them poverty is but a transient evil."

Although Wilentz is properly critical of others who have used the term *class consciousness* without historical sensitivity, his own use of the term to describe the attitudes of New York's workmen in the 1850s is not entirely convincing. Sometimes the documentation for strikes and violent confrontations seems too sketchy to warrant generalizations about workers as a class. Toward the end of the book Wilentz lumps together "the city's workers and labor radicals" in a manner inconsistent with his previous demonstrations of the confusing, labyrinthine process that was transforming New York. Nevertheless, he convincingly recaptures a radical republican outlook at odds with Jacksonian political parties and Whig benevolence. In so doing, he offers exciting challenges to much of the conventional wisdom about antebellum society and politics.

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn.

Lewis Perry

The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics. By Daniel Feller. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. Pp. xvi, 264. Tables, notes, note on sources, bibliography, index. \$29.50.)

Daniel Feller sets out three objectives for this study: to examine the origins and evolution of the controversy over federal land policy during the Jacksonian era; to relate that controversy to other issues; and to demonstrate how it contributed to political alignments and the emergence of the second party system. After reviewing the background of land policy to 1821, Feller gives a detailed account of congressional debates on a wide variety of measures for disposing of the federal domain. The debates centered on such questions as the minimum unit and minimum price for land offered for sale by the government, federal credit for land purchases, preemption rights, graduated price reductions on unsold land, and cession of federal lands to states. They pitted those who saw public lands as property of the people, believed that

landownership was a right, and favored rapid alienation of land at low prices against those who saw public lands as a capital fund for financing federal projects, believed that landownership was something one earned, and favored controlled disposition of land at market prices. Although legal and moral principles, for the most part, comprised the argument on each side of the controversy, they were only a thin veneer overlaying motives of self-interest; agricultural spokesmen pushed for a liberal land policy, commercial and manufacturing spokesmen for a more restricted one. Neither side won, but Congress's progressive reduction in the minimum purchase unit, maintenance of a low minimum price, numerous land grants to states, acceptance of preemption rights, and eventual adoption of graduation testify that agrarian interests and their allies got the better of the contest.

If the catalog of questions included in the controversy tended to blur congressional alignments, so too did the relationship between land policy and other issues. Since income from federal land sales might render the tariff redundant, might subsidize education and internal improvements, or might be distributed among the states, land policy became linked with these issues, often producing unnatural congressional coalitions and strained legislative logic. Generally, though, throughout the 1820s sectional identification defined the division and informed the rhetoric over land policy, with East cast against West. But presidential elections in 1828 and 1832, the removal of the tariff from political contention with the Compromise of 1833, and the fight over the Second Bank of the United States weakened geographical cohesion and paved the way for the formation of national parties in the 1830s. From then on, land policy was a party rather than a sectional matter, as Democrats championed cheap lands and easy acquisition, and Whigs insisted on using the federal domain as an endowment for social and economic betterment.

Feller deftly charts the complex course of federal land policy from 1821 to 1837, explaining clearly, if not always succinctly, congressional deliberations and actions. Moreover, he carefully examines the joining of land policy to related issues, analyzing better than other historians how the tariff, internal improvements, and fiscal policy influenced congressional views on the management of the federal domain. He is less successful, however, in showing how land policy figured in the rise of political parties. Simply to demonstrate that land policy changed from a sectional issue in the 1820s to a partisan issue in the 1830s is not enough to sustain the argument that it was instrumental in shaping party ideologies and programs, or that it was a factor in determining party constituencies. On that subject, the ethno-cultural thesis remains more convincing.

*Vanderbilt University,
Nashville, Tenn.*

Donald L. Winters