

enjoyed a short but successful diplomatic career; and, of course, his oratory became one of the glories of this nation. All of Webster's noble statements, from those spoken before the justices of the Supreme Court to those intoned in Congress to the many speeches he gave before crowds of Americans gathered to commemorate a special occasion or hear his arguments in defense of American nationalism are quoted in this book. In brief, then, this is an authoritative biography, the best available on Webster. It has none of the adulation of some previous efforts, and it is informed by massive research, especially in original sources, and by a close, careful, and judicious reading of those materials.

It is impossible to overemphasize the author's evenhandedness with his subject and the other protagonists of his narrative. Even the footnotes bespeak his concern over presenting both sides of an argument. Those historians with whom Baxter obviously disagrees are given a fair presentation of their position. If there is any criticism one can cite about this book, it is its refusal to risk broad generalizations in defense of a position that cannot always be adequately documented. Take, for example, the question of Webster's personal honesty in his financial dealings. Much has been made in the past about his irregular behavior regarding money. Baxter addresses the problem, but instead of coming down hard on either side of the question, he too oft resorts to such conclusions as "there is no proof of such misconduct" (p. 343) or "how much all this helped him financially is unclear" (p. 75). The author is to be commended for insisting on documentary evidence to support a conclusion, but it is a little disappointing not to get a thorough airing of the accusations so that the reader has a grasp of the general character of Webster's behavior. Some historians who are well versed in the sources believe that Webster was guilty of "improper use of secret funds" in winning ratification of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty (p. 585n). Baxter takes the position that "there is no proof of such misconduct" (p. 343). Fair enough. But Webster is not standing before a law docket; he is answering to history. And it would be helpful to know how Baxter would find him on this issue.

It is churlish to carp because the author has been such a meticulous historian in reaching his conclusions. Suffice it to say that this is a masterful and compelling study of one of the greatest figures of the nineteenth century.

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Robert V. Remini

*Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845.* By Robert V. Remini. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984. Pp. xxiii, 638. Notes, illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$27.95.)

Robert V. Remini believes that Andrew Jackson "not only symbolized" his age but served as its "leader and guide to a more

representative society" (p. 317). The detailed development of this theme amply justifies Remini's title. In biography the principal character sometimes becomes lost in a discussion of the times. Here, Jackson's dominating personality prevails amid controversies over nullification, the bank, the specie circular, the Senate censure resolution and its expunging, Indian removal, and the annexation of Texas. Remini calls Jackson courageous, strong, and indomitable: "one of the few genuine heroes to grace the presidency" (p. 403) and "a statesman of the first rank" (p. 23). He admires the Old Hero's "unquenchable love of the Union" and "unshakable trust in democracy" (p. xvii), to say nothing of his vigor in the face of wretched health.

Remini enjoys accompanying Jackson "on his journey, even at times when . . . [Jackson] was testy, arrogant, and surly" (p. xvii). The author nevertheless finds occasion to criticize: Jackson's "fumbling" of the "appointments process" (p. 292); "mismanagement" of the Texas issue (p. 356); and especially his "inhuman deed"—Indian removal—"accomplished in total violation not only of American principles of justice and law but of . . . [his] own strict code of honor" (p. 314).

Enriching details reinforce many Jacksonian stereotypes; others are demolished. Jackson, Remini says, "was no illiterate frontiersman, much less a barbarian" (p. 78). He could be eloquent in spite of his unconventional spelling and grammar. Although he had ghostwriters—as with the nullification proclamation—the ideas, conviction, thought, and spirit were his. Jackson's "final brawl" with John Quincy Adams contrasts sharply with that of the genteel retirement correspondence between Adams's father and Thomas Jefferson. Remini concedes that with democracy "the country seemed nastier than before. Elegance and gentility had disappeared" (p. 517). White House levees featuring "sooty artificers, evidently fresh from the forge," confirmed this (p. 148). Visitors could walk in "to see the President and shake his hand" (p. 395). Jackson remains dominant to the end. Remini's death scene spares nothing, not even "one slight convulsion" (p. 524). Jackson tenderly blessed each member of his family, his friends, and his slaves, who "must try & meet him in heaven." He, of course, would be there. "I want to meet you all . . . both white & black" (pp. 524-25).

After exhaustive research, Remini has written a coherent, analytical, and engrossing book that ingeniously captures the mood and spirit of Jackson and his times. Necessary as statistical studies still may be, Remini's contribution will not soon be superseded. Statistical documentation must have a human context, and that context Remini has richly provided.