

The Whig Party in Missouri. By John Vollmer Mering. *University of Missouri Studies*, Volume XLI. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1967. Notes, bibliography, index. \$4.00.)

An analytical narrative of "the opposition," *The Whig Party in Missouri* is an important addition to the still rather small number of studies of political institutions at the state level during the middle period. The author finds origins of the party in the presidential election of 1824-1825, but Whiggery was a tardy development, and although the term "Whig" was used in 1835 to refer to the Clay, anti-Jackson, or opposition party, it was not until 1838 or 1839 that a Whig party appeared as an organization. During the decade 1830-1840 and most of the following ten years Mering finds that it functioned more as a "political pressure group" than as a "political party." Throughout its entire existence of thirty years until its sudden (and in Mering's view complete) destruction in 1855 the Whig party in Missouri was almost always a minority and thus generally unsuccessful in winning elections and appointments.

The story is told largely in terms of thirty-five leaders at the state level, almost all of them Whigs, and it centers on congressional, gubernatorial, and presidential campaigns and elections. Maneuverings for nominations, calculations of the course to pursue between Benton and anti-Benton wings of the Democratic party, and attitudes toward questions of public (state and national) policy provide much of the substance. Lawyers and editors rather than planters, farmers, or businessmen thus dominate the stage. The "common man," the voter, whether Whig or Democrat, is seldom seen except statistically. No extended treatment is given to the development of committees, public meetings, electioneering, tickets, ballots, or voting practices, and there is almost nothing on the relation between state and local politics.

Three early chapters present a detailed survey, analysis, and interpretation of social and economic data. "Certainly," writes the author, "slaveowners tended to identify with the Democratic party" (p. 62). But to balance this view he notes "the greater wealth of the Whig party and the more impressive educational attainments of its leadership" (p. 68), and he comments that "Missouri Whiggery's business orientation undoubtedly goes far to explain its poor reception in an overwhelmingly agricultural state" (p. 68). Such observations and many others based on extensive and elaborately documented research make these chapters a valuable essay on the bases of Whig politics.

A wealth of research and penetrating analysis is evident in this volume. Illuminating remarks made almost casually in the narrative suggest many further avenues for exploration. The book is an outstanding example of the new political history—informed, thoughtful, well organized, and lucidly written. The reviewer hopes that a paperbound edition may be made available so that this volume can be placed more readily in the hands of a wider audience.