

instance, and fifty pages of backnotes. Because of the editors' concept of the book, however, it does not offer the benefit of analysis or balanced appraisal for most aspects of the military experience. Such of this as is present may be hard to reach because the index is inadequate and there is no bibliography. There are eighty-six "plates" and "figures," including maps; but many are ill chosen and insufficiently identified, and several of the maps are faulty. The editors' view of the war is completely one sided—the American army from the American side. The few Mexican writings included were taken in translation from American publications. The name Monterrey is misspelled deliberately throughout the book because "gringos" of the 1840s commonly misspelled it!

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*August Belmont: A Political Biography.* By Irving Katz. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. Pp. xiv, 296. Notes, illustrations, selected bibliography, index. \$10.00.)

For obvious reasons the history of the Democratic party and its leadership in the Civil War period, and just afterward, has attracted nothing like as much attention or interest as has been given to the more lustrous record of the Republican party. Professor Katz does much to close some of the more glaring gaps in this attractively written biography of one of the cleverest and most conspicuous of all the party managers in American history.

He finds that August Belmont, who for a dozens years was head of the Democratic National Committee, and who then for eighteen years longer (he died in 1890) remained one of the guiding, if aging, leaders of party councils, was a victim of tragic frustrations. He had every qualification of training in the adept and cosmopolitan world of finance—in which the Rothschild family had risen to prominence—to hold a place as one of the eminent financiers of the long period from 1850 to the final rise of the House of Morgan nearly three generations later. He was gifted not only with great natural quickness and astuteness in dealing with intricate business and financial affairs, but with a striking skill in organizing men and corporations to conquer the difficulties of a nation engaged in headlong industrial development. Belmont also possessed marked qualities of geniality and tact which, combined with his social vision and unfailing cordiality, enabled him to overcome the chill suspicions and hostilities that, as a foreign born Jew, he encountered in a period of political and economic turmoil, civil war, and reconstruction.

He became a social favorite, a Titan of the financial sphere, and one of the few Americans known both for his wide international relations in finance and politics and for his sustained influence in the administration of national affairs. He had a handsomely impressive stature and dress, with keen snapping eyes above his thick sideburns and firm chin. He had a

veritable talent for friendship, winning the intimacy of a wide variety of people from the supple, then serving, James Buchanan and the slyly ruthless John Slidell to the rigidly capable Abram S. Hewitt and the monumentally unbending Grover Cleveland.

He made many enemies, from the implacable Whitelaw Reid, Republican chieftain, to the enigmatically self-centered George B. McClellan. He had the difficult responsibility of guiding the Democratic party which, after sending to the White House two of the most incompetent men—Franklin Pierce and Buchanan—who occupied it in the long period from Zachary Taylor to Warren G. Harding, had an instinct for secondary chieftains which almost never failed. When it did not nominate one preeminently mediocre figure for high office as it repeatedly did, the Democratic party nominated two at once, as when in 1868 it made the unmatched choice of Horatio Seymour and Frank P. Blair for President and Vice President. Katz does justice to the repeated blunders of the party and to such sorry episodes as the “most fumbling campaign in our history,” which ended in Ulysses S. Grant’s monumental victory over Seymour.

The author does justice also to the modest contributions of Belmont to American social and intellectual life, including his use of great wealth in the purchase of fine furniture, wines, and works of art. He is less happy in dealing with Belmont’s diplomatic ventures, but then Belmont failed in his ambition of using the American Embassy in Madrid to bring about the bloodless acquisition of Cuba.

Justly appreciative of Belmont’s sterling qualities, the author, nevertheless, makes it clear that the financier-politician lacked high principle, never once in antebellum days assailing or criticizing slavery, and that he always managed to keep close to the sources of power in party and government. His great frustration was that he failed of any high distinction or accomplishment in politics, and after quarreling decorously with President Buchanan and failing to help Stephen A. Douglas gain the White House, slowly but steadily lost prestige and power.

This well composed biography throws much new light on the mechanics of party politics from money raising to platform writing in the middle of the nineteenth century. It presents a favorable picture of Douglas’ effort in the 1850s to gain the presidency. He throws due light on the shaky record of the *New York World* and the even shakier history of Samuel J. Tilden, the irresolute. This unambitiously successful book cannot be ignored by students of one of the most neglected periods of our national past.