

*The Presidency of James Buchanan.* By Elbert B. Smith. (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975. Pp. xiii, 225. Frontispiece, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$12.00.)

The editors of the *American Presidency Series* expect much of their authors, demanding interesting, scholarly, interpretive, comprehensive, synthetic, and original accounts. Doubly difficult is Smith's task in this volume, for his subject has attracted such outstanding middle period scholars as Allan Nevins, Pulitzer Prize winner Roy Nichols, and Philip Klein. The author's task is to provide both a fresh synthesis of their writings and original interpretations of his subject.

The synthesis has been provided. Nichols is the chief source for the picture of a Cabinet formed of strong southerners and weak northerners. Nevins is used to depict a president ignoring the separation of powers principle to influence the Dred Scott decision. Nevins is also followed in sketching a president almost brutally indifferent to his party's fate in the Kansas statehood struggle. Klein's evidence has been used to show an aggressive but unsuccessful imperialist in foreign affairs, and the account of the near identity of Buchanan's and Abraham Lincoln's Fort Sumter policies also faithfully adheres to Klein. While this synthesis is so exacting as to border on plagiarism at times, it is unsatisfactory for two reasons. Nevins and Klein are poles apart in their attitudes, and to combine Nevins' account of Buchanan's weak kneed impotence in the Kansas crisis with Klein's account of the president's sturdy assertiveness in foreign affairs produces a character too schizoid to be believable. Secondly, the synthesis is highly selective. Works cited in the bibliography as "best" studies fail to appear either in the footnotes or the narrative. Ignored are such works as Norman F. Furniss' account of the Mormon conflict, Ronald T. Takaki's study of efforts to reopen the African slave trade, Robert E. May's depiction of southern hopes for a Caribbean empire, and Tom W. Henderson's analysis of administration policies toward slave smuggling and the slave *Wanderer*.

For original interpretations the author's impressive credentials in scholarship and in practical contemporary politics demand a respectful hearing for his assertion that Lincoln's election "was made certain by vigorous political policies that

stemmed directly from the White House," and, therefore, "that James Buchanan might have prevented . . . [this] key event that triggered the southern secession" (p. x). In Smith's view these "vigorous political policies" involved the disruptive power of the federal patronage. Yet the contention that "any incumbent president . . . was . . . empowered by his control of jobs and favors to play a major role in choosing his party's candidate for the succession" (p. 101) probably reflects the 1960s more than the 1850s, as is indicated by the failure of both Millard Fillmore and Franklin Pierce to secure either their own renominations or determine their party's nominees. Stephen A. Douglas' Charleston support by officeholders like George Sanders (p. 109) suggests that officeholder unity for Douglas' defeat is a myth. Once the campaign commenced, Buchanan, as his published correspondence shows, left most influential Douglasites in federal office undisturbed. And, as the author himself admits, if party unity were necessary to stave off defeat, the "first overture should have come from Douglas" (p. 102).

This volume stops short of the admittedly difficult objectives of this series. The author summarizes the writings of some major figures of middle period scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s. But those who seek a synthesis of later scholarship or original contributions must continue their quest.

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*The Papers of Jefferson Davis. Volume 2, June 1841-July 1846.* Edited by James T. McIntosh. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974. Pp. xxxix, 806. Maps, illustrations, tables, notes, appendixes, list of sources, index. \$20.00.)

Jefferson Davis, despite his unique position in American history as president of the Confederate States of America, is still somewhat a man of mystery. In writing his introduction to volume one of *The Papers of Jefferson Davis* four years ago, Bruce Catton informed readers that "as a man progresses from youth to manhood, and on through manhood to death, he leaves tracks on paper" which should be collected and published if that man has sufficient stature in