

opposition. Their failure, according to Kohn, was due to an inability to understand either popular sympathies or the determined opposition of John Adams. In the end the Federalists destroyed themselves. From that political wreck the Republicans did salvage the army but one clearly nonpolitical and under civilian control.

The political machinations involving so many people make this a complex tale. It is to Kohn's credit that he manages, despite the mass of information, to make the story an interesting and at times absorbing one. Ironically, one of the weakest portions of the book is the last chapter. This is the same one that in his acknowledgments the author maintains "materially improved the book." The chapter is forced and repetitious. It should also be added that in such a well founded scholarly work the use of brief introductions for each part which read as though they had been drawn from a John Barth novel is both affected and unnecessary.

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The Presidency of John Adams. By Ralph Adams Brown. (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975. Pp. x, 248. Frontispiece, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$12.00.)

As a volume in the American Presidency Series, *The Presidency of John Adams* is intended to provide "historians and the general reading public" with an "interesting, scholarly" assessment of John Adams' administration. It will serve the second audience more effectively than the first.

On balance, the book offers an informed, well organized, and readable political narrative of Adams' term as president. It is essentially a synthesis of the secondary literature for the period, though Ralph Adams Brown does offer some interpretive suggestions of his own, particularly as they relate to Adams' handling of the presidential office. Perhaps the most debatable of Brown's theses is the assertion that during the heat of political argumentation over the Alien and Sedition acts, Adams remained conspicuously calm and level headed. Certainly Adams deserves credit for finally steering a course away from war with France. And probably throughout his term he hoped that war could be avoided on terms acceptable

to the United States. There is still considerable evidence, however, that during the spring and summer of 1798 Adams became caught up in the post XYZ, anti-French uproar and that as president he contributed to the climate of opinion out of which the Federalists' internal security legislation emerged. Nor is it really as evident as Brown suggests that during Adams' lengthy absences from the seat of government during the summers of 1798 and 1799, he was effectively in charge of his own administration. These points of interpretation aside, Brown's book provides a full and generally reliable description of the major political events of the later 1790s and of Adams' performance in the presidency.

Still, the volume does not do as much as one might wish. The reader's understanding of Adams' behavior would have been substantially increased if greater attention had been given to his prepresidential years, for these constituted most of his public career and provided the context for his presidential activities. It is difficult to understand Adams as president without knowing more than the book tells about the understandings of America's republican experiment that Adams drew from his experiences during the Revolution, while abroad during the 1780s, and as vice president under Washington.

Additional problems arise from the "great men and public events" conception of political history that informs the book. Throughout the volume Brown gives little attention to the changes in American political culture—institutional, ideological, and behavioral—which emerged from the years of revolution and carried into the nineteenth century, fundamentally transforming the contours of American political life. And this is true even though the experience of the late 1790s contributed importantly to these changes.

The book's major difficulties emerge almost inescapably from the series format. With its focus upon discreet presidential administrations, it allows little opportunity for the consideration of historical change over time, whether one talks of individual development or larger political processes. As an example of political-history-by-presidential-administration, the book is successful enough. The question is whether much is any longer to be gained from this long familiar genre.