

Book Reviews

An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover, by Richard Norton Smith. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984. 488 pp. Acknowledgments, notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$22.95 cloth.

In *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*, Richard Norton Smith has undertaken several ambitious goals. His chosen audience, for one, is not the professional historians of twentieth-century American history who have been following the sympathetic revisionist interpretations of Hoover published during the last ten years or so. George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Engineer, 1874-1914* (1983), the first of three projected volumes, and Gary Dean Best's two-volume account of *Herbert Hoover: The Postpresidential Years, 1933-1964* (1983) have recently augmented this continuing effort. Smith has attempted to fashion his historical portrait of Hoover for the potentially much larger audience of general readers. He assumes that general readers, unaware of the scholarly literature aimed at restoring Hoover's reputation, remain undisturbed in their highly negative notions of a Hoover caricatured as an unfeeling, do-nothing president. This is itself a disturbing idea, but if the general persistence of older critical views of historical episodes—such as the Radical Republicans and southern Reconstruction or President McKinley's role in the outcome of the Spanish-American War—demonstrates the shallow diffusion of revisionist views beyond the academic community, then Smith's assumption may be warranted. In addition, Smith proposes to penetrate and reveal Hoover's personal life, which remains largely hidden behind the public mask by which Americans knew him and judged him for the better part of his long life.

To accomplish these purposes, Smith uses the findings of Hoover scholars to render an accurate account of Hoover's extraordinary journey from West Branch, Iowa, to his world travels as a preeminent mine engineer and an internationally acclaimed humanitarian for his relief work in war and peace, through his public service years, the presidency, and the long, often embittered aftermath. If one were to visualize Hoover's life as a graph charting the course of a business cycle, the line climbs rapidly upward until it reaches an impressive

Book Reviews

peak, pauses for a precarious moment, and then plunges violently in a spectacular collapse. Smith devotes roughly a third of his account to Hoover's active business and public careers, including the presidency; the larger portion of the book concerns the postpresidential years.

Smith's rendition of Hoover's rise to fame vividly recaptures the genuine achievements of an exceptional man. By combining the complexity of events with Hoover's mastery of details and his effective methods of mobilizing voluntary networks of support, Smith calls to life the drama of Hoover's public service during World War I. Hoover emerged from the war regarded world-wide as a man of great good will and unusual managerial expertise capable of transforming intention into accomplishment. His subsequent performance as a dynamic and innovative secretary of commerce during the Harding and Coolidge administrations confirmed public perceptions of him as a wonder worker, a new type of public servant. In retelling the tale, Smith graphically recaptures the awe and high expectations that Hoover aroused among his fellow citizens at the outset of his presidency.

The presidential years, dominated by the devastating economic and social plunge of the Great Depression, still constitute the tragic turning point in Hoover's life. They blighted all of the man's works and deeds. These became corrupted into a fraudulent illusion which public relations techniques skillfully manipulated. Smith, in treating these crucial years, sets up a dichotomy between presidential substance and style. Hoover possessed the substance but grievously lacked the style of leadership which can arrest a fearful people's attention, move them emotionally, and arouse their hope and courage. Smith contends that the central defect was deeply embedded in Hoover's personality and temperament. He kept his emotions and his expression of them tightly corked: "The very quality of disinterested, rational management that had propelled Hoover so far, so fast, was precisely the wrong tack in governing a people requiring inspiration as well as legislation" (36). "His response to the emergency was cerebral, not emotional" (38). Hoover, in this regard, resembled William Howard Taft. They were both men of inflexible principle who detested politics and traditional political behavior; they were uncomfortable and ineffective as public speakers; they conceded, in almost identical words, that they could not be a Theodore Roosevelt; and, in consequence, they failed to command the loyalty of their party or win the affection and support of the people. "At the heart of the problem," Smith remarks, "lay Hoover's own inability to fill the role of presidential persuader, or play the political games his opponents

dominated by default. Added to this was a thin skin and an undeniable streak of self-righteousness" (129).

The sequel, 1933 to 1964, is essentially the story of Hoover's unwavering struggle for personal vindication. He intended to achieve this by a return play in the presidential office, either winning the nomination by fostering a deadlock in the Republican conventions of 1936 and 1940 or, that failing, to persuade the nominees to defend his policies and adopt his political principles as the party's public credo. Ironically, the vehicle of his restoration as an esteemed elder statesman came from an improbable quarter: President Truman asked his help in feeding the children of Europe and the Far East. Smith very aptly comments: "At last his prodigious energies were being channeled into constructive purposes. He was saving lives instead of defending his record" (364). Truman followed this assignment by appointing him to head the first Hoover Commission on government-executive reorganization. Richard Norton Smith has written a perceptive and balanced account of Hoover which deserves the audience he seeks.

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The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858: A Documentary Account of the United States Military Movement under Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, and the Resistance by Brigham Young and the Mormon Nauvoo Legion, edited by LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen. Vol. 8, FAR WEST AND ROCKIES SERIES. 1958 Reprint. Glendale, Ca.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1982. xiii, 375 pp. Introduction, notes, appendix, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Known variously as "Buchanan's Blunder," the "Mormon War," and the "Contractor's War," the U.S. Army's expedition to Utah during 1857-1858 was a significant event for all involved. The republishing of the documentary history of this important military operation is also significant, for it makes available once again an impressive collection of key documents. Originally issued in 1958, this account—while neither exhaustive nor fully representative of the extensive records available—contains many valuable official records and an impressive sampling of privately held documents.

The editors, LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann B. Hafen, both members of the Mormon church and acclaimed as leading authorities of frontier America, arrange the material into eleven chapters touching upon the most critical issues of the expedition. They provide the general orders which authorized the expedition; an account of the mission of Captain Stewart Van Vliet, sent to Utah to scout the territory and

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