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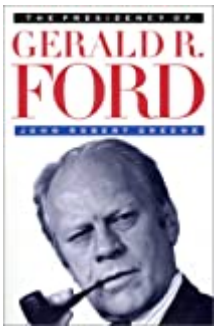

John Robert Greene. *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford (American Presidency Series).* Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1995. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-0638-2; $15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7006-0639-9.

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Several Gerald Fords emerge in this book: the one that made his early career through legislative infighting and partisan mediation; the one that hovered above the administrative battles of his own administration but nevertheless took the presidency seriously; and the one that "inherited" a "nation" (p. 20). John Robert Greene describes the origins and development of each in a thoroughly researched and admirably straightforward narrative.

Greene's book is the most recent to appear in the virtually complete "American Presidency" series edited by Donald McCoy, Clifford Griffin, and Homer Socolofsky. The books in this series with which this reviewer is familiar range from the useful to the superb. Greene's addition would fall more in the former than the latter category, but being useful (and readable besides) is no small accomplishment. The book's utility stems from its detailed chronological examination of each phase of Ford's presidency, and is enhanced by a 20-page bibliographical essay that draws from the author's book-length bibliography on Ford available from Greenwood Press.

While Greene is generally positive and sometimes apologetic towards Ford–whom he interviewed for his book–he balances his praise with sensible and subtle criticisms. A particularly interesting chapter, on the revelations of CIA domestic surveillance and foreign assassination attempts during the Ford years, demonstrates the author's discernment. "No single event in the Ford administration delivered an impact greater than the CIA investigations did" (p. 112). Yet, as then CIA Director William Colby told Greene in an interview, "no one thought to brief the president" of the CIA self-study that propelled Congress's decisive investigations (104). Ford reacted to the CIA's confessions as best he could, but in this emblematic episode from his administration, events led while the president followed.

In terms of explanation, Greene sides with the environmental constraint school of thought on the negativeness of Ford's leadership. The president occupied the office at a particularly unpropitious time. But he also handicapped himself, a fact which Greene acknowledges but does not adequately integrate into his analysis. Ford's poorly timed pardon of the former president, his plebiscitary response to inflation (WIN was supposed to be the symbol for a national volunteer organization headed by the president), and his almost incomprehensibly thick-headed failure to explain quickly what (if anything different from what he did say) he truly meant to say in that infamous debate, are recorded but are never brought together in an examination of Ford's fitness for his ultimate office.

In his own ambivalence about President Ford, Greene

reveals the complexity of Ford's experience. He was, it is typically alleged, an honorable man in a virtually impossible position, who on leaving office proclaimed just pride in his healing performance as head of state. In the opening pages of his book, Greene announces his intention to move beyond this simplistic view. But in the conclusion to his volume, Greene returns to this bit of conventional wisdom and claims it as his own. He does so in part because the intervening chapters of his book so clearly illuminate Ford's difficulties in the alternative role of head of government. He could not control a resurgent and Democratic Congress; he could not master the perplexing problem of stagflation; and he could not hold together as president the party that he had previously helped to unite. What he could and did do was stand before the public as a fit symbol of presidential rectitude and national pride.

But did the healer truly heal, and if so, what can be said about his choice of curatives? President Ford's political difficulties exploded when he pardoned his successor. The pardon made a lousy denoument to the Watergate mystery and led to charges of a "corrupt bargain" between the parties to the pardon. But Ford's difficulties with the public went deeper than the pardon. As the "inheritor" of the "nation," to reiterate Greene's telling appropriation of the language of monarchy, Ford was unfortunate in both what he inherited and in the way in which the deed was transferred. Not having stood for election to the vice presidency, Ford could not lay claim to even a latent mandate from the electorate. As for his inheritance, the divisiveness of national politics throughout the 1970s hints at the difficulty modern presidents face in being treated seriously, much less respectfully. Ford never did "make it" as president. The photo on the cover of Greene's book, showing Ford turning toward someone or something with a serious man's appraising gaze, holding a reflective man's pipe to the corner of his mouth, is not how most Americans remember Gerald Ford.

John Greene's serious treatment of a presidency that still has its problems being taken seriously will itself not right public and scholarly perceptions of the office. But it is an indispensable guide and goad to further research, and could easily be integrated into both history and political science classes on the presidency. It could even be read for pleasure by anyone simply curious to know what happened in national politics in the mid-1970s and what part this peculiarly unfortunate president played in events.

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