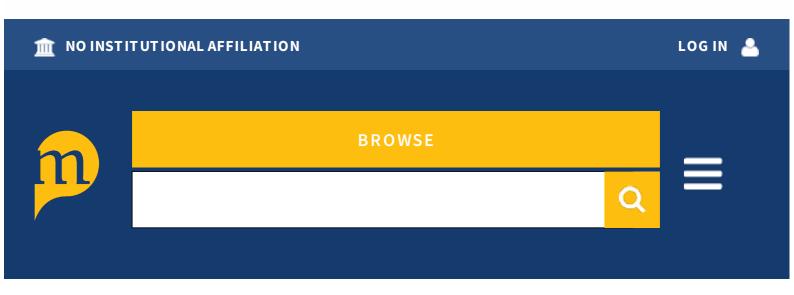
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McFeely's Grant: A Biography.



Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. Mcfeely's Grant: A Biography

Brooks D. Simpson

Civil War History

The Kent State University Press

Volume 33, Number 1, March 1987

pp. 63-83

10.1353/cwh.1987.0053

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

BUTCHER? RACIST? AN EXAMINATION OF WILLIAM S. McFEELY'S GRANT: A BIOGRAPHY Brooks D. Simpson When WilliamS. McFeely's Grant: A Biography appeared in 1981, it seemed to provide an all-encompassing examination of the life of that remarkable and controversial individual. Most previous studies of Grant had concentrated on either his military or political career; none could be termed a complete biography, making McFeelys book a landmark. Grant was awarded the Pulitzer and Parkman prizes, evidence of its popularity and acceptance among both the general public and professional historians, and won the plaudits of many reviewers. Marcus Cunliffe celebrated McFeely's "scholarly exactness" and called the result "biography at its best"; William L. Barney labelled it "the most satisfying complete portrait," offering "a perceptive

interpretation of that enigmatic personality." Michael Perman agreed, finding the account "gennerally
sympathetic and always insightful." James Sefton commended McFeely for displaying "a sensitivity to the
personal and intimate." "The picture that emerges in this admirable book is a moving and convincing portrait
of the whole Grant," concluded McFeely's former adviser, C. Vann Woodward. "It is the biography for which
we have been waiting." Most reviewers thought that McFeely had succeeded in one of his main goals—
$introducing\ his\ readers\ to\ "a\ man\ the\ y\ would\ re\ cog\ nize\ if\ the\ y\ me\ t\ him\ in\ a\ crowd."\ "All\ the\ p\ re\ s\ en\ t\ s\ tud\ y\ has$
tried to do," McFeely explained in his epilogue, "is to take him seriously as a man."1 The author wishes to
acknowledge the assistance of Milton M. Klein, John Y. Simon, Jean V. Berlin, and Patricia J. Anthony in the
preparation of this paper. 1 Cunliffe rev. in New York Times Book Review, Mar. 22, 1981, 13; Barney rev. in New
York History 63 (July 1982): 363-65; Perman rev. in Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 80 (Autumn
1982): 471-72; Sefton rev. in Journal of Southern History 48 (Feb. 1982): 117-18; Woodward rev. in New York
Review of Books, Mar. 19, 1981, 3-4, 6; William S. McFeely, Grant: A Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.,
1981), 522. Civil War History, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, « 1987 by The Kent State University Press 64CIVIL WAR HISTORY
Woodward was particularly interested in McFeely's treatment of Grant's attitudes toward race. The Yale
historian asserted that "Grant had shown little interest during the war in emancipation as a latedeveloping
war aim and little but hostility toward the more radical war aim of the few for black franchise and racial
equality." Instead, he argued that Grant "supported the conservative Johnson policy of reconstruction by
urging that blacks be entrusted to the 'thinking people of the South' and that black troops not be used
there. He also approved of critics of the Freedmen's Bureau and ignored mistreatment of the freedmen."
Woodward concluded that Grant "bears a heavy share of the blame for the abandonment of
reconstruction. "2SeveralotherreviewersseizeduponMcFeely" sexaminationofGrant" sfeelingsaboutthe
$horrors\ of war; their\ comments\ recalled\ the\ image\ of\ Grant\ as\ a\ mindless\ butcher.\ Guy\ Dave\ nport\ described$
how Grant "blundered up the ranks battle after bloody battle," some of which were, in Davenport's
estimation, "the worst planned and the most cruelly executed in military history." Andrew Klaven deplored
Grant's "uncomplicated strategy of deadly slaughter"; Es mond Wright charged that the general "won by
merciless sacrifice of men." While the reviewer in The Economist wondered "how far [Grant's] conscience
was troubled" by bloodshed, Cunliffe suggested that perhaps "Grant's limited sensibility was a great
asset" in waging war. Justin Kaplan, echoing Woodward's comment on the timely nature of the study,
remarked, "This version of Grant may not have been able to pass musterbefore the Vietnamera, but it seems
just right, credible and corrective, for our present time and condition." 3 McFeely's reviewers, then, seemed
to agree that a major reason for Grant's success was the author's ability to probe Grant's personality. They
took especial note of his treatment of Grant's attitudes toward blacks and war. And, in keeping with
Woodward's statement that McFeely "has mined the archives scrupulously," few questioned the ev2 New
York Review of Books, Mar

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Civil War History, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, #1987 by The Xent State University Press.

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