

CONSERVATIVE ORDEAL: Northern Democrats and Reconstruction, 1865-1869. By Edward L. Gambill. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981. \$15.95.

By focusing on the issue of race, Northern Democrats sought to re-emerge as a powerful political party in the post Civil War years and to shed their connection with secession and the collapse of the Confederacy. That they were largely unsuccessful in this effort allows the author the opportunity to explore the complex and diffuse response of the Northern Democracy to the issues of Radical Reconstruction during the presidency of Andrew Johnson. Northern Democrats to survive had to adjust and accommodate to new realities and in doing so in varying degrees were forced to cast aside traditional principles.

RL

AMERICAN PROFILE, 1900-1909. By Edward Wagenknecht. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press. 1982. \$22.50; paper: \$10.00.

Written footnote-free for the intelligent general reader, *American Profile* attempts to evoke a decade that, according to Wagenknecht, felt quite new to its participants. The blandness of the author's interpretation, however, is complemented by his uneventful prose. A dozen photographs, poorly reproduced, undated, unattributed, undiscussed, were to me the only part of the book with much life. The *Profile* treats TR, prominent personages, Culture, commerce, scandal and TR again. The author promises a sequel.

JM

JOHN ARMSTRONG, JR., 1758-1843: A Biography. By C. Edward Skeen. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 1981. \$22.00.

Relying heavily upon primary sources, C. Edward Skeen has produced a carefully crafted primarily political and diplomatic study of an important but neglected public figure in the early history of the American Republic. Since no significant collection of Armstrong letters exists, the author had to sift through well over one hundred manuscript collections in reconstructing his public career. This formal biography examines the historical events of Armstrong's lifetime, spanning the period from the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812.

Armstrong served as an officer in the American Revolution and in state and national legislatures, first from Pennsylvania and then from New York. Jefferson sent him to France as American ambassador and he served as Secretary of War during the War of 1812. His career, aided by a fortuitous marriage into the powerful Livingston family, brought him social as well as political prominence and eased his premature retirement after the War of 1812, a retirement in part the result of his abrasive personality.

RL

CONCISE HISTORIES OF AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE. Edited by M. Thomas Inge. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. 1982. \$9.95.

This five-hundred page volume is much better and more useful than you think it is going to be. Although a few of the concise histories are smart-alec essays and not histories at all, the authors of a great many of the others have succeeded in making thoughtful and coherent brief syntheses of the fields assigned them, and have appended good bibliographies to help the reader go further. Some headings, of course, can better be covered in a few pages than can others; that some of these pieces fail is not entirely the fault of their authors, who must have winced at the assignment of summarizing some enormous field in six or eight pages.

Topics covered included almanacs, animation; best sellers; circus and outdoor entertainment; comic art; detective and mystery fiction; film; gothic novels; illustrations; jazz; leisure vehicles, pleasure boats, aircraft; magic and magicians; newspapers; the occult; physical fitness; propaganda; pulps; romantic fiction; science fiction; stage entertainment; stamps and coins; television; trains and railroading; verse and popular poetry; and westerns, along with a lot of others.

The damn thing is easily worth the ten bucks they are charging for it.

SGL