

A number of the illustrations as well as some minor references and comments in the German version did not make it into the English edition. The addition of dates for the lives of named individuals is a valuable addition for English readers. The work “serves as a sort of final report for the Graduate Program ‘Contact Area Mare Balticum: Foreignness and Integration in the Baltic Region’ ” (p. 397) carried out with a number of graduate students at the University of Greifswald between 2000 and 2010, and it shows signs of its origins. Greifswald and the area around received more consideration than their role in Baltic history warrants. The extensive discussion of high culture, especially from the seventeenth century on, indicates the distribution of tasks among the researchers as well as the author’s own interests. There is a level of detail about politics and the political actors in the twentieth century which gives the appearance of a report. Also adding to that quality is the coverage of well-established topics which frequently offers little that is novel. At times the work takes on the air of a catalogue of names and events. The bibliography is thorough, though the notes are sparse. For economic history the book gives the essentials of what is a long and convoluted history. For background on a European region over a long period the single volume offers a sound starting point.

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#### UNITED STATES AND CANADA

*The Bank War: Andrew Jackson, Nicholas Biddle, and the Fight for American Finance.*

By Paul Kahan. Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2015. Pp. xii, 187. \$28.00, cloth.

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Consider a public fight between a U.S. President concerned over the power of a central bank and the bank’s president defending its track record with a set of increasingly partisan politicians along for the ride. Despite occurring over 180 years ago, the “Bank War” between President Andrew Jackson and Nicholas Biddle, the President of the Second Bank of the United States seems quite familiar in the modern context. The war started as the typical American political conflict between “nonpartisan technocratic policy making and democratic accountability” (p. xi), but quickly became personal to the two men involved. The resulting scorched earth policy led to the nation’s largest financial panic of the nineteenth century. Paul Kahan’s account provides an introduction to the conflict and sets the war in the broader historical context. Indeed, it was the turning point for many U.S. economic and political features. The period saw the first congressional censure of a president, the first Senate rejection of a cabinet nominee, the first filibuster, and the solidification of the two-party system.

Most studies focus on Jackson as either a villain due to the negative economic outcomes (e.g., Bray Hammond’s *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) or a well-intentioned champion of the common man whose actions had unintended consequences (e.g., Robert Remini’s *Andrew Jackson and the Bank War*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967). Kahan’s narrative focuses on the backgrounds, beliefs, and actions of both men. The book paints Jackson as the “self-righteous ideologue...who ignored evidence that contradicted his belief [that the bank influenced politics was bad for the country]” and Biddle as the “politically naive technocrat insensible to the changes reshaping the

American political landscape” (pp. x–xi). As such, the conflict was seemingly inevitable once Jackson took office. The political and economic environment only dictated how the eventual battles took shape.

Jackson grew up relatively poor and came to politics through his military success and promised patronage rather than policy positions. Before winning the presidency in 1828, his views were shaped by setbacks that either were at the hands of banks or were perceived to be. Likely, the biggest of these was his belief that the Bank of the United States influenced votes during his failed presidential bid in 1824. Though he often disguised his ambitions, he thus came into the presidency with an ax to grind against what he saw as a partisan, elitist, and manipulative bank.

Biddle, on the other hand, grew up in a wealthy family, but his failed political aspirations led him to tie his fortunes to the Bank of the United States. Despite Jackson’s beliefs, Biddle maintained that the bank was a non-partisan institution that helped stabilize the currency and the banking system. He believed that critics’ problems with the bank were due to ignorance rather than ideology, and that they would come to support the bank when confronted with the facts. Jackson’s waffling seemingly pushed Biddle to take advantage of Jackson’s reelection and ask Congress to recharter the bank early. The action only confirmed Jackson’s image of a politicized bank.

Starting with the design of the First Bank of the United States in the 1790s and continuing through the late 1830s, Kahan does a fine job of leading unfamiliar and general readers into the subject. No pre-existing knowledge of the time period or issues is necessary to enjoy the book. That said, there is not a lot of new material for those familiar with the seminal works of Hammond and Remini. Rather the book’s contribution is its bringing together of older sources and reinterpreting the events from a more modern lens. As such, one place where the book misses its chance is the lack of any substantial discussion of complementary or contrasting secondary sources. This is troublesome as the narrative pushes the reader to take Biddle as naive and Jackson as devious. Reality is never so simple. Even authors who see Biddle as the tragic hero also point out his flaws. For instance, Biddle had to know some politics as he used his connections to gain his place at the bank in the first place. On this and other topics, the book’s arguments would have been strengthened by direct links to previous studies.

Another point to keep in mind is that the book is focused on the narrative rather than the economic detail leading to and coming out of the war. For instance, the book focuses on the politics behind implementing Jackson’s post-bank policies yet only contains a short discussion of the mechanisms of how they led to the Panic of 1837. A reader that wants to get a fuller account of the period would have to consult another source. Finding those sources is made somewhat difficult because the text almost only provides citations for its direct quotes and thus does not highlight other studies written on the topic being discussed. Readers must look through the bibliography without much guidance as to the best source. This is not an insurmountable task but prevents the book from being easily used as a reference text.

*The Bank War* provides a look at the conflict surrounding a historical central bank and its broader context in American politics. Given the recent political climate, the topic is probably never more relevant. Kahn’s account provides a starting point for new readers as well as some new perspective for those familiar with the period.

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