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J. Brooks Flippen. *Nixon and the Environment.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. ix + 308 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-1993-7.

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All Politics is a Fad

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"All politics is a fad," President Richard Nixon informed the president of the Sierra Club in the spring of 1970. "Your fad is going right now. Get what you can and here is what I can get you" (p. 102). Despite this characteristic cynical approach or maybe because of it, Nixon approved of or signed off on more important environmental legislation than any other president in history. How this came about is the subject of J. Brooks Flippen's fine study, *Nixon and the Environment.*

Flippen's well-researched book, which had its origins as a dissertation at the University of Maryland under Keith Olson, is the first scholarly monograph on the subject. Considering the cottage industry that has developed around the examination of most every aspect of the life and times of Richard Nixon, it is surprising that we have waited so long for such a monograph. Indeed, although, as the author points out, Nixon took little pride in his environmental record, it may well turn out to be a far more important part of his legacy than his ballyhooed trip to China or his ending, albeit rather belatedly, the Vietnam War.

Flippen, who teaches at Southeastern Oklahoma University, mined the rich materials in the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archives as well as the papers of two Democratic environmentalists, Senators Edmund Muskie and Henry Jackson. He also put to good use oral interviews, including sessions with Senator Gaylord Nelson, the organizer of the first Earth Day, Walter Hickel, Nixon's controversial Secretary of the Interior, and especially, John Whitaker and Russell Train, two of the key environmentalists in the administration. The outline of the story is simple – Nixon had the misfortune to arrive on the scene just when the modern environmental movement took off. He was even more unfortunate when it turned out that the leading candidate for the Democratic nomination for president in 1972 turned out to be Muskie, Mr. Environment in the U.S. Senate. Thus, a president who had wanted to devote most of his time to international affairs and who had never given the environment much concern, found himself a reluctant protector of the air, water, and forests. Flippen takes us month by month through the strategy sessions and meetings in the White House as Nixon "carefully crafted and cunningly planned" approaches to keep one step ahead of the environmentalists in Congress, while protecting as best he could his business-oriented party from what he considered the most economically unsound legislation (p. 62). Although the president saw the environment as a political issue, Hickel, Whitaker, and Train, and even John Ehrlichman who oversaw environmental affairs for the administration, were all to some degree true believers.

Flippen does not look at green issues in a vacuum. Throughout his volume, he alerts the reader to other matters on the president's agenda as he tried to catch the various environmental waves. One can almost sympathize with the beleaguered Richard Nixon, concentrating on international crises and related domestic turbulence, when he generally goes three-quarters of the way to meet the demands of the environmentalists, only to see the Democrats in Congress receive all the credit. Even more stinging was the rhetorical assault he faced from activists in the Sierra Club and other organizations who complained that he had supported only half-measures. No wonder, as Flippen demonstrates, by 1972, as the original enthusiasm for Earth Day and other such projects began to subside, Nixon turned his back on the movement and even planned to eviscerate it (it has "gone too far" and was "destroying the system" (pp. 136, 142)) as part of his move to the right on domestic issues during his second term. Thank goodness for Watergate!

Nonetheless, beginning from the premise that the president is responsible for whatever legislation leaves his desk with his signature, Nixon's environmental record is lustrous. On his watch, he and Congress ap-

proved the establishment of the EPA, Clean Air Act Amendments, the Population Research Act, an extension of the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and the dramatic extension of the National Park System, among other acts. That his motivation was almost always pragmatic and often cynical should be irrelevant to those who today breath cleaner air and who enjoy the glorious Golden Gate National Recreation Area. In an amazing coincidence, Nixon died on April 22, 1994, the twenty-fourth anniversary of the first Earth Day (and also Lenin's birthday).

Flippen has told the story well. Perhaps he should have wandered more frequently out of the White House to examine in greater detail business concerns about the new legislation and, on the other side, the political calculations of the environmental lobby. In addition, the author incorrectly has Daniel Patrick Moynihan leaving the Senate to join the Nixon White House and errs somewhat in his brief explanation for why Vietnam peace talks broke down after the 1972 election (p. 188). But these are very minor quibbles that always appear just before the end of favorable reviews. It took a while for a scholar to get around to writing a solid book on Nixon and the environment – it will be a long while before someone will find the need to do another one.

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