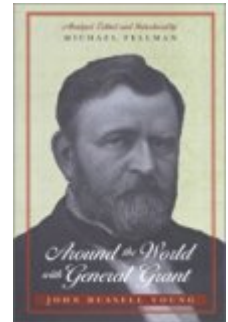


**John Russell Young.** *Around the World with General Grant.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 448 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-6950-1.



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Scholarship on Ulysses S. Grant has undergone a renaissance in recent years. Like the statuary of the early modern era, the figure that has emerged from this newfound interest is increasingly idealized. The new Grant is not as revered a hero as he was in life (considering how popular Grant was, only a Michelangelo could achieve that level of idealization today), but Grant is more revered now than he has been in decades, as the burgeoning number of studies about him in print and his improving presidential rankings in historical polls suggest.[1]

Growing respect for Grant's military acumen, though not universally shared, is partly a function of increased attention to the western theater of the Civil War as a reaction to earlier accounts that fixated on Robert E. Lee and the eastern campaigns.[2] Growing respect for Grant's political tenacity tends to be a function of pessimism about the prospects of Reconstruction; it depends upon a deterministic outlook that assumes the Republican party's postwar survival and the failure of Republican policy post-1868 (in the wake of decisions made prior to 1868). For Grant's reputation

to advance further, his standing as a politician must progress toward his reputation as a general.

This historiographical reassessment started in the wake of William S. McFeely's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography twenty-five years ago and has since accelerated.[3] Grant's efforts on behalf of African Americans, no matter the ultimate fate of the race in the New South, stand out in this scholarship as particularly noble, not only against the backdrop of the Lost Cause and the inherent difficulties of Reconstruction, but also in comparison with his predecessor's racism and his successor's timidity. That Grant has been charged with racism in his colonization-like scheme vis-a-vis San Domingo, while Andrew Johnson has not vis-a-vis the Danish West Indies, or that Rutherford B. Hayes's repudiation of Grant's policies in 1876 was generally complete and assured, has generally not been acknowledged (or if acknowledged, accepted) in such analyses.[4]

It could be argued that the failure to recognize (or the perceived need to minimize) the significance of the split in the Republican Party during Grant's two terms as president, has irrepara-

bly skewed historical understanding of the era and of the man, then and now. Additionally, one could argue that what Grant needs is a political foe to match Lee—not to overshadow him as Lee has, but to serve as something more than a foil.[5] Barring such a shift, the next best thing for Grant's defenders has been to make his papers as accessible to the public at large as possible.[6] That is what John Simon has been doing in his magisterial collection of Grant's papers, and that is what Michael Fellman has done with his recent edition of John Russell Young's account of Grant's two-year, four-month journey around the world between 1877 and 1879.

An erstwhile subordinate of Horace Greeley at the *New York Tribune*, Young was working as a foreign correspondent for the rival *New York Herald* in 1877. Though Young supported Grant in 1872, he later defended Greeley in his memoirs, so he largely fulfilled the nascent demands for political independence that were appearing in the press in that era. His work also stands up fairly well to the demands that historians might make of him today in terms of objectivity.[7]

Part travelogue, part interview of Grant, Young's account, an unlikely success upon publication, eventually grew from a series of newspaper articles into a two-volume, twelve hundred-page set. Fellman has successfully parsed that down into a one-volume, 450-page edition that retains both Young's style and the overall breadth of the journey. Also preserved are many of the original distinctive woodcuts, though not all eight hundred such illustrations could be included in the new volume. Fellman wisely focuses upon the "conversations" between Grant and Young, but due to the idiosyncratic format of the original volumes and Grant's known taciturnity, those interviews are largely limited to the last quarter of Young's work and the last half of Fellman's. Grant, after all, had his own memoirs to write and had to be careful of his thoughts, no matter what that might have meant for Young.

Grant would write his memoirs much more quickly than he might have anticipated in 1879, as a serious business reversal and his own impending demise via cancer led him to hurriedly write, and with the aid of Mark Twain, release his memoirs by 1885. Grant's conversations with Young on military topics stand as a supplement to Grant's account in his memoirs; however, since Grant stopped his memoirs largely by 1865 (except for a small nod to such issues as San Domingo), the thoughts on politics that he shared with Young largely stand alone.[8] Thus, while Grant expressed some disdain for Lee (pp. 384-385), support for Phil Sheridan (particularly vs. Stonewall Jackson) (pp. 264-265) and praise for Joe Johnston (p. 262) in Young's volumes, it is in the realm of politics that he offered his most significant assessments.

Grant defended his veto of the "Inflation Bill" in 1874, which set the stage for resumption of a hard (not paper) currency, a position advocated by reformers and one that Grant depicted as statesmanlike given the pressure on him from non-reformers, particularly western Republicans (pp. 238-242). He also expressed further interest in an American trans-isthmian canal (a project an American presence in San Domingo would have forwarded), preferably through Nicaragua (pp. 242-244). Grant vociferously defended his Cabinet (pp. 289-291) and Reconstruction policies (pp. 334-338) as well.

Laced through all these comments, subtly at times but often as not rather bluntly, were disparaging remarks about his foes in the Republican Party. In dismissing the civil service reformers, Grant referred to Charles Sumner as "the idol of reformers" with patronage feet of clay (p. 281). The other likely foil for Grant in politics, Greeley, was lampooned as full of "strange notions" about patronage matters, as easily slighted, and as "suffering from the mental disease from which he died" as early as 1871 (pp. 291-292), though no one else apparently made such a claim and it is not

certain Greeley died from such a cause.[9] Meanwhile, Hayes, who, as president, sided with Grant's living foes more often than not, was merely damned with faint praise.

Fellman offers brief annotations at the start of each chapter and throughout the text where necessary, along with a short introduction. These comments are surefooted, though an occasional typo or error did slip through. For example, Joe Johnston became "Johnson" at one point (p. 255), and Young's (and Grant's) mistake of calling Mississippi Democrat Lucius Q. C. Lamar "Lucins" (p. 335) was not corrected this time, either. But these are minor matters.

More significant, perhaps, is a missed opportunity to put Grant's trip more firmly in the context of another presidential run in 1880. Young was not able to get Grant to commit on the question during the trip. For his part, Fellman largely sidestepped the issue, declaring Grant too uncertain in his own mind on the subject to definitively answer, even had he wished to do so. Fellman, instead, largely looked at the question from the perspective of the 1880 Republican Convention in Chicago, where Grant was not renominated (p.xvii). Readers are left to guess why Grant and Young started talking politics on the record while first on the way to Burma. Was this meant exclusively to help Young's future book sales? Or was Grant offering a trial balloon and signaling further interest in politics? His comments (and more importantly, the trip itself) suggest the image of an experienced statesman, a party elder who could offer something to both sides of his increasingly riven party. Hence, relating the struggle over reform in the currency was likely meant to appease his foes, while a vigorous defense of Reconstruction was likely meant to rally his friends.[10] An approach stressing contingency may shed further light on such matters.

Professor Fellman deserves credit for tackling Young's opus and for making it more manageable, at a time when information on Grant is becoming

more and more relevant in the midst of a generation of revisionist scholarship. It is up to scholars of Grant and of Reconstruction to make use of such sources to capture a truer, more lifelike Grant, one that is increasingly and approachably human.

#### Notes

[1]. New, almost uniformly favorable studies of Grant that have appeared in the last ten years include Geoffrey Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President* (New York: Random House, 1997); Frank J. Scaturro, *President Grant Reconsidered* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1998); Al Kaltman, *Cigars, Whiskey, and Winning: Leadership Lessons from Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1998); Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Mark Perry, *Grant and Twain: The Story of a Friendship that Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2004); and Josiah Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Times Books, 2004), among others. An exception is Michael Korda, *Ulysses S. Grant: The Unlikely Hero* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). On Grant's improving presidential rankings, see the recent surveys at <http://www.americanpresidents.org/survey/historians/18asp>; Internet, and <http://www.opinionjournal.com/estra/?id=110007243>; Internet.

[2]. A new assessment of this debate can be found in Edward H. Bonekemper III, *A Victor, Not a Butcher: Ulysses S. Grant's Overlooked Military Genius* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2004).

[3]. William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981). McFeely has revisited Grant recently. See his article, "Ulysses S. Grant: 1869-1877," in *The Readers Companion to the American Presidency*, ed. Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), pp. 214-227; and McFeely with Neil Giordano, *Ulysses S. Grant: An Album* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003). Brooks Simpson, who is in the midst of writing a

major biography of Grant, has been most prolific in this regard vis-a-vis McFeely. Begin with his review article of McFeely's biography, "Butcher? Racist? An Examination of William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography*," *Civil War History* 33 (1987): 63-83; as well as his *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); *The Political Education of Henry Adams* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); and *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 133-196. Simpson's charged analysis of Adams follows from Ari Hoogenboom's view that readers "enraptured with Adams' prose" in his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, all too often "came to accept his prejudices" against Grant. See Hoogenboom, "Spoilsmen and Reformers: Civil Service Reform and Public Morality," in *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal*, ed. H. Wayne Morgan (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), p. 79.

[4]. On Grant, race, and San Domingo, see Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 43-50, 68-72. Similarly complete repudiations of two-term presidents occurred in 1920, when Warren Harding defeated James Cox and Woodrow Wilson was repudiated; in 1976, when Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon was repudiated; and in 2000, when George Bush defeated Al Gore and Bill Clinton was repudiated. Grant, in this view, nearly emerges as a "preemptive president," as John J. Coleman has described such presidents in "Clinton and the Party System in Perspective," in *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics*, ed. Steven E. Schier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), pp. 145-166.

[5]. In *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Mark Wahlgren Summers sagely pointed out that "if civil service reform is to be grasped at all, then, both Grant and the reformers will need rehabilitation; they

from the suspicion of eccentricity and self-seeking, and he from the unique place that traditional history has consigned him" (p. 90).

[6]. It has been argued that one of the reasons that Grant has not been highly thought of in the historical profession is because his enemies were more literate than he was, that their papers were better preserved and more widely disseminated. With only one side of the story, it would follow that historians, whether consciously or not, fell prey to the prejudices or interpretations of Grant's foes. William B. Hesseltine noted that "the years of his presidency are singularly barren in documentary remains," in *Ulysses S. Grant: Politician* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), vi, arguably the standard work on Grant's non-military career to this day. Though Hesseltine set out to write on Grant "impartially," his task was "rendered difficult by the almost complete lack of Grant manuscripts." Louis A. Coolidge, an early biographer, also argued along these lines when he wrote, "Had he urged a civil service propaganda, in and out of season and made 'reform' the cry of his Administration, he would no doubt have held the adoration of essayists and historians, and faults which they have emphasized might then have been excused." Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 401. Turning this perception has been a critical component of the latest scholarship on Grant. See, for example, John Y. Simon, "Ulysses S. Grant and Civil Service Reform," *Hayes Historical Journal* (1984): 8-15.

[7]. Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1909), pp. 351-352; and John Russell Young, *Men and Memories: Personal Reminiscences*, 2 vols. (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1901), v. 1, 112-120.

[8]. Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York: C. L. Webster, 1885; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 637-638.

[9]. By his own account Greeley suffered from sleep-related problems, most likely insomnia, long before his death. See John Bigelow, *Retrospections of an Active Life*, 5 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), v. 4, p. 229. He also apparently contracted malaria in 1870. See Joel Benton, ed., *Greeley on Lincoln* (New York: Baker & Taylor Co., 1893), p. 161. Additionally, in an interview with a *New York Sun* reporter, a homeopathic doctor, who treated Greeley in 1862 (after the Battle of Bull Run) for health problems similar to those reported at the time of Greeley's death, thought he died of exhaustion and that he was mentally stable. *New National Era*, December 26, 1872. In a little over a month, Greeley lost his wife of many years, the election of 1872, and his controlling interest in the *New York Tribune* before his death on November 29, 1872.

[10]. Grant even went so far as to suggest the merits of the "one- term principle" (p. 287), one of Greeley's "strange notions" about patronage that would have limited the president to one term in office. For more on Greeley's views, see Horace Greeley, "The One- Term Principle," *Galaxy* (1871), 488-493.

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