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Biography

James Monroe: Oberlin's Christian Statesman & Reformer 1821-1898
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“Disinterestedness is success; integrity is success; Christian fortitude is success.” This is how James Monroe defined a worthy life. The author, a member of the history department of Cuyahoga Community College, demonstrates in this fine biography how Monroe-not to be confused with President James Monroe-used these ideals to win the respect of his colleagues, presidents, and generations of Oberlin College students, during his career as a minister, educator, diplomat, and elected official. Rockicky has revised and expanded her dissertation to present the first investigation of this important reformer.

Monroe was born to Quaker parents in 1821 who imbued him with Christian humanitarian principles that led him to join the abolitionist movement of the pre-Civil War North. William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass befriended the young Monroe while he worked for the American anti-slavery movement before entering Oberlin College at the age of twenty. Four years after graduation he earned an MA in theology in 1850. The most fascinating chapters describe the growth of the abolition movement and the creation of its political moorings-the Republican Party.

In 1856 he was elected to the Ohio Assembly, where he furthered his advocacy for abolition and civil rights for blacks. Rockicky’s harrowing story of Monroe’s dangerous and unsuccessful 1859 mission to recover the body of John Copeland, a young black Ohioan executed in Virginia for being a member of John Brown’s raiding force on Harpers Ferry, is as suspenseful as a good novel.

After serving as consul to Brazil from 1862 to 1868, Monroe was elected to the U. S. House of Representatives in 1870. Unfortunately, like other former abolitionists, Monroe’s support of blacks waned because he believed that recently passed constitutional amendments provided sufficient rights and protection. He soon left politics and returned to Oberlin, where he prepared generations of students to apply lessons of the religious social gospel movement to the

emerging Progressive Movement. When James Monroe died at the age of seventy-six, he was warmly eulogized as a reformer who put the needs of others ahead of his own. This excellent book draws deserved attention to his worthy life.