

# Book Reviews

**James Klotter. *Henry Clay: The Man Who Would Be President*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 536 pages, 24 B&W illustrations. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN: 9780190498047.**

Practicing historians know how hard it can be to explain why something *did* happen. In this carefully researched and well-balanced volume, James C. Klotter attempts something even harder—to explain why something did *not* happen. Specifically, he asks (xvii), “Why did Henry Clay never win the presidency?” Surveying the antebellum Kentuckian’s five presidential quests, along with the major political episodes that informed his pursuit, Klotter does not find any single answer. “Politically,” he concludes, Clay “did not die from a single fatal wound, but bled to death from a thousand cuts” (386). His chief injuries were self-inflicted, Klotter tells us, for Clay “fought too many battles over too many issues over years. The longer Clay stayed in the public eye, the more groups he angered and the more people he provoked” (385). Nor did Clay ever find the political skills to overcome his shortcomings by soothing opposition, deflecting criticism, and placating enemies. “Every election had different circumstances, characters, and dynamics” (386), Klotter observes, but Clay’s own missteps and misfortunes repeatedly thwarted him.

Henry Clay’s career saw remarkable early successes, followed by decades of distinguished congressional leadership that never quite won him the White House. Born in 1777 into comfortable, eastern Virginia circumstances, Clay remained in Richmond as a teen-aged law clerk when his mother and her second husband moved to Kentucky. Admitted to the bar at age 20, Clay followed his family to the Bluegrass region and made his home in Lexington, Kentucky, where his personal and oratorical gifts brought him legal success and political initiation. An early call for a gradual end to slavery went nowhere, but Kentuckians still rewarded Clay with terms in the state legislature and brief stints in the U.S. Senate. In 1810, he won his first full term in the U.S. House of Representatives and took the Speaker’s chair immediately.

As a congressman, Clay quickly drew notice by demanding a second war with Great Britain and then helping to conclude it as a peace negotiator at Ghent. When Missouri’s 1819 application for statehood brought a sectional explosion over slavery, Clay did not design the famed Missouri Compromise, but led the drive

to adopt it. In the aftermath, Clay introduced his signature plan for an “American System” of national economic development, in which high tariffs and hefty federal land prices would fund internal improvements while a strong national bank supervised public finance. Clay’s early victories and ambitious plans led to his first presidential run in 1824, when at least five major candidates vied to succeed outgoing chief executive James Monroe.

Here Klotter begins to tick off the reasons for Clay’s failure. Clay underestimated the populist appeal of Andrew Jackson and moved to censure his military excesses. The American System worried the friends of limited government, even in his native Virginia, while the Missouri Compromise bothered enemies of slavery. He lacked an organization and a campaign newspaper. Ironically, he made no bargains with other candidates, though charges of a “corrupt bargain” with John Quincy Adams would dog the rest of his career. And finally, bribes might have cost him the electoral vote of Louisiana.

All these are plausible factors, but they also reveal the weaknesses of Klotter’s “thousand cuts” analysis. Here and elsewhere, Klotter seizes on multiple isolated and incidental causes of defeat without weaving them into a larger trend or tendency. It is therefore very hard to see how Clay’s long losing streak reveals anything beyond a nasty streak of bad luck or contributes to a broader understanding of antebellum political history. Though Klotter claims that “the Clay story, in both positive and negative ways, has meaning and importance for us, even now” (xix), he offers few examples, beyond raising such timeless puzzles as “will voters accept the partisan rhetoric, or focus on actual actions?” (380). In the end, Klotter concludes that Clay made too many enemies for political success, but he gives few examples of specific policies that definitely (rather than possibly) cost him votes.

Within this particularistic framework, Klotter’s analysis is useful and reliable. He disposes briskly of the rumored deal between Clay and Adams to settle the 1824 election in the House, and traces the detailed maneuvers that Clay employed to secure the presidency for Adams, without lingering over why he made this fateful choice. Klotter carefully glosses Clay’s contradictory personality, and fairly dissects his fear and loathing of Andrew Jackson. A chapter on slavery is particularly good, showing how Clay the slaveholder genuinely regretted enslavement despite the political risks, and took more positive steps against it than many others (Thomas Jefferson, for example), while still insisting on the deportation of freedpeople. Ironically, Clay’s reputation as a moderate opponent of slavery may have been key to his role as the Great Compromiser, giving him enough credibility to

soothe the crises over Missouri, nullification, and territorial expansion without fundamentally disturbing the Peculiar Institution.

A fully satisfying accounting for Henry Clay's failed canvasses would fully place his failures in the larger context of antebellum politics. Why did he never get the hang of party organization? Why couldn't this charismatic compromiser learn the people-pleasing skills of equivocation and double-talk? Why was he so much better at congressional maneuver than nationwide campaigning? What fundamental political developments swept up his rivals but somehow passed him by? Or were the issues that most bedeviled Henry Clay, such as slavery and economic development, simply too thorny to command a majority-backed solution? James C. Klotter has compiled an impressive catalogue of contributing answers to these questions, but definitive explanations still elude us.

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**Wineapple, Brenda. *The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation*. New York: Random House, 2019. 576 pages. \$32.00 (cloth). ISBN: 9780812998368.**

Brenda Wineapple could not have timed the publication of her re-telling of the impeachment, trial, and acquittal of President Andrew Johnson in 1868 any better. With the House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump ramping up in the final months of 2019, leading ultimately to a successful impeachment vote in December 2019 and acquittal in February 2020, students of history will of course cast about to learn more about the two previous times that a sitting president has faced a trial in the U.S. Senate. While historians are often loathe to mine the past for analogies to the present, Wineapple's carefully crafted and narratively propulsive work may make it hard to resist.

Wineapple takes her time recounting the clashes between Johnson and Congress over the course of Reconstruction in the South, clashes that began almost immediately upon his taking the oath of office in 1865. The path to impeachment was a long, slow march that proceeded in fits and starts; three impeachment resolutions were defeated either in committee or by the full U.S. House of Representatives. Just as today, members of Congress debated exactly what the framers of the Constitution meant by the phrase "high crimes and misdemeanors," whether a statute had to

be violated, or if Congress could wield impeachment in response to presidential abuse of power.

Wineapple expertly demonstrates that impeachment, while suffused with the trappings of judicial process, was an essentially political one, the analysis of which must grapple with the complex array of short-term political calculations made by the players involved. Moderate factions within the Republican party of the late 1860s resisted impeachment for months, as many worried about how voters would judge them for putting a president on trial, a heretofore unprecedented act. Once Johnson's obstinacy helped unify the party behind impeachment, the Senate trial could hardly shake off the political prism through which the evidence was weighed. Chief Justice of the United States Salmon P. Chase, for example, presided over the trial even as he harbored his own ambitions to be president, raising questions about his impartiality.

The heart of Wineapple's narrative is not cynical political maneuvering, however, but the convictions of the Radical Republicans in Congress, led by Representative Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner, who watched in frustration and anger as President Johnson, indifferent to the lives and security of African Americans, worked to restore white supremacy in the South. Wineapple conveys just enough historiography for the general reader to understand how generations of historians ridiculed the impeachers for allegedly threatening the constitutional order for their own partisan ends. (Then-Senator John F. Kennedy, for example, singled out Senator Edmund G. Ross for a "profile in courage" for bucking his Radical colleagues and voting to acquit.) Wineapple instead depicts a sincere and courageous effort to remove Johnson on the part of those able to envision a nation in which formerly enslaved people could participate as full citizens.

Wineapple provides an unflinching, damning assessment of Johnson as "incompetent, inadequate, unfit for office, and a menace to the welfare of the people" (420). Johnson was thin-skinned, self-pitying, and prone to lash out at his political enemies. His 1866 "Swing Around the Circle," a speaking tour in which he attempted to build support for his conciliatory stance towards the South and lay the foundation for a future campaign for the presidency, devolved into shouting matches with belligerent spectators. Johnson was adept only at antagonizing his rivals and alienating all but the most loyal supporters. But more important than his errors in political judgment was the grim reality of Johnson's policies for southern African Americans. Johnson not only undermined Congress's prescribed Reconstruction vision at every turn, he undermined the military's effectiveness in

the formerly rebellious states as well. To drive this point home, Wineapple recounts the details of the horrific violence rained down upon black Union veterans and those freedmen who would dare to assert their rights. Wineapple's narrative makes clear that the Tenure of Office Act—which forbade Johnson from removing executive officials without Senate approval—was not a ploy to entrap Johnson on a legal technicality, but part of Congress's effort to wrestle control from a chief executive who had demonstrated no interest in executing the law.

Once Johnson dismissed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in February 1868 impeachment moved with sudden speed. The impeachment effort, however, foundered in the Senate trial. While Wineapple skillfully tells the story of the battle between Stanton and Johnson over the War Department office in all its drama, she also accurately shows that the details and niceties of whether Johnson had in fact broken the law made for a tedious trial. Driven by the belief that the House had to prove an indictable crime, 9 of the 11 articles of impeachment addressed various phases of Johnson's alleged violation of the Tenure of Office Act. Thaddeus Stevens and Benjamin Butler succeeded in crafting two "kitchen sink" articles that accused the president of abuse of Congress and disgracing the office of the president, but these did not form the focus of the trial. Butler and his fellow House managers got bogged down in legal details and sparring matches over minutiae with witnesses, while Johnson's defense counsel, notably William Evarts, spoke loftily about protecting the dignity of the presidency. The trial that began as the hottest ticket in town on March 30, 1868, ended four weeks later with closing arguments delivered to a mostly empty gallery. The Senate voted to acquit by a single vote on the 11th "kitchen-sink" article, and 10 days later votes on two other articles failed to meet the two-thirds threshold as well. The Senate adjourned without bothering to vote on the remaining articles.

Wineapple has portrayed the impeachment battle in extraordinary detail and color, including the investigations of bribery and political fallout that followed Johnson's acquittal. She strains at the end to find optimism in a story that can be read as the failure of Reconstruction writ small. Impeachment, she concludes, "had not succeeded, but it had worked" (421). Johnson was weakened and Congress ascendant for a generation. "The impeachers," Wineapple writes, "had done the best they could" in the service of "a farsighted imagination of the road not yet taken" (421). It may be tough to celebrate this episode in American history, but at least we know who the heroes actually were.

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**United States Government and Readex. Digitized Collection of the *Territorial Papers of the United States, 1764–1953*. Naples, Florida: Readex, 2019. 470,088 pp. Price varies by subscription. Available from: <https://www.readex.com/content/territorial-papers-united-states-1764-1953>.**

Adding to the continually growing online body of digitized primary sources available to scholars and the public, the publisher Readex (a division of NewsBank) has completed the scanning of nearly a half-million pages of documents for its database, *Territorial Papers of the United States, 1764–1953*. Separated into four groups, Series One through Series Four, the scanned images comprise all of the records held by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) of the United States relating to the former territories of the United States. The collection includes the earliest Spanish and French colonial records of pre-territorial Louisiana through Alaskan Territorial Legislative records of 1953.

This online collection is not a digital version of the familiar hefty, selective, and well-edited 28 blue volumes published under the direction of the State Department and produced by the Government Printing Office (GPO) from the 1930s through 1950s. Rather, the Readex database contains generally high-quality scanned images of *everything* in the NARA record groups held by the Departments of State and Interior, as well as multiagency holdings, that are considered territorial papers from this range of dates. The Readex resource reproduces all 470,088 pages of records contained in these records including: manuscripts, official correspondence, printed documents, maps, newspaper pages and clippings, published journal extracts, and any other papers that were preserved in government files. Readex publicizes that this database now makes accessible the 98 percent of the materials left out by the earlier print editions.

Unlike the GPO volumes, the *Territorial Papers* database is unedited. Records are found by a simple search on the home page of the database, which can be made more selective by choosing a combination of the four series to be explored, or by conducting an advanced search that permits discrimination through a variety of filters such as date, territory, language, NARA record group number, and others. The search relies heavily on Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technologies combined with metadata tagged to each document. Metadata included for the documents includes, among other tags, the territory associated with the document, author, date, document type, and subject matter.

For the most part, the combination of OCR and metadata tags works well; however, it has its limits to accuracy: a search for a name such as “Eck” might result in finding words with that combination of letters or results with similar looking letter groupings such as “ock” in the word *stock* or “eek” in the word *week*. As with all research, a reader would be mindful to search using synonyms as well as alternate spellings, because much of the handwritten material, for example, reflects phonetic rather than standardized spelling.

A drawback for some will be the lack of a table of contents and index for the records. Each of the four series lists the various territories and date range of records related to particular places that it contains. Because each record series contains tens of thousands of records (Series One has the fewest at 71,901 pages and Series Four the most with 226,284 pages), a table of contents and an index are impracticable.

For those that love mining for hidden historical gold in archival records, this database provides a level of access to the documents within the *Territorial Papers* record groups that would be unobtainable to most researchers previously. For others, those that are fond of the prior edited volumes, this database now will provide all of the associated records that relate to information found in what was previously published and should offer new insights into related documents that were largely inaccessible.

As a whole, Readex’s offering of the *Territorial Papers* database should be a boon to historical research for the 27 Southern, Midwestern, Western, and Pacific states covered by these records. It is simple to use, provides reasonable filters, combines scanned images paired with thumbnails and page numbers, and offers underlying metadata sufficient to bring a researcher close to an item of interest. It is a resource that pairs well with the trend in primary source scholarship toward the availability of scanned documentary resources online either free through government agencies such as the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and nonprofit historical organizations or through paid databases provided by JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest, Ancestry, and others.

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**Christopher J. Lamb. *The Mayaguez Crisis: Mission Command and Civil-Military Relations*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018. 284 pp. \$66.00 (cloth), \$0.00 (PDF). ISBN: 9780160945038.**

The United States hardly had time to catch its breath after the fall of Saigon when Cambodians seized the merchant ship, SS *Mayaguez* on the high seas. U.S. handling of this crisis has been widely criticized by scholars, military professionals, and politicians. It seemed to be a metaphor for everything that went wrong in Vietnam: micromanagement of the military, misapplication of force, unnecessary casualties, no clear objectives, and incompetent and deceptive leadership. Dr. Christopher J. Lamb, a distinguished research fellow at the National Defense University, applying extensive research from new materials, argues that President Gerald R. Ford's handling of the *Mayaguez* Crisis was not a failure, as so often was characterized.

Lamb, a long-time student of the *Mayaguez* issue, is well-qualified to challenge the orthodoxy. Thirty years ago, he wrote his master's thesis and doctoral dissertation on it. In 1989, his first book on the crisis, *Belief Systems and Decision Making in the Mayaguez Crisis* (Gainesville, University of Florida) appeared. In writing this book his goal is to "fill in or otherwise improve some key descriptive details about the *Mayaguez* crisis, provide a compelling explanation for US behavior based on all available evidence, and extract lessons about command and control of US forces and civil-military relations more generally" (213).

Lamb works to determine what the United States was trying to accomplish in its response through focus on the interaction of the key leaders who implemented America's response over the four-day crisis. He considers decision models in order to arrive at his conclusion that Ford and his advisors, Henry Kissinger being the most influential, acted rationally to accomplish geostrategic goals to "signal US resolve and willingness to use force" when necessary (161). Specifically, Ford and his advisors wanted to send a strong warning to North Korea. They feared that the North Koreans saw, in the collapse of South Vietnam, a weakened and irresolute United States. While the media criticized U.S. handling of the *Mayaguez* issue, Lamb provides examples from diplomatic sources that indicate other nations, the ones that mattered (the Soviet Union and China), got the right message.

Lamb's depiction of the crisis and how Ford's team worked toward developing a response to the crisis is fascinating. It provides the reader clear insight into high level decision-making that has direct relevance for today.

Interestingly, Ford relied on his National Security Council (NSC) for advisement. This was the first time this had been done. While Ford's team of advisors agreed on the priority goal for their response, the details of execution is where problems arose. Ford and Kissinger did not want to lose the opportunity the crisis presented to show that the United States was not a "helpless giant" (171, 207). They wanted to strike back hard and quick. Therefore, the response was rushed. U.S. Marines went into Koh Tang island without the recommended three-to-one advantage, and with poor intelligence. The U.S. Air Force helicopters who inserted the Marines were shot up, one crashed and lives were lost unnecessarily. Only the professionalism and selfless dedication of servicemen saved the operations against Cambodia from being catastrophic. Cambodian gunboats were bombed, as was the mainland—U.S. Navy strike jets were used but B-52s were seriously considered for the bombing. The Marines' situation and the *Mayaguez* crew's welfare were secondary to making the U.S. appear "ferocious" (55, 93, 97, 146). Ford staked his political reputation on his response, knowing that his political future was doomed if the crew were lost and too many servicemen killed.

When the Pentagon and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger hedged on Ford's aggressive application of force to protect the hostage crewmembers and support the Marines, friction arose. Ford believed that the Pentagon and Schlesinger were dragging their feet—afflicted with the "McNamara syndrome" (146). He considered Schlesinger insubordinate and fired him a few months after the crisis.

Lamb adjudges that using the NSC and top cabinet officials to assist with critical and urgent decisions was problematical. While they might agree on the main objective, the interaction amongst them devolved into competition and positioning. Lamb asserts that a specially formed team, composed of experienced and wise individuals with no political stakes in the game, would have worked better.

Lamb contends that because the scholarly interpretations of the *Mayaguez* crisis were not on target, they sent the wrong message to political and military leaders. In crises that followed, such as the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis, the United States suffered manifest humiliation when the national leadership chose to prioritize recovering the hostages, instead of responding with a punitively powerful application of force. Because the *Mayaguez* crisis is often presented as an example of civilian micro-management of the military, which Lamb contends was not the case, civil-military relations have been unnecessarily impaired. Other lessons learned resulted in needed changes within the military, special operations and Goldwater-Nichols being two of them.

Lamb reminds readers that the top priority for American diplomacy is to protect the nation and maintain its place as a dominant power. Members of the military know that the mission comes first, the welfare of the troops is second to that. This applies to international relations too.

*The Mayaguez Crisis* makes a solid case for Lamb's conclusions. The book is extremely well researched and based on reliable materials. The maps and charts included are extremely well done. Lamb engages the reader with clear and compelling prose. It is a delight to read and is highly recommended for diplomatic and military professionals.

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