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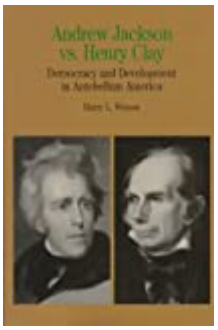

Harry L. Watson. *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay: Democracy and Development in Antebellum America.* Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1998. xv + 283 pp. (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-11213-4; $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-17772-0.

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Nearly all of us who teach at the college or university level are familiar with the Bedford Series in History and Culture, a rapidly-growing collection of primary documents and essays for use in undergraduate classes. The mission of the series, which is advised by Ernest May and Natalie Davis, is to offer undergraduates inexpensive and topical primary documents with up-to-date analysis by experts in the field. The original books in the series took public domain writings like the Narrative and Life of Frederick Douglass, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and Plunkitt of Tammany Hall and re-packaged them (well, I might add) for the college market. All of these valuable documents were already available in several forms, mostly in paperback, and in multiple copies in even the sparest college libraries. The later books in the series, however, have focused ever more energy on assembling new and interesting collections of documents, many which have never been collected before. Several of these are of particular note to readers of H-SHEAR, including Jack Rakove's *Declaring Rights*, Theda Perdue and Michael Green's *The Cherokee Removal*, William Cain's *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight against Slavery*, and Gunther Barth's *The Lewis and Clark Expedition.* Now we have the best book the series has so far produced: Harry L. Watson's *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay.*

At first glance, this collection of documents appears to have a narrower focus than many of the others in the series. After all, one can imagine assigning (as I do) David Blight's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to illustrate numerous themes: slavery, the abolitionist movement, autobiography, and slave narratives as a genre, as well as concepts of race and gender. But what Professor Watson has covered here is far more than a chronicle of political infighting between the seventh President and his chief political adversary, the three-time Presidential loser Henry Clay. On the contrary, as Watson's sweeping introduction makes clear, this collection touches on many, if not most, of the major themes covered in a course on antebellum U.S. History. On one level, Watson focuses on the relationship between the two most outstanding political leaders of the era. But, far more significantly for teaching purposes, Watson delves far beyond the personal and even political. The book is really an extended essay on the central tensions facing Americans in the antebellum period: democracy (defined as "the movement for equality and popular rule by the majority of all white men") and the contemporary debate over economic development (p. vii). As Watson points out in his preface, this debate framed political discourse for the entire generation before the Civil War. It also led directly to the formation of modern political parties, one of the most lasting contributions of the period.

Of course the contest between "democracy" and "development" was not the only one faced by Americans in this period. As many recent scholars have pointed out, this particular debate enabled Americans and their leaders to evade, avoid or just plain ignore the question of slavery and its place in the life of the republic. (In fact, in a document that might have well warranted inclusion here, the New York Jacksonian Martin Van Buren made clear that a chief benefit of a revived Democracy would be to avoid "geographical divisions founded on local interests or, what is worse, prejudices between free and slave holding states." [MVB to Thomas Ritchie, Jan. 13, 1827, Van Buren papers]).

Taking a cue from the politicians of the day, Watson, too, mostly avoids the slavery issue. He also rules out immigration and nativism, evangelical reform, and changes in issues of gender as central focuses of the book. Instead, Watson sticks close to subjects debated unceasingly by politicians of the day, such as banking, internal improvements, and tariffs. He rightly points out that to skirt these issues and concentrate only on those that later eclipsed them would be to distort our understanding of the age–an age where disagreements over building a National Road or re-chartering the Second Bank of the U.S. were vital issues indeed.

It is precisely this limitation of subject matter that makes *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay* such a valuable teaching tool. If the book was a monograph that pushed aside issues of slavery, gender, ethnicity and reform, it would be hopelessly–even fatally–flawed, a case for a scathing review. Such, however, is not the case here. While this reviewer would have welcomed some discussion of how the slavery issue was pushed aside (for example, Jackson's 1835 message labeling abolitionists "fanatics" and justifying mob violence against them; Amos Kendall banning abolitionist material from the U.S. mail; the gag rule; early disagreements over the annexation of Texas; or how both Whigs and Democrats treated anti-slavery voices within their parties), other books and document collections exist which deal expertly with these topics. There was, until this book, a desperate need for a document collection or short monograph to update Robert Remini's *Andrew Jackson and the Bank War* (1967), Peter Temin's *The Jacksonian Economy* (1969) and even Reginald McGrane's 75-year-old *The Panic of 1837: Some Financial Problems of the Jacksonian Era* (1924). Watson's book does that brilliantly, by combining well-known documents (such as Jackson's Bank Veto and Clay's speech attacking Jackson's Removal of the Deposits), lesser-known documents (campaign letters, early pamphlets) with a 118-page introduction that beautifully integrates the biographies of Clay and Jackson, as well as the "democracy vs. development" debate, into recent scholarship on social change and the market revolution. Moreover, *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay* is extremely helpful in engaging students with the political economy in the Jacksonian period–a notoriously difficult topic for both students and teachers.

At this point, let me divert from the usual course of a book review, and talk about how *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay* played in the classroom. This, I hope, will be a novel use of H-NET reviews and ignite some debate for those of us who teach courses in the antebellum period. Some disclaimers: I have only taught the book in one course, and my students are not experts in the field, dying to know the intricacies of Jacksonian-era politics and finance. In fact, they are a group of fairly typical state university students in an upper-level lecture course on U.S. History, 1787-1850. I assigned the book (which is over 250 pages long) over the course of two weeks: one where I focused on events before Jackson's election ("The Era of Bad Feelings and the Missouri Compromise") and one where I focused on "Jacksonians, Whigs and the Politics of the 1830s". At the same time, I assigned chapters 10 and 11 of Sean Wilentz's *Major Problems in the Early Republic*. In the past, I have taken it upon myself to discuss the nuts and bolts of the Bank War, Nullification, the Specie Circular, etc. I fashion myself more-than-an-amateur on these issues, but had a hard time connecting with students as to why Jacksonian-era Americans argued so passionately about, say, the censure resolutions against Jackson.

I asked the students to take a few minutes to tell me what they liked about the book, and what they didn't like, and how it could be improved. Now, I know better than to take everything students say at face value–otherwise, I would lecture once a month, assign "The Buccaneer" with Yul Brenner and Charleton Heston in lieu of document collections and give them all A's. But, overwhelmingly, the students reported that they enjoyed *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay*. Some gave me permission to quote them directly in this review. From one junior history major, discussing the document where Jackson gives patriotic orders to the Tennessee militia in 1812: "Although I view [Jackson's] actions as disgusting, I could easily see how a frontiersman would back 'Old Hickory' ". This is impressive, since I do not recall her addressing particular documents before. Another student, this one more talented, referred specifically to the 1824 letter to Jackson written by Edward Patchell. This was a particularly clever doc-

ument for Watson to include: it shows beyond a doubt the effect Jackson's Presidential candidacy had on grassroots supporters like Patchell, a hat maker from Pittsburgh. "Patchell's reverence for Jackson left me feeling quite inspired to go out and run for public office," the student reported. He also wrote of the nuance present in Clay's letter to Francis T. Brooke, explaining his endorsement of John Quincy Adams. Here Clay condescendingly called Jackson a "military chieftain"; the student said he was surprised how effective Clay's mudslinging had been. Several students said they wanted more documents from the men's early careers. This left me a bit puzzled, since Watson included Jackson's early marching orders (see above) and Clay's 1798 newspaper column (as "Scaevola") in support of a state constitutional convention.

In short, both discussions on *Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay* were among our best of the semester. They delved deeply into major issues of the day, into the lives of significant actors of the era, and into things that are often hard to discuss: the political economy of antebellum America. One student so enjoyed the format that she is borrowing Watson's method and writing her term paper on Andrew Jackson vs. John C. Calhoun. She said she plans to begin with the two men's similar positions on the War of 1812, then discuss Calhoun's role in Jackson's 1818 Florida campaign, the struggle for succession in Jackson's cabinet, and conclude with Calhoun's last speech against the Compromise of 1850. For this enthusiasm, I am grateful to Professor Watson and his book.

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