

BOOK REVIEWS

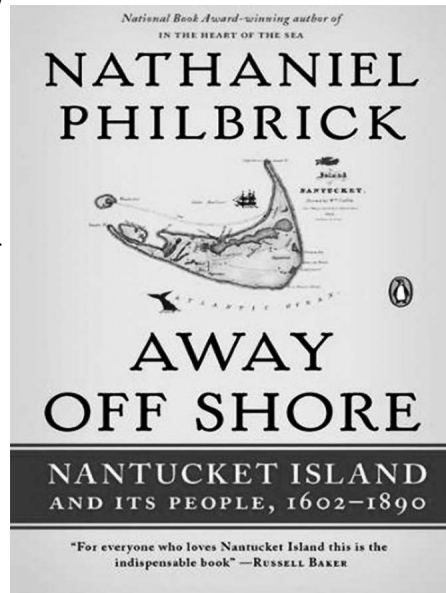
***Away Off Shore: Nantucket Island and its People, 1602–1890.* Nathaniel Philbrick. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1994. 325 pages. \$16.00 paperback.**

Away Off Shore: Nantucket Island and its People, 1602–1890 presents a panoramic perspective of the “Nation of Nantucket” from its glacial formation up to the beginning of its transformation into an international tourist destination.

Philbrick focuses on a number of broad historical trends to bring the island and its inhabitants to life. The early European settlers’ interactions with the original Native Americans were initially relatively fair and based upon mutual reciprocity. However, the now depressingly familiar litany of differences and grievances between the two societies eventually won out, resulting inevitably in decline and depopulation of the hunter gatherers. Disease, alcohol, different perceptions of land ownership, rampant greed, fraud, and debt servitude bordering on slavery were all factors that the island’s original inhabitants were defenseless against.

A temporary bright spot which slowed but could not halt the decline of the Native Americans was their talent as whalers. As the whaling industry evolved over time many Indians displayed a remarkable ability as whalers which enabled them to make a decent living in a white man’s world. This lasted well into the nineteenth century, but eventually ended with the decline and collapse of the local whaling industry.

The evolution of the whaling industry on Nantucket presents a fascinating story. Due to the island’s position in ocean currents, the industry started with drift whaling, where the European settlers competed with the Native Americans for whale carcasses that drifted onto shore. A whale that became disoriented and trapped itself in Nantucket harbor led to the next logical phase, shore whaling. After dispatching this unfortunate creature, the islanders learned to



hunt whales close to home using small boats and towing their prizes to shore. Once the home waters were over-hunted, the next step in the process was to employ small ships carrying multiple whaleboats. Two factors eventually led to a further enhancement of the process. The decline of the local right whale, the initial favorite target because it floated when dead, required longer voyages to find prey. This, combined with the need to process the whales on ship rather than on land, precipitated the need for even larger whaling ships. The ability to process, or “try” a whale on ship was needed for two reasons. On-ship processing drastically reduced the time of whaling voyages and led to higher profits. Also as important, wherever whalers processed their stinking cargo on land, the locals protested, sometimes violently, that their environment was becoming defiled with whale carcasses and oil.

This last evolution of whaling brought riches and prosperity to the island on a large scale. The bigger ships and declining Atlantic whale population inevitably led the whalers to the Pacific Ocean and their ultimate quarry, the giant and far more dangerous sperm whale. The amount of oil these behemoths carried in their head cavities made their pursuit fabulously profitable and almost sealed their eventual doom. If not for the eventual discovery and refinement of petroleum, the sperm whale may have gone the way of the passenger pigeon. However, the decline of the Nantucket whaling industry preceded the collapse of the world wide industry. Some unlucky voyages, bad business decisions, and the heavy silting of Nantucket harbor which made it difficult for larger ships to enter, all contributed to the end of the once lucrative business.

In his recounting of the history of Nantucket whaling, the author relates the story of the *Essex*, the unlucky whaling ship that was rammed and sunk by a sperm whale. The incident formed the basis of Herman Melville’s classic novel, *Moby-Dick*, and was the source of Philbrick’s nonfiction masterpiece, *In the Heart of the Sea, the Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. The crew sailed thousands of miles in three small boats, eventually resorting to cannibalism and murder to survive.

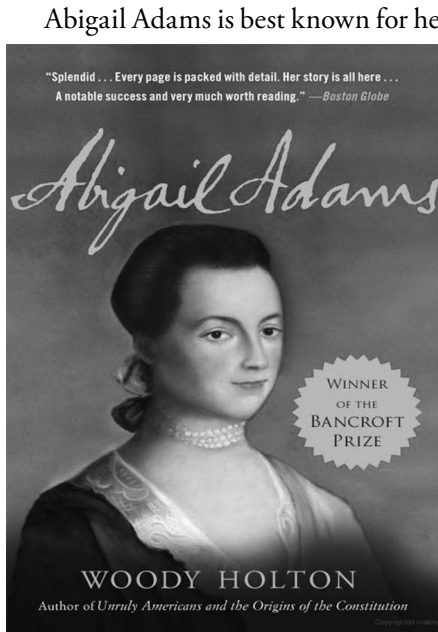
A major theme in the book was the rise and domination of Quakerism on the island. Originally the choice of a few prominent families, the sect grew to the point where the majority of islanders embraced the faith. It provided a source of stability and cohesiveness to the island enabling it to present a united front to the outside world and to avoid many of the pitfalls of other whaling communities awash in cash and therefore also in vice. The Quakers eventually proved all too human and over time declined due to internal squabbles both religious and secular. But for decades this faith was the common glue that kept the sometimes fractious community from all out (figurative) internecine warfare. The nonviolent faith also led to the island to declare itself neutral in

the War of 1812, enhancing the islanders' image as a people and a nation unto themselves.

This book is an engaging work of popular history and will especially appeal to anyone with an interest in Native Americans, Quakerism, sailing and whaling, and of course the history of Cape Cod and the islands.

Stephen Donnelly is a consultant for the insurance industry and a Westfield State College alumnus.

Abigail Adams. Woody Holton. New York: Atria Books, 2010. 512 pages. \$12.95 paperback.



Abigail Adams is best known for her famous letter exhorting her husband, John Adams, to “Remember the Ladies” in devising America’s new political system while he was at the Continental Congress in 1775. Abigail was as committed to the cause of independence as her husband and had proven herself an astute observer of political developments. Her famous phrase comes from the following entreaty: “In the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands.” Dozens of middle and high school textbooks quote this

passage, as do a large number of college-level U.S. history textbooks.

This famous letter transformed Adams into a feminist icon. Although in this passage she may have been referring to domestic violence, in other letters she expressed the view that women should be equally educated with men as well as be allowed to engage in business and control their own finances. Some of these aspects of Abigail Adams’s biography are well-known. Less well known are her ideas on religion, politics, African-Americans, money

making, war profiteering, European life, and family. As scholar Jeanne Boydston aptly noted over twenty years ago:

Abigail Adams is surely one of the most studied women in American history. A prolific and eloquent correspondent, she left behind a cache of letters spanning the better part of fifty years. She is the subject of five major, scholarly biographies in the last 35 years alone, nine volumes of correspondence (hers alone or in part), creating a veritable “Abigail industry.”¹

Since these words were penned in 1994, another half dozen new biographies of Abigail Adams and collections of the Adams’ correspondence have appeared in print to both critical and popular applause. These newest works include Woody Holton’s *Abigail Adams* (2010), winner of the prestigious Bancroft Prize; Joseph J. Ellis’ *First Family: Abigail and John* (2010); and literary scholar Edith B. Gelles’ third book on the subject titled *Abigail and John: Portrait of a Marriage* (2009), among many other new works. In addition, several major miniseries and documentaries have been produced over the years that wonderfully chronicle their relationship.

Thus, one might well wonder, do we really need another biography of Abigail Adams? This reviewer would answer with a resounding “yes”! Woody Holton’s *Abigail Adams* is a wonderful, engaging work that offers many new insights and perspectives. As one reviewer writes, Holton “allows Abigail’s voice to radiate off the page; the biography grips the reader from the beginning tale of Abigail writing her own will. [It is] a wonderful book for revolutionary history buffs, women’s studies majors, and biography lovers.”²

There were many ways that Abigail defied convention in her private life. For example, Holton has discovered that she wrote a will leaving most of her property to her granddaughters, in blatant defiance of the law that made her husband the master of all she owned. Furthermore, she was a shrewd and calculating businesswoman who profited from wartime shortages and John’s political positions to amass a small fortune. She then speculated and invested her earnings in ways John did not always approve of. Later in life she used “her” money to generously support impoverished relatives, indolent children, and neighbors along with her own household.

1 Jeanne Boydston, book review of *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams*, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), 158.

2 *Library Journal*.

At the time of his death, John Adams was so wealthy that his family was able to hold on to his estate for another hundred years. In contrast, Presidents Jefferson and Madison both died so deeply indebted that their houses had to be sold just to pay off their debts. Holton attributes John's financial security primarily to Abigail's shrewd business dealings and successful financial speculation schemes.

In *Abigail Adams*, Holton provides us with a vivid and comprehensive picture of America's second first lady. Much of his analysis focuses on two intertwined themes: Abigail Adams as economic agent and Abigail Adams as commentator and critic of women's roles in society. Holton traces her life from her childhood as the daughter of a parson to her long and sometimes uncertain courtship with John, her joys and sorrows as a mother, and her life as the wife of a revolutionary war leader, diplomat, vice president and then president. He reveals Adams as an exuberant, politically savvy, and forward-thinking woman with a mind of her own. It must be noted, however, that Abigail expressed her opinions only in private letters; she never advocated publicly for women's rights. Holton also illuminates the many personal struggles and tribulations she endured as a woman of the eighteenth-century, including the ever present threat of disease and death.

Abigail Adams, née Abigail Smith, was born on November 11, 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts, the second of three daughters. Her father, Reverend William Smith, was one of the best educated and most prosperous citizens of the community. Her mother was from a prominent local family. Her parents instilled in Abigail a sense of duty to those who were less fortunate and a religious life that emphasized morality and reason.

Abigail first met John in 1759 when she was fifteen years old and he was twenty-four. Although her impression of him has not been preserved, John was not particularly impressed by the teenage girl. However, in 1761 they were reintroduced when a close friend of John's began courting Abigail's sister. As the two grew to know and admire each other, they gradually fell in love. An intellectual affinity was a significant part of their attraction.

Although they lived less than five miles apart, John and Abigail began a correspondence during their courtship that continued during the many lengthy separations that characterized their marriage. Their early love letters were alternately playful and passionate. John often addressed his "Dear Adorable" while Abigail wrote, as she would for the rest of her life, to "My Dearest Friend." Abigail and John married on October 25, 1764; she was just shy of her twentieth birthday and he was twenty-nine years old.

Like nearly all colonial women, Abigail had no formal education. Instead, she was taught to read and write at home by her mother and also received

lessons from her grandmother. However, unlike most colonial girls she was in the unique position of having access to the extensive libraries of her father and maternal grandfather.

New England schools of the time usually admitted only boys; girls were primarily instructed at home. Few believed that women needed a formal education. Abigail's poor health as a child may have also limited her opportunities. She later explained in a letter to her grandson in 1813: "My early education did not partake of the abundant opportunities which the present day affords and which even our common schools now afford. I was never sent to any school; I was always sick. (7)"

Despite her formal schooling, similar to many other young women of her social class, Abigail read avidly and discussed and corresponded with her numerous friends about books and ideas. She was also tutored for several years by her sister's fiancée. Her curiosity and intellect were highly attractive to John during their courtship and later prized during their fifty-year marriage. However, Abigail was always deeply embarrassed by her lack of formal education along with her poor spelling and grammar (which are clearly visible in her correspondence).

During their first ten years of marriage, Abigail gave birth to six children (five of whom survived). Abigail had to adjust to John's work and frequent absences. When he was away, she was responsible for the children's education as well as running the house, farm and finances. As Adams' political career climbed so did his time away from home. In 1777 he was assigned a post in Paris where he was accompanied by their ten-year-old son, John Quincy. The two remained abroad, separated from the family, for more than eighteen months. Other international assignments followed, necessitating even longer periods of separation. During these years Abigail kept John well-informed of domestic politics through her letters while he kept her abreast of international affairs.

Between 1764 and 1784 the couple lived separately nearly half of the time. These two decades of constant separation ended in 1785 when Abigail joined John in Europe where he had been appointed Minister to England. They lived together in London until 1788 before returning to Massachusetts. As the family became more affluent they moved to a larger house in Braintree (later renamed Quincy), Massachusetts.

Throughout her life, Abigail was a vocal advocate of women's education, arguing that girls should receive a public school education that was equal to that given to boys. For example, in August of 1776, shortly after her famous "Remember the Ladies" exchange, and seemingly unfazed by John's wry dismissal of that request, Abigail again took up her pen on behalf of women.

She wrote John:

You remark upon the deficiency of Education in your Countrymen. . . . If you complain of neglect of Education in sons, What shall I say with regard to daughters, who every day experience the want of it? With regard to the Education of my own children, I find myself soon out of my depth, and destitute and deficient in every part of Education (116).

She concluded, “If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen and Philosophers, we should have learned women.” As mothers, women were their children’s first and often main teachers. Three years later she again commented to John, “I regret the trifling narrow contracted education of the Females of my own Country” (137). Abigail Adams’ travels and time spent living in Europe in the 1780s only deepened her commitment to improving women’s intellectual attainments. She was impressed by how well-educated many French and English women were.

Despite their separations, Abigail always supported and showed an active interest in her husband’s political career, especially during his two presidential campaigns in 1796 and 1800. She was the first “First Lady” to live in the “Presidential House,” later called White House. During her husband’s single term as president, Abigail continued her key role as confidential and informal adviser. During her final years Abigail suffered from poor health. She died of typhoid fever in her home in Quincy on October 28, 1818 when she was 73 years old.

Using previously overlooked documents from numerous archives, Holton demonstrates that Abigail Adams was far more charismatic and influential than most historians have realized. At the same time, Holton’s study also reveals that domestic dramas—from unplanned pregnancies to sickness, epidemics, and untimely deaths—can be just as heartbreaking and historically significant as the actions of statesmen and soldiers. A special focus of the book is Abigail’s many complex relationships. These include relationships with her mother, sisters, and children; with many famous contemporaries (including male “founding fathers” and less well-known female luminaries such as Mercy Otis Warren); as well as with hitherto unknown protagonists, such as Phoebe, one of her father’s slaves. As the publisher’s synopsis notes:

In a departure from the upbeat tone of some other Adams’ biographies, Holton shows how frequently Abigail’s life was marred by tragedy, making this the deepest, most humanistic

portrayal ever published. Using the matchless trove of Adams family manuscripts, the author steps back to allow Abigail to respond to her many losses in her own words. (www.tantor.com)

The author, Abner Linwood (“Woody”) Holton, was well-positioned to write this biography. An associate professor of history at the University of Richmond in Virginia, he has published two award-winning books: *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (2007), a finalist for the National Book Award, and *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (1999). Holton received his B.A. in English from the University of Virginia and his Ph.D. in history from Duke. In his first book, *Forced Founders*, he argued that Jefferson, Washington, and other Virginia plantation owners rebelled against Britain partly in order to regain control of Native Americans, slaves, and small farmers. This work received the esteemed Merle Curti Award from the Organization of American Historians.

Likewise, *Abigail Adams* was the winner of the Bancroft Prize, one of the most prestigious awards in the field of American historical writing. It also received a *New York Times Book Review* Editor’s Choice Award and an American Heritage Best of 2009 award, attesting to its appeal to a broad, nonacademic audience. The words of biographer Walter Isaacson, which appear on the book’s front cover, aptly convey this appeal: “Holton vividly captures the brilliance, charm, and spunk of Abigail Adams, and shows why she deserves her place at the table along with her husband John and the other Founders. [It is] a must-read book for understanding the founding of our nation.”

L. Mara Dodge teaches U.S. History at Westfield State University and is the Editorial Director of the Historical Journal of Massachusetts.

My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams. With a Foreword by Joseph J. Ellis. Edited by Margaret A. Hogan and C. James Taylor. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010. 507 pages. \$13.95 paperback.

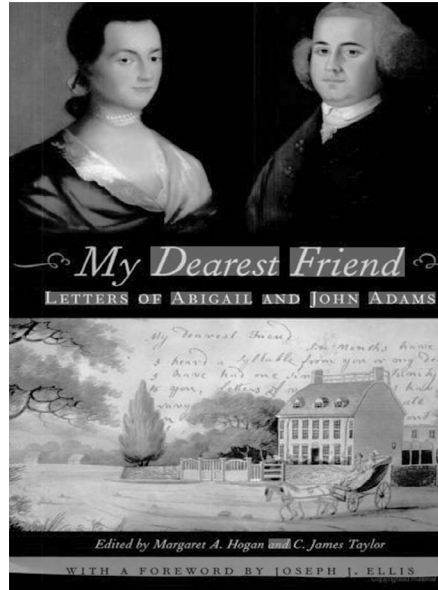
John and Abigail Adams are the best documented couple in American history and among the most beloved. In 1762, the twenty-four year-old John Adams penned a flirtatious note to “Miss Adorable,” the seventeen-year-old Abigail Smith. In 1801, Abigail wrote to wish John a safe journey

as he headed home to Quincy after serving as president of the nation he helped create. Although Abigail lived until 1818 (and John survived until 1826), they wrote no more letters to each other after he left the presidency. They did not need to; they were finally living together in their beloved family home in Quincy, Massachusetts.

The letters that span their nearly forty years of correspondence, from 1762 to 1801, reveal one of the most intriguing and inspiring partnerships in American history. The Adams were prolific writers who were apart for nearly half of their fifty-year marriage. Over 1,160 of their letters have been preserved. Historian Joseph J. Ellis has postulated that Presidents James Madison and George Washington might have had similarly compelling correspondence if they had had the opportunity. However, the Madisons were always together and George Washington had his wife destroy his letters. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson burned the letters he had exchanged with his wife

As a result, scholars have no direct evidence of those couples' relationships. In contrast, from very early on both John and Abigail sought to preserve their copious correspondence, clearly grasping its historical significance. More importantly, it is not simply the quantity but the quality of their correspondence that has endeared them to so many generations. Extremely lively and literate, full of keen observations and articulate commentary on world events, these letters are also remarkably intimate and seem to reach across the centuries. We recognize these people: their cares and concerns, the ebbs and flows of their marriage and family life amidst the tumult of war and nation-building.

The editors, Margaret A. Hogan and C. James Taylor, are both on the editorial staff of the Adams Papers Project at the Massachusetts Historical Society. They are uniquely positioned to make an informed selection. In *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams*, they offer the reader 289 letters which cover a longer time period (four decades) than the two previous editions of published letters. These 289 letters, comprising nearly 500



printed pages, represent a full 25% of the known correspondence between the two and include some letters that have never before been published. The correspondence is conveniently divided into five sections: Courtship and Marriage (1762-75), Independence (1776-77), The Years Abroad (1778-88), A New Government (1789-95), and The First Couple (1796-1801). In 1801 John was defeated in his bid for reelection and the couple retired together to Massachusetts.

My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams invites readers to experience the founding of a nation and the partnership of two strong individuals, all in their own words. The letters are presented in their entirety. The editors provide brief introductions to each section and occasional background paragraphs, but mostly these letters speak for themselves, needing little introduction, translation, or annotation. They are not obscure or inaccessible to the twenty-first century reader. Rather, they are filled with affection, teasing, admonishments, debates, delightful turns of phrase, and sharp observations on both personal and political matters, all set within the immediacy of daily family life. This is history at its most authentic and most engaging. As Joseph Ellis notes in his forward, these letters “recover the messiness of history-as-it-happens (viii).”

John’s initial impressions of Abigail were less than complimentary: “Not fond, not frank, not candid” was the overall assessment he recorded in his diary in 1759. Several years later, however, when they met again, he was more impressed. Over time, their flirtatious early correspondence evolved to reflect a deeper, more mature relationship, but they never lost what Abigail described as “that unabated affection which has for years past, and will whilst the vital spark lasts, burn in the Bosom of your affectionate A Adams (25).”

In their letters we find trenchant political exchanges, such as Abigail’s famous plea to her husband and the Continental Congress to “Remember the Ladies,” and John’s less famous, revealing reply. He noted that while it was well known that the Revolution had prompted children, slaves and apprentices to rebel, “your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented (112).” Many of the letters are personal, from coquettish courtship epistles to Abigail’s moving premonition that a baby she was carrying would be stillborn.

However, it is the intermixing of personal and political, private and public lives, that often provides the greatest sense of immediacy and power. As historian Mary Beth Norton wrote:

The Adamases’ correspondence gives modern Americans an extraordinarily personal view of our country’s founding.

Intermingled with comments on the great events of the day—the Battle of Bunker Hill, the vote for independence, the inauguration of Washington as president—are discussions of daily life, stories of neighbors and relatives, complaints about the high cost of living and laments over such family tragedies as a stillborn daughter and the deaths of parents.¹

Reading their letters—intact, unedited, and unadulterated—provides a wonderful primary source compliment to Horton’s magisterial recent biography, *Abigail Adams*. The Adams’ world was not a world of sound bites. Although vivid and full of life, their letters are long and complicated; they carry on discussions and debates for months, refining their ideas and political views. Their thoughts range from the quotidian and deeply personal to insightful and wide-ranging reflections on the world-shattering historical events they were living through and were key participants in.

One cannot understand either the Adams or their world—the American Revolution and the post-revolutionary decades—without reading their correspondence. The unfolding of their letters over these four pivotal decades in our nation’s past reveals history at its most dynamic, illuminating, accessible, and meaningful. This beautifully-produced collection, which includes twenty pages of glossy, color images, can be read and treasured by a wide audience, from academic specialists to undergraduates.

L. Mara Dodge teaches U.S. History at Westfield State University and is the Editorial Director of the Historical Journal of Massachusetts.

***Remembering the Forgotten War: The Enduring Legacies of the U.S.–Mexican War.* Michael Scott Van Wagenen, University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. 329 pages. \$28.95 paperback.**

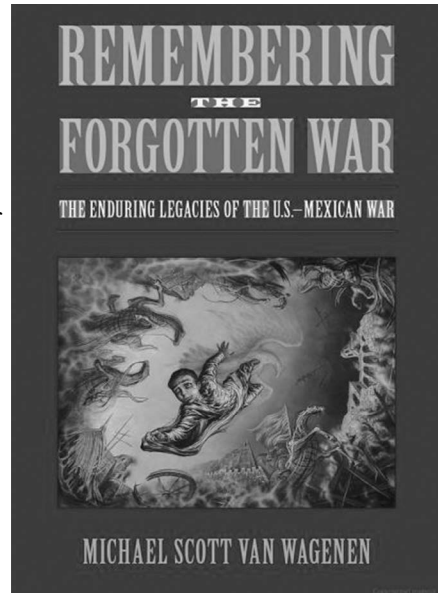
In January of 2004, the visitors’ center of Palo Alto Battlefield Historic Site first opened its doors. Visitors’ comments were solicited in the Register of National Park Visitors. Comments ranged from “Viva México” to “Excellent place—good information” to “The U.S. are such bullies!!!” to “very informative and fairly balanced” (p. 234). This one example, amongst many locations of historical memory of the U.S.-Mexican War, illustrates the subject of Van Wagenen’s monograph: how representations of the U.S.-Mexican War have varied depending on who was doing the remembering. As Van Wagenen puts

¹ Mary Beth Norton, *New York Times Book Review*, Nov. 4, 2007.

it, collective memory has the “ability to serve any number of masters” (p. 238). An ambitious undertaking, beginning in the years immediately following the Treaty of Guadalupe and ending in 2008, Van Wagenen’s work examines the public memory of the war on both sides of the border. Alternating chapters on the United States and Mexico bring these two territories into dialogue with each other, showing how this war at times loomed large in the collective memory of one side of the border or the other—and at other moments was nearly forgotten.

Van Wagenen explores how national politicians and grassroots organizations used the war to strengthen whatever claim they were making to economic resources and/or political power. In the U.S., the memory of the war was often affected by the goals of federal government and its foreign policy. In the era of the “good neighbor,” World War II and the Cold War, the need for an alliance with Mexico on the global stage meant that U.S. presidents honored the sacrifices of Mexican soldiers, toning down the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and earlier characterizations of Mexicans as degenerate or savage which had rationalized expansion. Seeking Mexican support in opposing the Soviet Union, President Harry Truman famously placed a wreath on the memorial to the supposed cadets of the military academy (“Niños Heroes”) who refused to surrender to US soldiers during the invasion of Mexico City by General Winfield Scott. This vision, however, could be directly contested by local groups, including those claiming to speak for U.S. veterans and their descendants. Overall, however, “American amnesia” on the national level has more often made this the “forgotten” war (p. 242).

In Mexico, the War of North American Intervention was typically used to shore up the power and hegemony of the state. President José Joaquín de Herrera (r. 1848–1851) preferred to emphasize the battle of Churubusco to defend Mexico City rather than the Niños Heroes of military academy because of the prominent role of irregular soldiers in that battle and the imminent threat he faced of overthrow by members of the Mexican Army. On the other hand, authoritarian Porfirio Díaz (r. 1876–1911) used the ceremony at



Chapultepec commemorating the deaths of six supposed cadets to further his own goals of centralization of power and to delegitimize irregular military forces, ignoring the commemorations of Churubusco. Textbooks were used to communicate patriotic values of self-sacrifice and obedience to the state using the hagiography of the Niños Heroes. In spite of losing the war, the Mexican government was able to glorify the sacrifice of its soldiers and cadets as martyrs for the nation, finding a way to celebrate “past defeat as a victorious symbol of independence and valor” (p. 242), imbuing patriotism into Mexican youth as well as loyalty to the national government.

Van Wagenen has marshalled an impressive variety of sources into a very readable narrative. Academic histories, public ceremonies, monuments and plaques, textbooks, music and poetry, and archival sources are woven together to present a clear argument in each chapter about the specific interests at stake in any particular region or nation at a given time. Popular culture is also examined, from folk ballads in Mexico to an episode of Fox’s “King of the Hill.” A great strength of this book is that Wagenen has collected an incredible wealth of examples from so many places and sources that might otherwise remain unconnected to each other because of distances of time and national boundaries.

To maintain cohesion in a narrative spanning more than 150 years, there are a few central organizing threads, one of which involves the historical memory in Mexico of the “Niños Heroes” or “Boy Heroes.” These cadets of the military academy have served a variety of purposes throughout modern Mexican history, becoming over time secular relics of such national pride that, in 1947, their bones were exhumed from the field where they were presumed to have died and reinterred as sacred martyrs for the fatherland (p. 147). Politicians on the national level embraced or ignored this patriotic mythology depending on the potential benefits to their power. Each chapter on the Mexican side of the border shows how the ceremony in Chapultepec every September was altered by the changing tides of Mexican politics. Similarly, Van Wagenen also traces the battles over the famous prosthetic leg of Santa Anna as a thread through several chapters on the United States’ memory of the war. By revisiting the Boy Heroes or Santa Anna’s leg repeatedly, he connects the potentially disparate chapters to each other to make the overall text more cohesive. Van Wagenen does discuss Mexican popular expressions of views on the war through the ex-voto tradition and folk ballads from the U.S.-Mexican War, but there is far greater development of national-level war remembrances. Later chapters are stronger on popular uses of the war south of the Rio Bravo; for instance, one student during the protest movement of 1968 in Mexico City claimed that the murdered protesters were the “modern niños heroes” (p. 184), rejecting the

argument of official textbooks and politicians that patriotism meant obedience to the state.

Perhaps the most challenging issue inherent in Van Wagenen's argument is that of reception. The U.S. chapters have a wealth of information on how veterans groups in particular contested versions of the war created by Congress or the press. However, the way in which representations of the war by Mexican presidents were interpreted by veterans, women, or average citizens in different regions of Mexico merits further study. One of Van Wagenen's examples of the Mexican government's attempts to establish its version of the past through school curricula is problematic as we do not know which Mexican school textbooks were available or even used in classrooms prior to 1961, when the first free government textbook project was initiated. The ceremonies of Chapultepec remembering the Boy Heroes, another key example, reveal the projects of politicians, but not whether they were attended by the popular classes. Later chapters included oral interviews with former students of the Mexican school system and their memories of history lessons, textbook use and patriotic rituals, but this avenue of inquiry needs deeper exploration to understand how attempts by the state to manipulate public memory was contested and transformed by local conditions and interpretations.

That said, this volume should appeal to a broad audience of academics, students and those interested in the U.S.-Mexican War. With approachable language and discrete chapters, it lends itself to use in the undergraduate and/or graduate classroom. Van Wagenen is very successful in examining the way in which this war was shaped and reshaped in the memories of people on both sides of the Rio Bravo.

Dr. Christin Cleaton-Ruiz is an Associate Professor of History at Westfield State University.

***JFK's Last Hundred Days: The Transformation of a Man and the Emergence of a Great President.* Thurston Clarke. New York, NY: Penguin, 2013. 432 pages. \$29.95 hardcover.**

The problem of balancing public memory and written record poses an unceasing challenge to scholars of recent history. Thurston Clarke has made that most evident in his latest work on President John F. Kennedy, a study that adds to a seemingly saturated field a detailed portrait of the man and an implied endorsement of his political canonization. In *JFK's Last Hundred Days*, Clarke taps into an enduring fascination with one of Massachusetts'

favorite sons with a day-by-day account of the presidency in the fateful fall of 1963.

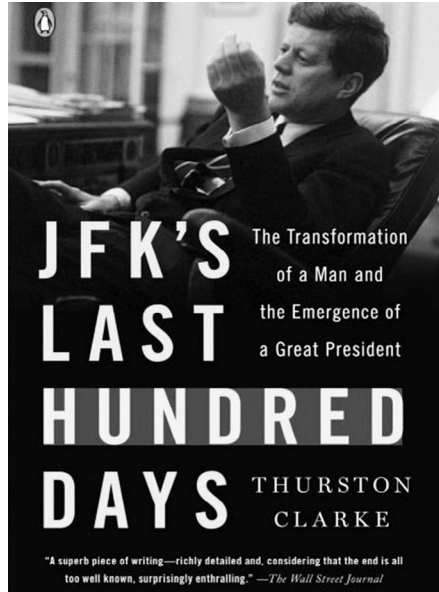
An independent scholar, Clarke takes readers with President Kennedy to Washington, Boston, Cape Cod, and Palm Beach, on a tour of western states, and finally to Dallas. As he begins with artist Elaine de Kooning's attempt at a portrait of the president, Clarke similarly seeks to understand the man from every angle—an attempt at a comprehensive written portrait through discussions of policy, politics, and Kennedy's personal life. Kooning's *idee fixe* mirrors the author's endless fascination, seen in his *Ask Not: The Inauguration of*

John F. Kennedy and the Speech that Changed America (2004) and *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* (2008).

The first matter of concern, we find, was the death of Kennedy's second son, Patrick, two days after birth from a respiratory ailment. Clarke presents that tragedy as one which definitively altered the president's character and turned him away from what former lover Mimi Beardsley described as a "reckless desire for sex" (p. 31). Subsequent chapters that frankly discuss Jack and Jackie's marriage and Jack's appetites serve to humanize a portrait that would otherwise pass as uncritical (pp. 68–74, 78–87).

Clarke's work must be taken in the context of biographies that have perpetuated the myth of Camelot, efforts by the Kennedy clan and former aides like Theodore Sorensen and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to aggrandize the president beyond his own wishes. Tellingly, Clarke quotes Kennedy, who once complained to Schlesinger, "[t]hat's the trouble, Arthur, with all you historians! That's what you did to [Franklin] Roosevelt and his crowd. You made all those New Dealers seven feet tall. They weren't that good. They were just a bunch of guys like us" (p. 132). Though not entirely unlike Schlesinger, Clarke acknowledges Kennedy's political and personal failures in a way that makes his ultimate successes all the more significant.

Inevitably, in assessing greatness, historians must set what might have been, had Kennedy lived, based on his vision, with what actually happened under Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy, Clarke argues, originated most measures



now associated with Johnson's time in office, among them civil rights legislation, Medicare, immigration reform, and the War on Poverty. Johnson would benefit from better relations with Congress, a more forceful personality, the undisputed triumph of 1964, and the shadow of a slain president. Yet Clarke shows that contemporaries could agree that the assassination made no difference in the fate of Kennedy's agenda, which would be left to Johnson and Nixon to complete (pp. 354–355). It remains that to honor Kennedy with those achievements is to diminish Johnson, and that becomes most evident in Clarke's treatment of Vietnam.

The big "what-if" question concerning Kennedy, which robbed Johnson of presidential greatness, is precisely American involvement in Vietnam. With Kennedy coming around on the issue of civil rights in 1963, the course of conflict in Southeast Asia has invited more retrospective speculation than any other issue of the day. For Clarke, public claims supporting continued involvement were intended to placate proponents of an aggressive foreign policy ahead of the next election (p. 158). Kennedy was committed to personnel reduction (pp. 213, 241). Perhaps that was in the interest of detente with the Communist bloc, which would also be aided by pushing a nuclear test ban treaty through Congress. Kennedy believed that his endeavors in ending the Cold War would become one of the most important elements of his legacy.

The conclusion is clear: in his last hundred days, Kennedy was on the right side of history. Indeed, he was preoccupied with history and his concern about his place served an ambitious agenda that would lift up all Americans and increase global security. Clarke does not, however, make clear how the Kennedy vision intersected with political expediency—for greatness passed through reelection in 1964. Compromise was necessary, and the accounts of horse trading with Republican congressional leaders Everett Dirksen and Charles Halleck on the test ban treaty and civil rights are helpful (pp. 25–31, 249, 269–270). But what of the way in which Kennedy negotiated the meeting of postwar liberalism, Cold War rhetoric, and brewing domestic tensions? Was Kennedy made bolder, as in his willingness to introduce a civil rights bill before the election, by the prospect of facing a weak Republican contender—Goldwater, Rockefeller, or perhaps Henry Cabot Lodge? Clarke's account of the first election strategy meeting, on November 12, 1963, does not say (pp. 291–294). Nor is it clear to what extent Kennedy carried with him, in the fall of 1963, lessons from his rise in Massachusetts politics or from the difficult campaign of 1960.

This points to what may be the biggest failing of *JFK's Last Hundred Days*. Though minute detail is meant to cultivate sympathy for our subject,

in the process the bigger picture of Kennedy's legacy is lost. Crucial to the president's popularity and to the subsequent myth of Camelot was his intellectual and social context. It is the man as a symbol as well as his ability to appeal to deep forces in American culture and society—not hidden plans to leave Southeast Asia or horse trading with congressional leaders — that made the rhetoric of Camelot possible and which, while he lived, endeared John F. Kennedy to the American people. Presidential greatness does not come from policy deliberations in Washington, or merely as the ex-post facto judgment of history, but first and foremost as a relationship between citizens and their leader.

Built on familiar oral interviews, Oval Office recordings, memoirs, and Schlesinger's journals, the book is, as promised, the engaging portrait of a compelling figure, but one that offers few new insights to devoted students of the Kennedy era. Still, Thurston Clarke's work, like Robert Dallek's (*An Unfinished Life, Camelot's Court*), raises important questions about memory and the way in which American mythologize leaders.

Patrick Lacroix is an instructor at the University of New Hampshire.