

avoid entanglement in the global balance of power, which was concentrated in Europe (3).

The central thought of the political scientist, which can be traced in all chapters, is the role of President Woodrow Wilson. The 28th US president, who belonged to the classical liberal school of thought and called himself an idealist, also played a key role in strengthening moral principles in foreign policy. Nye pays much attention to the contribution of President Wilson and alludes to his legacy throughout the book. Moreover, he compares the presidents of the Cold War era with Wilson by making him an idol of morality in politics. According to Nye, the most immoral president in modern US history was Donald Trump (169-170). It should be emphasized that Joseph Nye's book is a brilliant scientific study on this important topic in modern conflict and complex international relations (IR). This book is a valuable contribution to the studies of the theory of international relations (IR) and U.S foreign policy.

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Christopher J. Leahy. *President without a Party; The Life of John Tyler*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020, 528 Pages. ISBN 978-0-8071-7254-4. \$39.95

“His Accidency” was one of several derogatory names that President John Tyler (1841-1845) was given by his detractors. Ironically, most of his detractors were to be found in the same political party that in the election of 1840 had nominated him as vice president. When President William Henry Harrison died after just three weeks in office, Tyler, who had not even arrived in Washington, D.C. yet, became the first vice president in America to be elevated to the presidency.

John Tyler's road to the White House was indeed odd: When Henry Clay, the towering figure in the Whig Party, surprisingly lost the nomination for presidential candidate to William Henry Harrison, it proved difficult to find

a running mate for the ticket. Several candidates politely turned down the offer before it was finally given to Tyler. As historian Daniel Walker Howe has noted, that choice turned out to be one of the worst mistakes made by any party in American history.

It was not just the Whigs that quickly soured on John Tyler's policies: In presidential rankings, he is consistently found somewhere near the bottom of the list. Christopher J. Leahy's book is not a revisionist attempt to rehabilitate Tyler's reputation, but rather an attempt to provide what the author calls "a fresh look at Tyler's entire life and political career." The author, who is a professor of history at Keuka College, attempts to provide a larger context for Tyler's decisions. While he acknowledges that "his Accidency" does deserve a lot of the blame for his own political misfortunes, he also thinks that the dominant view of him has largely followed "the lead of the Whigs who banished him."

With its 512 pages, based on an extensive use of primary sources, Leahy's biography is a major addition to the rather narrow field of books on Tyler. It explicitly seeks to replace Oliver P. Chitwood's fawning *John Tyler: Champion of the Old South* (Newtown: American Political Biography Press, 1990 [1939]). Other books in the field include Edward P. Crapol's thematically organized *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012 [2003]), and Gary May's brief *John Tyler* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

One of Leahy's explicit goals is to account for Tyler's upbringing, and "how the southern master class developed and how its culture influenced politics." Leahy thus devotes much space to Tyler's roots in the Virginia Tidewater, and how he was later politically handicapped by acting "as if the whole world revolved around the place where he had been born."

Given the focus on Tyler's private life, it is of course impossible to ignore the fact that he was particularly prolific in fathering children: He had 8 with his first wife Letitia, who died while he was in the White House, and 7 with his second wife, the 30 years younger Julia Gardner, whom he married while he was still in office. In addition to these 15 children, Tyler was also accused by political opponents of fathering children with some of his female slaves. According to Leahy's biography, these accusations were credible.

Why did John Tyler turn out to be such a bad president? After all, he was a highly experienced politician, who had served in the Virginia legislature, had been the governor of Virginia, a member of the House of Representatives and a senator. Yet he managed in short order to alienate both the Dem-

ocrats and the Whigs. Tyler had been an admirer of Andrew Jackson, and, as it turned out, still opposed most of the Whig Party's American System, including higher tariffs and a national bank, which he thought was unconstitutional. Yet, the Whigs nominated him without proper vetting, mostly because he was a Southerner, who could provide some regional balance to the presidential ticket. The campaign slogan for the Whig campaign of 1840 was also enhanced by it: "Tippecanoe and Tyler too," but nobody had really thought about what would happen if it turned out to be "Tyler only". In fact, nobody had asked Tyler about his views on the presidency and Whig agenda until President Harrison died.

None of the previous eight presidents had died in office, and accordingly, there was no precedent. Some of the most interesting aspects of the Tyler presidency are the precedents he established. The first one was established simply by insisting that he was now president: When the leading Whigs summoned him after Harrison's death, they argued that he would only become "acting president," but Tyler immediately made it clear that according to his reading of the Constitution, he was the actual president, with all the powers and duties vested in that office. Having no intention of being a mere figurehead, Tyler chose to take the oath of office, thus paving the way for subsequent vice presidents from Millard Fillmore to Lyndon B. Johnson.

Once in office, Tyler kept William Henry Harrison's cabinet, but when it informed him that it had previously made decisions by majority vote, and that he as president would have one vote, just like the other members, he refused to accept such restrictions on his authority. Leahy notes that Tyler also helped expand the scope of presidential power with his extensive use of the veto. That, however, was also what quickly got him kicked out of his own party. In September of 1841, Tyler was not only formally banished by the Whig Party - he also became the first president to face a formal attempt at impeachment. After a string of vetoes on the central issues on party's political agenda - including on new tariffs and a proposal for a new national bank - his entire cabinet, with the notable exception of Daniel Webster, also resigned.

Regardless of his isolation from both political parties, the John Tyler that is portrayed in Christopher J. Leahy's book is neither dogmatic, nor a dilatory and vacillating politician. He is simply a contrarian, who despite clear political ambitions ends up alienating members of both major political parties. Even as an unpopular president without a party, Tyler nevertheless remained firmly convinced that he could do something that would win him a second term as president. He came to see the annexation of Texas as his

best bet, since such a move could woo elements from both political parties.

Tyler did in fact secure the annexation, but ultimately agreed not to run on a third-party platform. Instead, he left it to the Democratic candidate James Polk to make Texas part of the union. When Tyler left office, he was convinced that the annexation of Texas had increased national security and thus would help his presidential legacy. Unfortunately, he was blind to the fact that it had also severely increased sectional tensions. The civil war that ultimately resulted from these tensions would more than anything tarnish his legacy, since he became the only former president to go to war with the nation he had once led.

Before Tyler helped convince his fellow Virginians to secede, he had actually convinced himself in both 1856 and in 1860 that he had a chance of becoming the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. Instead, a seat in the Confederate Congress became his last political office.

When Tyler died on January 18, 1862, there were no flags flying at half-staff in Washington, D.C. In fact, there was not even an official announcement that the former president had passed. As Leahy notes, "Northern silence reflected what amounted to a disavowal of the life and political career of John Tyler." In the author's view, the last tragic chapter of Tyler's political life – his role in the Confederate Congress – was yet another result of the "all-consuming ambition and a desire for political fame" that had characterized his entire career.

Despite the 500 plus pages and Leahy's stated ambition to write the first full biography of John Tyler since. Chitwood's *John Tyler: Champion of the Old South*, there are some surprising omissions in his book. While the struggles over a national bank takes up a lot of space, there is virtually nothing on how Tyler ended up on the Whig presidential ticket in 1840, just as there is very little on his attempts to run as an independent candidate in 1844. On the other hand, some readers may get a sense of "information overload" while reading other chapters. There are passages, where Leahy has seemingly been determined to make use of every single letter or other primary source he has come across during his elaborate archival research. Regardless of such reservations, scholars with a particular interest in the history of the 1840s will most likely find new interesting details in this well-written and level-headed political biography.