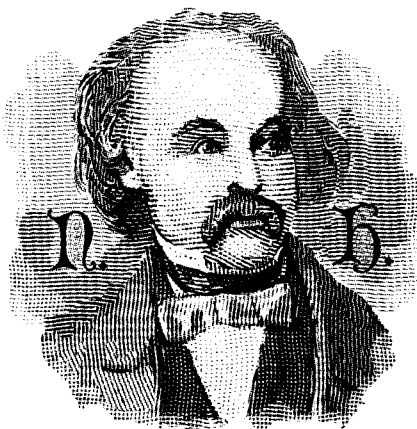




Book Review by Jay Martin

THE LAST JEFFERSONIAN

Hawthorne: A Life, by Brenda Wineapple.
Alfred A. Knopf, 509 pages, \$30 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper)



IN THE PREFACE TO HIS LAST COMPLETED novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), Nathaniel Hawthorne spoke of America as that place “where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight.” Nearly twenty years later, in 1879, Henry James picked up this thread and, from his own transatlantic point of view, amplified it in his *Hawthorne*. Hawthorne was obliged to write romances, he said, because the “elements of high civilization” were absent in America during Hawthorne’s time: “no state...[no] sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service,” James began, and then continued on through a long list of lacunae. When so much of “customs, manners, usages, habits, [and] forms,” were missing, James inquired, what was left for the novelist to draw upon?

James was largely right about Hawthorne’s art. Hawthorne made the necessity of romance into a triumph of art, and his varied investigations of American legends and his rigorous examination of the inmost heart of man made up for the lack of a developed society. What James termed large absences and “destitutions” became, for Hawthorne, the advantages and additions of imagination and minute perceptivity. In her *Hawthorne: A Life*, Brenda Wineapple skillfully delineates Hawthorne’s gain, from his earliest sketches and tales, to his novels, essays, and his works for children.

But another side of Hawthorne is sketched in her book, though not emphasized. James said about Hawthorne and his American contemporaries that though they lacked so much of social life one thing still remained for Americans;

and this was, he ventured obscurely to say, the American’s “secret joke.” It turns out that what Americans decidedly had, and had in abundance to counterbalance all that was missing, was *politics*! Tocqueville, of course, commented perceptively on the superabundance of political activity in America during the decades of Hawthorne’s career. The life that Wineapple sets forth shows Hawthorne enmeshed in politics every bit as much as he was engaged in literature and the literary life.

It would be, to use Hawthorne’s own phrase, a “twice-told tale” to rehearse Hawthorne’s development and accomplishments as a man of letters. Most American high-schoolers or college readers of anthologies know something of his literary career. But Wineapple’s book reminds us that Hawthorne lived in a tumultuous time politically; that he knew many major political figures, profiting from his association with them; that he wrote frequently for political journals; that he sought political offices; that he gained from politics the income that allowed him to write fiction; and finally, that through a political appointment he got hold of the subject about which he wrote his best book, *The Scarlet Letter*. Earlier biographers, of course, have written about Hawthorne’s politics and political associations. But for those readers who have never examined a Hawthorne biography in full, Wineapple offers a healthy and happy corrective to the predominant one-sided image of Hawthorne as a delicate, withdrawn recluse who penned remarkably subtle fictions of the dark dramas of tortured inner lives.

SOME OF HAWTHORNE’S EARLIEST PUBLISHED essays were written in 1836 for the *American Magazine of Useful and*

Entertaining Knowledge, which he came to Boston to edit; he himself wrote sketches of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John C. Calhoun. About his personal interest in American politics there was nothing surprising. At Bowdoin College, Hawthorne had been friends with Franklin Pierce, Horatio Bridge, and Jonathan Cilley. Like them, Hawthorne became a committed neo-Jeffersonian Jacksonian Democrat, and remained one all his life. Advocating the political principles of limited government, states’ rights, and individual liberty committed him to a conservative republican view that federal powers must be kept at a minimum. Cilley was soon elected to Congress, where his promise of a brilliant political career was ended fatally by a duel. Hawthorne wrote his memorial. Pierce, like Cilley, rose rapidly into influential positions in the Democratic Party; Bridge, too, had political connections in Maine and Washington, D.C. Hawthorne soon became friends with John O’Sullivan who served in the New York legislature, was a follower of Martin Van Buren, and, in 1837, became editor of the *Democratic Review*, in which, between 1837 and 1845, Hawthorne published twenty stories. The masthead of O’Sullivan’s party organization rang with Jeffersonian and Jacksonian fervor: “The Best Government is that which Governs Least.”

Through these friends Hawthorne had been working as hard to get some political post or preferment as he had labored on his stories. The “spoils system” was in glorious ascendancy, and Hawthorne sought to be its beneficiary. Pierce and Bridge tried to get him taken on as historian for a Congressionally-supported South Seas Expedition eventually led by Charles Wilkes. Just before his death, Cilley was laboring to ob-



tain a place for Hawthorne at the Salem Post Office, or perhaps an office in the Capitol. Later, other friends of Hawthorne's urged Orestes Brownson to represent Hawthorne's merits to George Bancroft, collector of the Port of Boston and political boss of the Democratic Party. In this case, Bancroft loomed larger as a politician than as the great historian. Bancroft did, in fact, offer Hawthorne an inspectorship in the Boston Custom House and later a post there as measurer of coal and salt, which the impoverished author and party loyalist gladly accepted. In 1840, when Martin Van Buren failed at reelection, Hawthorne resigned his post. "He'd not serve under Whigs . . .," Wineapple remarks. Four years later, with the election of Polk, Hawthorne declared himself available again for an office.

In 1846 it came. With Franklin Pierce, Maine's Senator John Fairfield, and the chairman of the Essex County Democratic Committee all promoting the cause of Hawthorne to President Polk, he was appointed surveyor of the Salem Custom House at a salary of \$1,200 a year, entailing little work. "I have grown considerable of a politician," Hawthorne wrote to Horatio Bridge. He returned some favors with articles in the *Democratic Review* and by inviting such speakers as Daniel Webster to lecture at the Salem Lyceum, where Hawthorne became secretary. It was from the Custom House in Salem that Hawthorne got the idea for *The Scarlet Letter*. That book made him internationally famous. True, when the wheel turned and the Whigs came back into power in 1848, Hawthorne was summarily dismissed—"an act of wanton and unmitigated oppression by the Whigs," William Cullen Bryant wrote in his Democratic paper, the *New York Evening Post*. For his part, Hawthorne retaliated in the spirit of Machiavellian politics, attempting to get the Senate to reject his proposed successor; and as to his chief local political opponent, he vowed to "do my best to kill and scalp him in the public prints." In the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, he

did just that—roasting the Whig incumbents at the Custom House. Hawthorne had gotten an income as well as a subject in Salem: literature, politics, and economics had gone hand in hand. And once *The Scarlet Letter* was published in 1850 Hawthorne's fame made him eligible for even more lucrative posts.

Now that he was famous, he was a sterling candidate for political preferment. When Franklin Pierce was nominated for the presidency, Hawthorne volunteered to write his "campaign biography." He did so with dispatch, got the best known publishing house in America to issue it prominently, and advertised his other books in it. He flatly told his publisher: "We are politicians now; and you must not expect to conduct yourself like a gentlemanly publisher." The \$300 he earned was far less important than the fact that this favor for his friend, when Pierce became president, dropped a very lucrative political spoil in Hawthorne's lap—the American consulship of Liverpool. This was then a great plum because Liverpool was the main port through which England transported goods to America, and the Consul there was authorized to charge two dollars for his signature each time a vessel departed. Hawthorne calculated that he could, as he said, "bag" enough to save about \$10,000 a year. And he was happy to give up his solitary life at a novelist's desk for the political preferment and the daily chink of coin in the Liverpool Consul's office. At the peak of his fame he gave up literature and would publish nothing during the next seven years.

Hawthorne liked the job at the consulate; he worked steadily and well at it. He liked the social life that it allowed him in England. If he were turned out of office, he lamented, he would "have to begin scribbling romances again...." With the election of James Buchanan he was turned out. And then, as easily as he had become a political appointee, he returned to literature, moving to Italy, where he gathered material for his last romance, *The Marble Faun*, concerning American expatriates in Italy. And then he

went back home to Concord. To the end his political allegiances remained with Pierce's Kansas policy and the Democratic Party; he despised the Whigs and the Free Soilers who abandoned the Democratic Party, and he feared the policies of the new Republican Party and its 1856 candidate John C. Frémont. He lived just long enough to see Lincoln elected and the country plunged into war. He was a prominent member of a Massachusetts delegation led by Representative Charles Russell Train that traveled to Washington to meet with the new president. "On the whole," Hawthorne wrote, "I like this sallow, queer sagacious visage, with the homely human sympathies that warmed it; and, for my small share in the matter, would as life have Uncle Abe for a ruler as any man whom it would have been practicable to put in his place."

HAWTHORNE DIED AT THE AGE OF 59, before the end of the Civil War, a cataclysm to which he had never become reconciled. His doubts about the war required that his essay, "Chiefly about War Matters by a Peaceable Man," had to be censored to permit its publication. *Our Old Home*, his last book, was castigated on political, not literary grounds, for Hawthorne's dedication to Pierce, who was still held in contempt in New England for his support of the compromise in Kansas. But Hawthorne remained faithful to his earliest political principles. He was perhaps the last Jeffersonian in American politics and the last true romancer in American letters. Brenda Wineapple's biography allows us to see how much Hawthorne unified and intertwined political activity with a literary life.

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COUNTING EVERY VOTE

Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876,
by Roy Morris, Jr. Simon & Schuster, 320 pages, \$27 (cloth), \$14 (paper)

Centennial Crisis: The Disputed Election of 1876,
by William H. Rehnquist. Alfred A. Knopf, 288 pages, \$26 (cloth), \$14 (paper)

ONE OF THE LESS-NOTICED LEGACIES OF Progressivism is the abandonment of political history, or at least its demotion from pride of place. Although the founding and the Civil War retain their allure to the general public and even to professors, the histories of other eras have become specialized tastes.

To Progressive historians, the great changes that remade society resulted not from the choices of mere politicians but from social and economic movements, in which many share but none control. Indeed, the usual stuff of political history—ambition, interests, schemes, and deals—was precisely the muck that Progressives thought could be raked and discarded. The rise of democracy or (in today's preferred formula) the triumph over various forms of discrimination can, after all, make for a grand narrative, beside which tales of partisan intrigue and even individual politicians' virtue may seem idiosyncratic or ultimately futile. Ambition counteracting ambition, interests entering coalitions with other interests—these are the usual fare of American politics, but to Progressives these stories had all the suspense and consequence of a dime-store novel, and, except to political junkies, none of the romance.

For lovers of American politics who are skeptical of the dominant progressivisms, however, there is no better way to reengage the political history of the United States than to look at the disputed presidential election of 1876. And now, in the wake of the disputed election of 2000, come two books that do precisely that—fittingly, one from the Democratic perspective and one from the Republican. For the Democrats, we have an experienced writer on the era, Roy Morris, Jr., with *Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876*; and for the Republicans, no less a figure than the Chief Justice of the United States, William H. Rehnquist, with *Centennial Crisis: The Disputed Election of 1876*.

THERE IS BY NOW LITTLE DISAGREEMENT on the basic facts. Democrats had every reason to expect success in 1876. The expiring Grant Administration had been mired in scandal; the economy had been sour since the Panic of 1873; Democrats had won back the House of Representatives in 1874,

for the first time since the Republican sweep of 1860; and they had won control of all but three of the former Confederate states and had reason to expect to "redeem" those state governments in '76. In Samuel Tilden, Governor of New York and a Wall Street lawyer, they had both a proven reformer who had helped break the hold of Boss Tweed on Tammany Hall and a master political tactician who as a young man had learned his trade from Martin Van Buren. An anti-slavery Democrat before the Civil War and a hard-money (indeed, quite wealthy) man after, Tilden could win votes in the South and West without bearing any taint from their heresies.

The Republicans had somehow come together at their convention to nominate everyone's second choice, Rutherford Hayes, Governor of Ohio and a Civil War veteran; but neither the party nor the candidate was confident that Hayes's personal rectitude would adequately overcome the legacy of "Grantism." And there was no denying the exhaustion of Reconstruction in the South or the momentum for change in the nation as a whole. Neither Tilden nor Hayes was surprised by the news reports on election evening that gave Tilden New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Indiana, most of the South, and a 3% lead in the popular vote. Both apparently went to bed thinking the presidency would belong to the Democrats.

What happened next is also generally agreed upon. Late on election night, Daniel Sickles—who had been in turn an antebellum Democratic congressman, the first beneficiary of a "temporary insanity" defense for killing his wife's lover, a Union General who lost a leg at Gettysburg, and a United States minister to Spain—stopped by Republican headquarters in New York City, and, finding the national chairman already in bed, began perusing returns. Realizing that, if the three Reconstruction states still in Republican hands came in for Hayes, he would win the Electoral College 185 to 184, Sickles cabled Republicans in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina (and Oregon) to "hold your state." Meanwhile, John C. Reid, the managing editor of the *New York Times*, whose experience in Andersonville prison during the Civil War confirmed him as a staunch Republican, came to the same conclusion about the possibility, however slim, of a Hayes victory

in the Electoral College. While many papers of both partisan stripes called the election for Tilden the next morning, the *Times* demurred, declaring it "doubtful."

"Visiting statesmen" from both parties descended on the three Southern states in question during the weeks that followed, to witness the tabulation of the vote by the state canvassing boards, which for all three states were in Republican hands, and perhaps to find a way to influence the outcome. In South Carolina, where extra federal troops had been stationed after extensive pre-election violence, the presidential votes seemed narrowly but clearly enough in Republican hands, though the Democrat Wade Hampton seemed to have won the race for governor. In Florida the preliminary vote was very close. In Louisiana Tilden led by a margin of about 7,000. The canvassing boards, however, had legal authority to disregard the votes of precincts and counties (or in Louisiana, parishes) where fraud or irregularity was discovered; and in Florida and Louisiana, allegations were made and testified to that there had been violence and the intimidation of black voters at the polls, prompting the boards to throw out enough votes to elect Republicans.

HAYES HAD BEEN SKEPTICAL AT THE outset of the effort on his behalf and had kept himself scrupulously in the background, but he became convinced that there had been severe intimidation of black Republican voters, and having promised to protect the rights of blacks in his July letter accepting the Republican nomination, he grew confident in the justice of those working for his cause. Tilden, to the consternation of the Democratic Party, left the development of a post-election strategy to others, despite his past brilliance as a campaign operative, although he clearly signaled that he would have no part in any effort to install him in the presidency by force.

Instead, he concentrated on producing a volume, soon to appear on the desks of all members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, reviewing the history of counting presidential votes (the clause in the Constitution says only, "The President of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and the House of Representatives, open all the certificates and