

factories, and then produced the barrels necessary to haul the oil.

Five years after the founding of their refining plant in 1865, the price of kerosene had dropped by 50 percent. Rockefeller's ceaseless pursuit of lower prices drove other refiners out of business, many of which he then acquired. By 1880, his company controlled 80 percent of the kerosene business. Contrary to the predictions of those with a simplistic view of markets, such as Means, Rockefeller could not then rest on his laurels and run a high-priced monopoly. Kerosene itself had competitors, including whale oil and electricity. Furthermore, there was always the possibility of new entrants to the kerosene market. So Rockefeller pushed on. By the time the company reached 90 percent of market share five years later, it had driven prices down another 69 percent, to 8 cents a gallon.

Although hardly helpful to Rockefeller's competitors, his business acumen was immensely beneficial to industry as a whole and to the American (and world) consumer. But does Means undermine his attack by mentioning the fact that Standard Oil made life much better for the consumer? Of course not.

On the other hand, Means seems to vindicate him only by reporting what, to Means at least, was a puzzling contradiction: Rockefeller's philanthropy. The implicit message is that making lots of money is bad, but at least it can then be given away.

Means does the same for Henry Ford, whom he badly maligns, by explaining that the Ford Foundation's "general support for a variety of liberal and social-welfare programs (causes Ford himself might well have loathed) would help buff the image of the automaker."

Are we to understand that an entrepreneur who created his great fortune by serving humanity well, through innovation and hard work, needed his image improved by having his fortune squandered by others, against his expressed wishes, on left-wing projects of dubious merit?

Anyone who would suggest such a thing lacks the insight necessary to explain the his-

tory of business. Others have performed the task far better, including Gerald Gundersen's excellent *The Wealth Creators* and Larry Schweikart's *The Entrepreneurial Adventure: A History of Business in the United States*.

Read those books and skip the disinformative *Wealth and Power*. □

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Absolute Power: The Legacy of Corruption in the Clinton-Reno Justice Department

by David Limbaugh

Regnery Publishing • 2001 • 385 pages • \$27.95

Reviewed by Arch T. Allen

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Lord Acton's famous admonition underlies both the title and subtitle of this account of how President Clinton's promised "most ethical administration" in American history came to include a politicized and corrupt Justice Department. Critical of Clinton and Janet Reno, his appointed attorney general to head the Justice Department, author and attorney David Limbaugh describes and documents their politicized corruption of the administration of justice.

The U.S. Constitution vests federal executive power in the president, who is under oath to execute the office faithfully and to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. Among the president's constitutional duties, he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed. Underlying those constitutional provisions is the political philosophy of protecting liberty through the rule of law. As Limbaugh notes, the rule of law is the core maxim "that we are a government of laws, not men." Accordingly, no man is above the law, and the law restrains the government itself. Nevertheless, what James

Madison called “the great difficulty” remains: “You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

Limbaugh “bookends” his case against Clinton-Reno abuse of the governed with accounts of the Waco disaster and the Elián González abduction. At Waco, agents of the Clinton-Reno Justice Department executed a military-style seizure of a sect’s compound under the pretense of serving search and arrest warrants, resulting in the deaths of scores of American citizens including children. In Elián’s case, other Clinton-Reno agents executed a pre-dawn commando-style raid of an American home under the pretense of a search warrant to abduct a legal-alien child at gunpoint, resulting in his return to communist Cuba. In both cases, Clinton and Reno piously proclaimed the primacy of the rule of law, but, as Limbaugh demonstrates, the law required neither the Waco seizure nor the Elián abduction; they were Clinton-Reno decisions.

Between those bookends, Limbaugh chronicles the Clinton-Reno failure to apply the rule of law to themselves and their government. He shows how political expediency led Reno to abandon an earlier legal position and undertake unprecedented litigation against an American business, how opportunism and cronyism led to a conspiracy against innocent government employees, how the politics of personal destruction led to the release of an employee’s personnel records in violation of privacy protections, how far-fetched privilege claims were asserted to delay investigations, how administration lawyers ignored or avoided some Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution, and how Clinton granted clemency to terrorists in an obvious effort to bolster his wife’s senate campaign.

In Limbaugh’s most devastating accounts, he explains the Clinton administration’s compromise of American security in soliciting Chinese political contributions to his reelection campaign and how Clinton and Vice President Al Gore illegally raised political contributions. And he shows how Reno enabled them to avoid enforcement of the

laws against them by preventing career Justice Department personnel from pursuing the matter under the pretense that it might become subject to an independent counsel—and then refusing to appoint an independent counsel. Limbaugh leaves no room to doubt that politics was often the deciding factor in Justice Department action or inaction.

The author exposes the Clinton-Reno “rule of law” as a pious pretense masking political opportunism and depending, to borrow Clinton’s infamous phrase, “on what the meaning of is is.” Americans who cherish their liberty under the rule of law should lament that more of us are not as concerned as David Limbaugh about the Clinton-Reno abuses. The politicization of the Justice Department is something much to be regretted, as it removes one of the obstacles to wrongdoing by the president and his administration. With the Justice Department in the hands of dutiful party men (or women), the executive branch is not “obliged to control itself.” Alas, Bill Clinton has now set a precedent in that regard.

Absolute Power is a polemic, however, and as the brother of Rush Limbaugh, the author is subject to familiar dismissal as just another “a Clinton hater.” That evasive tactic, however, should not dissuade people from reading this serious and well-researched book. □

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The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700–2000

by Niall Ferguson

Basic Books • 2001 • 425 pages • \$30.00

Reviewed by Martin Morse Wooster

Niall Ferguson, an Oxford University historian, is best known for *The Pity of War*, a book arguing that it was a mistake for Britain to enter World War I. But he is also a financial historian, whose most lengthy book is a two-volume history of the Rothschild banking dynasty. In his latest