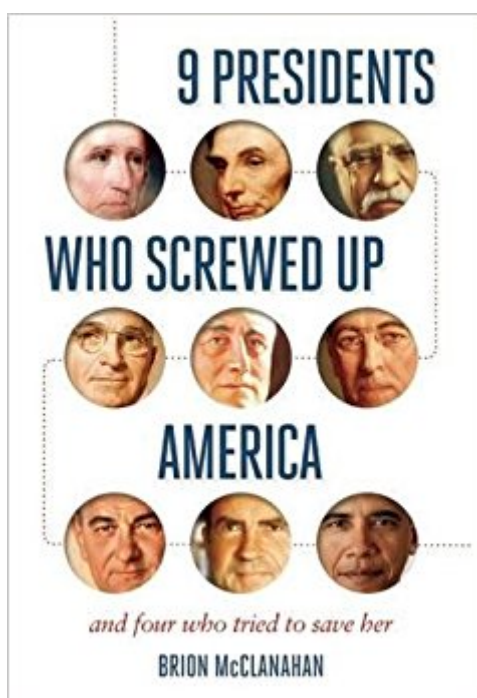


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# 9 Presidents Who Screwed Up America: And Four Who Tried To Save Her



## Synopsis

Of the forty-four presidents who have led the United States, nine made mistakes that permanently scarred the nation. Which nine? Brion McClanahan, author of *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Founding Fathers* and *The Founding Fathers' Guide to the Constitution*, will surprise readers with his list, which he supports with exhaustive and entertaining evidence. *9 Presidents Who Screwed Up America* is a new look back at American history that unabashedly places blame for our nation's current problems on the backs of nine very flawed men.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Every once in a while American historians will be polled regarding the men they consider the greatest presidents. Without fail, they choose those people most dedicated to the expansion of government. In this outstanding book, Brion McClanahan blasts these historians to smithereens, and reveals the true history of the dangerous men who are known as our great presidents.

It's about time someone did! Tom Woods, author of *Nullification: How to Resist Federal Tyranny in the 21st Century* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*; This book is both a fascinating read by a master historian and a necessary guide for any voter. Kevin R. C. Gutzman, author of *James Madison and the Making of America* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution*; Congratulations to Brion McClanahan. As a true American historian, he tells the truth about the rogues' gallery of US presidents, who have stolen our freedoms, and killed millions in the process. And what

great prose! Lewellyn H. Rockwell Jr., founding chairman of the Ludwig von Mises Institute "Mr. McClanahan has a hit on his hands, or should. He lays out a case, in plain English, how each of nine presidents screwed up our country. It is a fascinating and factual accounting of presidential usurpation of power...This book is entertaining and educational; a feat which is all too difficult to achieve. I must say, I am smarter for reading it." Brent Smith, The Daily Caller "Brion McClanahan presents a masterful and superbly-scholarly discussion of how nine presidents, beginning with George Washington himself, effectively destroyed constitutional government." Thomas DiLorenzo, LewRockwell.com

It Didn't Start with Barack Obama America is well on her way to becoming a banana republic. With presidents signing patently unconstitutional legislation, refusing to enforce laws they don't like, and even making appointments without the advice and consent of the Senate, it's clear that the federal Republic our Constitution established is hanging by a thread. And yet the chances that a president who has flouted our founding document and the very rule of law will be impeached are slim to none. Americans seem to have resigned ourselves to the exact form of government that the framers and ratifiers of our Constitution feared most: the tyranny of an elected monarch. The executive branch of the U.S. federal government has grown so far beyond the bounds set for it in our Constitution that Americans can no longer claim to govern ourselves. We only get the chance to pick the man who will spend four years legislating unilaterally with his pen, waging undeclared wars, and usurping still more powers that the people and the states never delegated to the federal government in the first place. But how did we get here? Step by unconstitutional step, as historian Brion McClanahan reveals in *Nine Presidents Who Screwed Up America* and *Four Who Tried to Save Her*. McClanahan's ranking of the presidents is surprising because he judges them on the only true standard: whether or not they kept their oath of office to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

A very interesting read.

When a presidential candidate gets on TV or in a debate and says "elect me and I'll lower taxes," "fix education" or "reform healthcare," most American voters overlook the fact that the office of President has no power delegated to it allowing the office holder to do any of these things. The President's role as "chief executive" is to

to execute the laws passed by the legislative branch (congress), and to defend the constitution by vetoing laws that congress passes which are not constitutional. But over time the perception has become that somehow the president is in fact the "King" whose will the congress must bow to, and from whose hands alone "change" can come. As a result of this, many on the right today think "Obama has destroyed the country" while those on the left believe "its all Bush's fault." There's truth and error within both positions, but looking at the subject contextually, the fact is that those two Presidents, and others, were able to wield power as a result of the "precedents" set by their predecessors- not as a result of the existence of any constitutional authority allowing them to do the things they've done. Said another way, contrary to popular belief, we did not just awaken one day and find ourselves in the mess we're in. Rather, the proverbial snowball has been accumulating speed, size and potential destructive capacity for several generations. If Americans could be provided the evidence needed to glean this reality, then, and only then, can real "change" be brought forward and applied to our system of governance. Brion McClanahan's book "9 Presidents Who Screwed Up America, and Four Who Tried to Save Her" will walk readers through the process by which the powers of the office of President have been expanded far beyond anything even opponents of the constitution could have imagined. Using "originalism" with regard to the intent of the framers and ratifiers of the constitution, McClanahan expertly shows not only that the presidency has become imperialistic over time, but he provides the pertinent documentary information from primary source materials to prove his assertions. Readers of this important tome will come not only to see that presidential actions are no longer held in check by the constitution, but they will learn important and relevant facts concerning why these "checks and balances" were put into place to begin with. The end result is a thorough understanding of how and why usurpation of non-delegated powers works to erode liberty. This book is not designed to libel or slander past Presidents. Rather, it offers a look at the office of President from a constitutional standpoint, and judges their actions, both good and bad, on that basis and from the viewpoint of a real expert on the subject. There are no punches pulled and no sacred cows. Just the facts delivered with erudite analysis. This will be another in my collection of books that I will refer back to over and again.

McClanahan opens with a thesis about the intent of the founders versus modern expectations. "These men argued that the president was not to be a king, nor would he have the power George III had in England. But the understanding of the executive branch among most Americans — including historians — has been distorted. We ask what we think the president should do in office, not what he is constitutionally permitted to do in office. The latter should be the measure of the man." "In the Constitution, the founding fathers generation left as a vehicle for preserving self-government. We ignore it at our peril." The terms of office of the 13 presidents addressed in the book cover the full history of the country: the founding, expansion through the early 18th century, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the progressive era, World War I, the Depression, World War II, Vietnam and the great Society, and now Obama. McClanahan discusses each of the presidents' undertakings in various spheres of action. In foreign policy and in war, did they follow the constitutional separation of powers whereby the Senate takes the lead? Did they allow the Senate to advise and consent? Did they allow the legislature to draft the legislation, or did they actively involve themselves in the legislative process? Did they execute the laws as passed by Congress, or did they selectively enforce them? Did they push themselves into the legislative and judicial spheres by setting up national boards that performed all three processes without supervision? His conclusion is that the nine presidents who screwed things up built on each other's precedents, increasingly ignoring the written limits on executive power in the Constitution. If there is one somewhat hopeful note, it is that it is not getting worse. The invasions of privacy in the Lincoln and Wilson administrations seem to be at least as destructive as those of Bush and Obama. Likewise, the suppression of freedom of the press during the wartime administrations of Lincoln, Wilson and Roosevelt was worse than what we are seeing today. Today's invasions are more threatening because they are backed by more dangerous technologies: electronic eavesdropping, drones, access to bank records and the like. The four presidents that got things right were Jefferson, Tyler, Cleveland and Coolidge. They stayed within the prescribed powers of the chief executive. McClanahan notes that history considers the latter three to be weak presidents because they did not "get things done." That is exactly the point, and perhaps the most difficult point for any government. One has to know when not to act. McClanahan confines himself quite narrowly to a discussion of the Constitution and the constitutionality of the activities of these 13 presidents. He could not do otherwise and hold the book to a readable length. His final chapter, what can we do, is a prescriptive list of constitutional amendments that might bring things back into balance. What he does not discuss, what he could not discuss within the scope of this book, are the limits of human nature. Humans have a bias toward action. The citizenry looks to the president, as the man in

charge, to fix problems whether or not they are within his job description. Since taking action usually involves assuming more power and commanding resources that can be parceled among one's friends, it is entirely natural for a chief executive to eagerly answer a call to action. This is the nature of leaders worldwide. The restraint that the Constitution calls for is unnatural. We should not be surprised that presidents do not answer the call. It takes a lot of drive and a big ego to seek the presidency. It is not surprising that two of the four presidents that McClanahan credits with trying to save the institution were modest men who came into the presidency when their predecessor died in office. Tyler and Coolidge had few further political ambitions and could afford to be honest. Coolidge resisted intense pressure to help predominantly black citizens victimized by the greatest Mississippi flood of all times. His heart may have gone out to them, and they may have been predominantly Republican voters, but it was not the federal government's job to do anything. He stood on principle. McClanahan writes "The founding generation considered self-control a key measure of character. Anyone with enough political clout can abuse power. Restraint requires more tenacity and backbone than rampant, damaging, and often narcissistic autocratic rule. Executive restraint is a republican virtue, passed down from the great example of the Roman Cincinnatus, the general who saved Rome from collapse but then gave up power willingly to return to his fields and resume his life as a farmer." The Progressives, dating back to Theodore Roosevelt, took an expansive view of the Presidency. They saw their job as not merely executing laws, but leading and improving the society. McClanahan notes that Franklin Roosevelt "believed that Americans in modern industrialized society had the need for new 'rights,' including the 'right' to a job, food, clothing, recreation, a home, medical care, education, and freedom from the 'fear' of unemployment, old age, sickness, and unfair competition." A president who believes it is his job to guarantee these "rights" to the citizenry must make himself a dictator to do so. Both Roosevelts, Wilson, Johnson, Nixon and Obama have pushed as hard as possible in that direction. The role of state governments is a major theme. Although the founders intended the United States to be a confederation of 13 states, Lincoln's interpretation when the Confederate states seceded was that it was a confederation of the people within the states — the states themselves had no standing. The union of the peoples that made up the United States was indissoluble. McClanahan favors the notion that smaller governments, closer to the people, will be more responsive to their needs than a large distant central government. Even when they are not, their mistakes will be limited. This was certainly the plan of the founders. The national government was to concern itself with matters like national defense and interstate commerce that were beyond the scope of the states. That which could be done by the states, such as education, roadbuilding and the like, was no business of the federal

government. Though the federal government has intruded itself into these spheres claiming it can do a better job, the fact is more that it simply has the muscle to push state and local governments aside, and it does so. The United States Constitution drew on English common law and the Enlightenment philosophers, especially Britons such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. The population of the United States in the 18th century was predominantly English, though with the admixture of Germans that Franklin found so upsetting. Blacks and Indians, though populous, generally did not have political rights. The Constitution was therefore a document adapted by and for a small, homogeneous population. What it did was to codify the common sense and experience of enlightened Englishmen, incorporating the insights of the great minds of the time. It was revolutionary primarily in that it was of one piece, contemporary, and written and agreed. English law has been a global success. Most national constitutions draw heavily on the American Constitution and its British roots. One observes, however, that as implemented they are more a reflection of their own populations than the English philosophers. Argentina, Haiti, Ukraine and many other countries' constitutions set forth high aspirations. However, in practice they represent the people, not the noble words. As the population of the United States has diversified away from the founding British and Northern European stock, the workings of constitutional law have changed as well. We have hugely diverse mixture of founding stock Europeans, Southern and Eastern Europeans, American Indians, Afro-Americans, Middle Easterners and Asians all trying to live comfortably under the blanket of a constitution designed by and for Britons. We should not be dismayed that it has been stretched out of shape.

Well written and referenced. I do find it odd that so many one star reviews mentioned the author omitted the Bush's when both are addressed in the book starting on pg 161. How can one have such a negative view/review of a book they obviously didn't read?

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