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Book Review - The Family Legacy of Henry Clay: In the Shadow of a Kentucky Patriarch

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Off the SHELF

The Family Legacy of Henry Clay: In the Shadow of a Kentucky Patriarch, by Lindsey Apple (The University Press of Kentucky, 2011: ISBN 978-0-8131-3410-9, \$40.00)

The Family Legacy of Henry Clay is a study on the Clay family beginning with the patriarch, Henry Clay. Apple begins the work by looking at Clay's beginnings and the growth of his business and political careers. After spending the first three chapters examining Henry Clay and his business and political legacies, Apple begins to discuss the topic at hand—Clay's familial legacy. Beginning with the second generation of Clays, those raised on Ashland in Lexington, Kentucky, Clay set standards for the education of his children and for their marriages. As the book moved through the generations the author focuses on two aspects of life for Henry Clay's legacy to his descendants: risk taking and service to the country and their communities. Through examining the traits Henry Clay passed on to his children and grandchildren, Apple explains that none of the family members could live up to the myth of Henry Clay that was established by the family after the Civil War.

The book was a fascinating, in depth look at a family dealing with their demons as well as those of their ancestors. There were wonderful

anecdotes about women becoming political leaders without the right to vote and men in uniform fighting for their country. There are also sad tales of men and women losing the battle with mental and physical illnesses. Apple provides an interesting take on The Lost Cause and how the Clay family used that to keep the family grounded and focused. While the Clay family's stories are interesting, the organization of the text requires a fair amount of repetition. Many of the chapters focused on the second and third generations of the family included the same stories to support different arguments. The Clay family was also very keen on using the names Henry and Lucretia for many of the children and grandchildren. While Apple did add a listing of the cast of characters and a Clay family tree, it was still hard to connect the person in the story with one of the four branches of the Clay family.

The Family Legacy of Henry Clay is more than just a history text. Some of the arguments made by Apple may also be of interest to psychologists and sociologists. Overall, the book was very enjoyable and an interesting study in family histories.

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