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Marshall, Jon. *Clash: Presidents and the Press in Times of Crisis*. Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2022, 424 pp., \$36.95 (hardback). Reviewed by Pam Parry, Southeast Missouri State University, pparry@semo.edu.

The president's relationship with the press is a lynchpin in American democracy, particularly when the nation faces a crisis. Author Jon Marshall places this dynamic under a microscope, examining how "political, economic, social, and technological pressures" have changed the executive branch, journalism, and the country they both serve (4).

Other presidents are discussed in the book, but Marshall focuses on ten of them: John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Readers might be tempted to pick apart his chapter choices, but this reviewer encourages them not to do so. His book spans more than 400 pages, and he could not possibly have included all forty-six presidents in such a thorough examination; it is safe to say that every president had some type of crisis, but the ones he selected had a transformational relationship with journalists. In other words, the presidency and the press were changed by the conflict they were embroiled in. Looking through the lens of these ten administrations and their relationship with journalists, "this book helps us understand how we arrived at our current state of affairs. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening journalism's role in keeping presidents accountable" (4).

In his introduction, Marshall outlines eight themes from examining this material. For example, he discovered that presidents have sought to shore up their dominance by attempting to diminish the press's influence. Also, some presidents have seized technological advances to usurp journalists. In recent years, dishonesty has caused the public to distrust both institutions, he observed as another emerging premise.

One of the book's strengths is Marshall's presidential selections and the corresponding crises, as they reveal the tectonic plates that underpin the U.S. system of government. For instance, Adams's antagonistic relationship with journalists of his day helps the reader realize that the vitriol of today's political environment is not really new. It has a long-standing tradition in American politics. In writing this book, it was essential to include the first and perhaps most serious attack on press freedom in Adams's Alien and Sedition Acts – which made it illegal to criticize the president. But other, more modern presidents also attempted to use the advent of radio, television, and social media to make journalists irrelevant to the American public. Sometimes it worked. Those presidents did not want the filter of the press and embraced technological means to circumvent them, like FDR's use of radio and Trump's use of Twitter.

Another strength is the trove of primary and secondary sources that Marshall consulted to develop his arguments. His bibliography spans twenty-five pages (371-395). Thanks to digital collections, such as America's Historical Newspapers, his primary sources date back nearly to the founding of the nation. His endnotes support his arguments, and they comprise almost one-fourth of the content or nearly ninety pages of the book (283-370). He makes fresh arguments about the state of American journalism and the White House, backing them up with substantial evidence.

Another reason to read this book is its objectivity. Despite his journalistic career and potential bias in favor of reporters, Marshall acknowledges their shortcomings as well as those of the chief executives. He proffers, at the end of the book, how his profession can improve itself. And that section alone is worth the

price of this book. Additionally, his interest in presidents, which began at age five when he shook Nixon's hand, indicates his respect for both the occupants of the Oval Office and their watchdogs (279).

Clash is significant because it adds to the already large historiography of the press and the presidency, spanning from the 1790s to the 2020s. The two chapters on President Trump pique interest because they explain how the country became so divided and how the recent pandemic made it worse. The first chapter delves into Trump's propensity to embrace "alternative facts" (217), while the second chapter discusses how Trump's media strategies impacted the pandemic. He is the only president who received two separate chapters, and they add value to this volume. They provide fascinating insights into recent history

that are still fresh in public memory.

Several people would be interested in this book – journalists, politicians, public relations practitioners, engaged citizens, news consumers, presidential historians, media historians, American historians, and academics, to name a few. In addition to historical analysis, this book provides practical solutions for how journalism can bolster its watchdog function. As such, *Clash* would be great for graduate courses in journalism, the presidency, and public relations. It provides insights into reporting skills, the executive branch, as well as how public relations interacts with these two institutions. It would be a terrific read for a graduate course on crisis management. This book is informative, intelligent, and inspiring, and it invites Americans to expect more from their press and their presidents during times of crisis.