H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jelte Olthof, Maarten Zwiers, eds. *Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President.* Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2020. x + 232 pp. $146.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-41444-0.

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Published on H-Biography (November, 2021)

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Chavez on Olthof and Zwiers, eds., 'Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President'

Even before the election of Donald Trump, concerns about his personality were widespread. A June 2016 cover story in ***The Atlantic*** was titled, "The Mind of Donald Trump: A Psychologist's Guide to an Extraordinary Personality—and Trump's Possible Presidency." The author concluded that "Trump's basic personality traits suggest a presidency that could be highly combustible."[1] Indeed. And as the introduction to this engaging edited volume makes clear, Trump's presidency demonstrates the need to study the role of the individual in politics (the precise focus is the individual in the White House), which the book seeks to do through a "biographical perspective" (p. 3).

In addition to the introduction, the volume contains eleven chapters. In the first chapter, Nigel Hamilton discusses the nature of biography and what a biographer hopes to achieve. It is an excellent exploration and defense of biography as a method of inquiry. Hamilton compares biographers to "cryptologist[s], for they are both seeking to crack a code" (p. 17). Biographers are not simply trying to add more details to the historical record and better understand presidential personality (though they often do). Instead, reconstructing a person's life can challenge long-accepted accounts and change the historiographical conversation. Additionally, the modern biographer's work presents the opportunity to reconsider "an individual's impact or agency on others, and upon the course of events" (p. 19).

Arthur Eaton provides an overview of the field of psychohistory, tracing its rise and fall as an area of research. The chapter discusses divisions within the field and the push by psychohistorians to demonstrate that they were doing serious history and situating their subjects in their historical context, not just applying psychoanalytic theories to historical figures.

David Zarefsky looks at Abraham Lincoln's antislavery policies. Staking out a middle ground between those who see Lincoln as a saint and those who see him as flawed and insufficiently bold, Zarefsky shows Lincoln's complexity. Examining his past and personality, Zarefsky argues that there were seven principles that constituted Lincoln's views on slavery: 1) he promoted the containment of slavery, not its abolition; 2) he did not know what do to in the short term; 3) he had faith that containing slavery would eventually lead to emancipation; 4) he believed there needed

to be explicit laws and enforcement to keep slavery out of new territories; 5) he looked to the past and connected his views on slavery to the nation's founders; 6) he did not blame southern slaveholders personally but instead saw the problem of slavery as structural; and 7) he believed in the importance of public opinion and was critical of those of opinion makers like Stephen Douglas who downplayed the threat of slavery. Once in the White House, these beliefs would influence his approach toward slavery.

Mark Leon de Vries explores Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, and deftly illustrates that who is in power matters. Though vilified today, "measured by his own ambitions, Johnson's presidency was hardly a failure" (p. 63). Johnson was able to shape Reconstruction as he saw fit, ensuring that Congressional Republicans' more ambitious agenda to remake the South failed. De Vries makes clear that even with a supportive president Radical Reconstruction might have failed, but "it was almost certainly a necessary" condition (p. 65). Thus, an unsupportive Johnson doomed Radical Reconstruction. De Vries does a superb job demonstrating how Johnson's background as a southerner influenced his beliefs. But more impressively, he shows how Johnson's personality and prejudice manifested itself in policy and influenced government action.

Sara Polak examines Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempts to control his image, during and after his presidency. More than his predecessors, she argues, Roosevelt sought to control his image, particularly visual depictions of himself. And it was this commitment to preserving his legacy, "be it through preservation, presentation, re-interpretation, or revision," that made him "a precursor and an architect of modern public history in administrative and infrastructural terms" (p. 95).

Dario Fazzi's chapter on Eleanor Roosevelt stands out, as it is the only one in the volume on a first lady. It does an excellent job succinctly sketching the details of her life and the experiences that shaped her social activism and liberal internationalism, leading to her efforts to globalize the New Deal. Fazzi notes that Eleanor "distinguished herself from her husband but at the same time complemented neatly his political image" (p. 101). Her independence allowed her to take stands, make statements, and engage with groups that Franklin Roosevelt often could not. Yet her actions were still intimately tied to his political agenda and its advancement.

Robert Mason looks at Dwight Eisenhower's popularity and political persona, and highlights Eisenhower's popularity and his ability to portray himself as nonpartisan. However, his success in being seen as above parties hindered his goal of remaking the Republican Party in his own image. Mason suggests that Eisenhower's moderate form of conservativism, rather than attracting Republicans, instead led the GOP further to the right, producing the strain of conservatism that would become dominant in the succeeding decades.

Keith Finley tackles Lyndon Johnson and his approach to Vietnam. The key to Johnson's behavior in office is in his roots in the Texas Hill Country and the influence of his parents. His father, a Texas legislator, imparted the need for idealism and pragmatism. His mother, Rebekah, was demanding and wanted her son to improve continually. If he did not meet her exacting standards, she would withhold her praise and affection. "As a result of this carrot and stick approach to parenting, the adult Lyndon Johnson craved adulation and refused to rest on his laurels once success was achieved" (p. 131). Once in the White House, both parents' influence was evident, as Johnson's pragmatism and idealism led his Great Society agenda and his search for ever greater success. But on the international stage, Johnson's background counted for little, and Vietnam destroyed him.

Kathryn Cramer Brownell's wonderful essay situates Richard Nixon within the larger cultural, social, and institutional environment he confronted. Examining how Nixon's personality intersec-

ted with these larger forces, Brownell focuses on the Office of Telecommunication Policy (OTP). Driven by his acrimonious relationship with the media, Nixon sought to use the OTP to increase competition and change the media landscape more to his liking. Brownell shows "how the personal motivations of a president can shape institutions and policies, as well as broader cultural attitudes and ideas of power" (p. 167).

Using the presidency of Jimmy Carter, Maarten Zwiers demonstrates the role regional identity can play in a presidency. Though Carter faced many challenges not of his own making, it was personality, both his own and those of his closest advisers, that led to his failures. The problems that arose, according to Zwiers, originated in Carter and his team's southern roots, which collided and failed to mesh with the political culture of the nation's capital.

In the final chapter, Jelte Olthof explores the challenges of knowing who the "real" Donald Trump is. The problem lies in Trump's lifelong penchant for exaggeration and self-promotion. And it was his ability as "the ultimate political performer" (p. 194) that led to the successful creation of a persona as a "blue-collared billionaire" that got him elected (p. 194). One of the problems, Olthof writes, is that such an elusive personality "complicates the job of the electorate to hold the president accountable" (p. 206).

In the introduction, Olthof and Zwiers note that all the chapters "emphasize the importance of individual agency in understanding the presidency and the working of U.S. political culture" (p. 8) and focus on how personality affects presidential politics. However, these facets are evident in some chapters more than others. And, since the chapters vary greatly in how they approach agency and the aspects of personality they focus on, a concluding chapter tying the contributions together would have been useful.

All the contributions are well crafted, but many of the topics are not new. Lincoln's views on slavery, Eisenhower's nonpartisan image, LBJ's approach to Vietnam, Carter's outsider status, and the enigma of Trump have all received extensive attention from scholars. Still, each essay is engaging, and the volume is a valuable reminder that individuals matter. When presidents come to power, they aren't blank slates. They have a past, and their experiences have shaped who they are and how they see the world. And it is this background, as this collection shows, that can have a major effect on the course of history.

Note

[1]. Dan P. McAdams, "The Mind of Donald Trump: A Psychologist's Guide to an Extraordinary Personality—and Trump's Possible Presidency," *The Atlantic,* June 2016, 81.

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Citation: Tizoc Chavez. Review of Olthof, Jelte; Zwiers, Maarten, eds. ***Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President.*** H-Biography, H-Net Reviews. November, 2021.

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