

*W. Miles Fletcher III is professor emeritus of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is author of The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan (1982) and The Japanese Business Community and National Trade Policy, 1920–1942 (1989). He has also published articles on the history of the Japanese cotton-spinning industry and on the “lost decade” of the 1990s.*

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The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age. *By Wendy Gamber.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. xi + 305 pp. Photographs, maps, figures, notes, index. Cloth, \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1-4214-2020-2.

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Reviewed by Tamara Plakins Thornton

Before 1868, the “notorious Mrs. Clem” was in most ways a typical resident of Indianapolis: a rural migrant, with roots in the upcountry South, poorly educated but a respectable, married Methodist of middling economic circumstances. That year, Nancy Clem was charged with the brutal murder of Jacob and Nancy Jane Young, a married couple from a similar background and members of her social circle. The legal drama that stretched over the next six years—two hung juries, two guilty verdicts followed by successful appeals, and a fifth trial canceled for lack of public funds—was complex, to say the least, but so too was the basis for Clem’s notoriety. As a woman accused of homicide, Clem confused her contemporaries. She was not a prostitute and she did not kill for love, and with those plot lines dismissed, Gilded Age Americans had exhausted the available story lines. What shocked sensibilities—not just in Indianapolis but also, courtesy of an aggressively eager press corps, across the nation—was the inexplicable horror of a respectable, even genteel, woman who murdered for money.

Widow Nancy Hartman Patton had married grocer Franklin Clem in 1859, having arranged for a prenuptial contract whereby she retained control over her money. Some nine years later, in connection with two other rural transplants—including Jacob Young—she embarked on what Wendy Gamber characterizes as an early Ponzi scheme. Promising enormous interest rates, and claiming (sometimes truthfully, sometimes by way of enticement) some of the city’s most prominent businessmen as their satisfied investors, the partners gulled many respectable, well-heeled people into turning over their money. Early clients might be paid using the money invested by later clients. Other investors might receive interest payments—but could never reclaim the principle.

Ultimately, the clandestine and fevered rounds of borrowing and lending could not be sustained. With all about to be revealed, it would seem, partner turned on partner, with fatal results.

Led through an exhaustive chronological account of Clem's many trials, Gamber's readers can get lost in a thicket of detail. This is not to say that the many chapters devoted to the proceedings do not provide fascinating glimpses into how the law worked: the Gilded Age version of "expert witnesses," a shoe dealer and a blacksmith testifying on matters of footprints and hoof prints; the professionally ambitious lawyers and their bravura closing arguments (including the eight-hour performance by future president Benjamin Harrison); the jail cell hurriedly wallpapered and carpeted to accommodate a "lady." But the ever-growing cast of characters, each relating further minutiae of events, sometimes overwhelms Gamber's analysis of the social environment and cultural context in which Clem conducted business. That analysis, though, is indeed revealing.

Gamber references some of the recent work on "paper" capitalism, but her primary interest is not in the cultural anxieties that confidence men (and women) provoked, or the power and perils of modern capitalism they represented. Instead, she skillfully depicts the changing social milieu in which they functioned. The confidence game Clem and her associates played did not fit the well-publicized stereotype in which gullible hayseeds prove easy marks in a city of strangers. Instead, their scheme involved obtaining money from people who knew and trusted them. In the 1860s, Gamber points out, it was still possible for the minimally literate wife of a common grocer to rub shoulders and strike business deals with socially prominent individuals—and to convince them that she had struck prior deals with other such bigwigs. The city's neighborhoods, including the street where the Clems lived, exhibited a considerable degree of class, regional, and ethnic diversity. By the mid-1870s, however, when Clem engaged in a second round of Ponzi scheming, class lines and residential borders had hardened, and now Clem could only draw in the likes of a female boardinghouse keeper and a credulous farmer. Their civil suits eventuated in a criminal charge of larceny and a guilty verdict that stuck—her sixth trial—followed by three and a half years under the harsh regimen of the nation's first all-female prison. Then in the late 1880s or early 1890s, Clem fell even further in the confidence game hierarchy, peddling female tonic-cum-abortifacient on the poor side of town. Parallel to this downward mobility was the shift in her public image. In 1868, the press portrayed Clem as solidly respectable, indeed ladylike, the setup for the paradox of the genteel murderess. A generation later, homicidal gentlemen and ladies had turned into recognized cultural types, but intervening social and cultural change meant

that Clem's rural-based respectability would no longer be mistaken for polished gentility.

Gamber is at her most illuminating in depicting the rival cultural outlooks that shaped the emplotment of Clem's participation in business affairs. Bourgeois Victorians subscribed to a separate-spheres ideology that glorified women's moral superiority while denying them economic productivity. Clem's involvement in business affairs of any sort thereby offered evidence of not just gender but also moral deviance. "If female self-reliance explained murder," Gamber continues, "it also threatened to become a crime itself" (p. 80). But there was another perspective, one still held by people like the Clems, plainer folk with rural, often southern backgrounds. They believed that a good wife deferred to her husband but also pulled her own weight economically. Nancy Clem, argued her lawyers, served her husband well by working hard to contribute to her family's economic well-being. The case "was about sex after all," reflects Gamber, "for both prosecution and defense defined marital fidelity in economic terms" (p. 87). Gamber correlates these alternatives with Reconstruction-era partisan politics, but she is more convincing when she acknowledges that legal teams and public opinion alike "lurched from one available cultural script to another" (p. 191). In the long run, she concludes, "modern" separate-spheres ideology eclipsed a rural, regional system of gender relations as part of the "remaking of the middle class in the late nineteenth century" (p. 191). In Gamber's hands, the shocking thus sheds light on the conventional.

*Tamara Plakins Thornton is professor of history at the State University of New York, Buffalo. She is the author most recently of Nathaniel Bowditch and the Power of Numbers: How a Nineteenth-Century Man of Business, Science, and the Sea Changed American Life (2016).*

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Inventing the Pinkertons; or, Spies, Sleuths, Mercenaries, and Thugs: Being a Story of the Nation's Most Famous (and Infamous) Detective Agency. *By S. Paul O'Hara.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. vi + 194 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-4214-2056-1.

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Reviewed by Stephen E. Towne

Historian S. Paul O'Hara examines the public image of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency (PNDA) in its heyday, from the Civil War, when founder Allan Pinkerton broke up an assassination plot against