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The presidential election of 1844 was one of the two or three most momentous elections in American history. Had Henry Clay won instead of James K. Polk, we'd be living in a very different country today. Polk's victory cemented the westward expansion that brought Texas, California, and Oregon into the union. It also took place amid religious turmoil that included anti-Mormon and anti-Catholic violence, and the "Great Disappointment," in which thousands of followers of an obscure preacher named William Miller believed Christ would return to earth in October 1844.

Author and journalist John Bicknell details even more compelling, interwoven events that occurred during this momentous year: the murder of Joseph Smith, the religious fermentation of the Second Great Awakening, John C. Frémont's exploration of the West, Charles Goodyear's patenting of vulcanized rubber, the near-death of President John Tyler in a freak naval explosion, and much more. All of these elements illustrate the competing visions of the American future—Democrats versus Whigs, Mormons versus Millerites, nativists versus Catholics, those who risked the venture westward versus those who stayed safely behind—and how Polk's election cemented the vision of a continental nation.

## **America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation Details**

Date : Published November 1st 2014 by Chicago Review Press (first published January 1st 2014)

ISBN : 9781613730102

Author : John Bicknell

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Politics, Religion



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## **From Reader Review America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation for online ebook**

### **Kel Munger says**

The big question in 1844 was the future of Texas, recently annexed following the defeat of Mexico. While John Bicknell's history of a watershed moment in U.S. history also elaborates on other issues—continuing westward migration, the rise of the Second Adventists with their expectation of the immediate return of Christ, the murder of Mormon founder Joseph Smith in a Missouri jail, the continuing political rise of Henry Clay—in America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed a Nation, he elaborates on how the Texas question inevitably led to the slavery question.

And, ultimately, the slavery question was indistinguishable from the moral question, which is why the religious revival of the early to mid-1800s was so crucial to everything that came after. How one stood on slavery was tied to which religious beliefs one ascribed to (it's why there were Southern Baptists and two Presbyterian churches in America, after all). But the visionary ideals of new religious movements, including Mormonism, with their ideas of destiny, certainly played into the rest of the 19th century. ...

(Full review on Lit/Rant: <http://litrant.tumblr.com/post/107688...>)

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### **Alannah Clarke says**

As someone who studied American history, I was taught about the importance of 1844 as a pivotal year. However, this book proves that it was much more important than we are led to believe. Author John Bicknell takes us through the year in themes ranging from westward expansion and its effect on slavery to the Philadelphia riots. Reading this book really brought out my interest in American history, what makes America the country it is today. Overall, the book is brilliantly written and I would recommend it to anyone interested in American history, like myself.

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### **Zeb Kantrowitz says**

The subtitle to the book says all of what the year 1844 was about: religious fervor, westward expansion and a presidential election. The year 1844 was in the middle of what became known as the 'Second Great Awakening'. This referred to a religious fervor that struck across the North East and especially the area of New York along the Erie Canal (which was called the "Burned Over District"). It was the time of the growth of two American based religions, the 'Saints' and the 'Millerites'.

The Saints were the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints led by their prophet Joseph Smith. Smith had led his people from New York to Indiana to Missouri and now to Nauvoo Illinois. The Saints had a habit of getting under the skin of their neighbors, and had been chased out of their last three homes. In 1844 they would suffer the death of their prophet and the beginning of their trek to the Great Salt Lake.

John Miller was a simple man with a simple ambition to 'Preach the word of the Second Coming of Christ'. He didn't advocate a 'new' church, just getting ready for the 'Advent' of the thousand year rule of Jesus. Twice in this time the Advent was pronounced as having to occur based on the lessons in the Bible. It didn't happen, but did lead to the establishment of Advent churches in America, the best known today as the 'Church of the Seventh-Day Adventists'.

Texas had declared and won their independence from Mexico in 1836. Now under the banner of Manifest Destiny, many Americans wanted to annex Texas and the Oregon Territory. Texas was still a sore point with the Mexicans and the western border of the country had never been satisfactorily settled. With the English offering financial help to the nascent Republic, there was fear that the British might try to turn it into a colony of the Empire.

Oregon Territory was currently co-ruled as a condominium with the British. But Americans were pouring into the Willamette Valley by way of the Oregon Trail. As the population grew, more and more of the settlers wanted to ensure that they would someday become a state. To accomplish this, the United States would have to force out the British, by treaty or by war.

Territorial expansion would be the major plank of politicians in the 1844 presidential election. New territories would exacerbate the problem of the question expansion of slavery. The result of the election would be the splintering of the Democrats (call the Democracy), to end of the Whigs and the birth of the Republican Party.

Zeb Kantrowitz [zworstblog.blogspot.com](http://zworstblog.blogspot.com)

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## Ryan says

Having read several other one year histories (1776 by McCullough & 1864 by Flood), I was very interested in reading this one for the purpose of getting a broader perspective on a year that is so momentous for Latter-day Saints. Bicknell definitely delivered. He may not be as good an author as McCullough (few people are), but he is a decent storyteller and gives the reader the essential points with accuracy and brevity, but enough detail to make things interesting and human.

I also got a much broader understanding of the background of the Civil War (including the role of the annexation of Texas) that was fascinating and increased my awareness and depth as a Civil War enthusiast. One of the most interesting parts of the book in this regard was the "Epilogue," in which Bicknell speculates (always dangerous, I know) about how the history of the United States may have been different with Clay instead of Polk in the White House at the beginning of 1845. However, one does have to wonder about such conclusions given Abraham Lincoln's observation that he was controlled by events much more than he controlled events. I don't think this means that man has no agency as much as it means that you never know what decisions you might make until you are actually in the situation.

As far as my perspective of Latter-day Saint history goes, this book was very valuable. I now have a much broader perspective of what happened to Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints in 1844 in light of 19th century violence (i.e. the Bible Riots in Philadelphia), millennialism (i.e. the Millerites), political partisanship (Whigs v. Democrats), immigration (i.e. naturists v. Irish and German populations), and expansionism (i.e. Texas, Oregon, California, Mexico, etc.). Too often we study Mormon history in a

vacuum that leads to incomplete, truncated, oversimplified, and/or erroneous conclusions about why things happened or what people's motivations were. The broader my own perspective becomes, the more understanding and tolerant I become of other people's perspectives and motivations and the more introspective I become about my own. This is certainly not to say that there is no right or wrong, but it does make it more likely that we will understand how complicated human beings are and how difficult are mortal circumstances can be.

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### **Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says**

My ARC courtesy of Chicago Review Press/Net Galley - much thanks!

Very good survey of what America was like in 1844 - electing a President, predicting the world was coming to an end, moving west to Oregon and California, and many other things.

For a further review: <http://susannag.booklikes.com/post/10...> .

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### **John Adams says**

Enlightening and entertaining, "America 1844" reveals aspects of both the political and social movements of a single year of U.S. history to illustrate the huge, long-term effects that one pivotal year had on the future of the nation. Events well-known and others previously obscure combine to paint a portrait of a moment in time that was both fascinating and momentous. Written in an engaging, readable style, the depth of Bicknell's research is genuinely impressive. A valuable book for history buffs and a delightful read for anyone who enjoys learning amusing and astonishing stories. A wonderful read.

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### **Casey Wheeler says**

I received a prerelease e-copy of this book through NetGalley (publication date October 14, 2014) with the expectation that I will post a review on their site and others (my blog, Goodreads, Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, Twitter, Amazon, etc.).

I requested this book as I have an interest in American History. This is the first book by John Bicknell that I have read.

I found this book well written and researched. In addition, it was an interesting read about a time period that is often overlooked. I have read other books about this time period, but the focus has always been on the events that occurred during James Polk's presidency and not the period immediately before he took office.

I particularly found the parts about John Tyler's attempts to gain a second term, Henry Clay's efforts to avoid losing votes and James Polk's tight rope walking to stay out of the fray very interesting. The author also wove in other events that contributed to the expansion of the United States such as the wagon trains to Oregon and California and the implementation of the telegraph.

The book also reinforced that politics is politics and that the manipulation to stay in power or gain power has

changed little over the course of time with the exception of the tools that are used.

I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the events leading up to the Mexican War and the expansion of the United States. I also recommend it to those who are interested in following the course of politics and political manipulation in our country.

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### **Nancy says**

1844 in America was more pivotal than we are taught in high school history. We learn about the presidential campaign with the annexation of Texas the major issue. Adding new states would shift the balance between slave and free states. Westward expansion before sure trails were forged left pioneers and explorers meeting hardships and often death. Millerites expected the end of the world, and the Mormon community was seeking freedom of religion. Meanwhile in Philadelphia riots broke out when Catholic Irish became victims of Nativists. A good exploration of a complex turning point in American history.

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### **Brian Andersen says**

A pretty great book for understanding an often overlooked and turbulent period in American history. Most people just skip from the Revolution to a chapter on the War of 1812 and then on to the Civil War without much thought to what happened in between. That leaves out 30+ decades of history. This book fills that gap and connects the dots very well.

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### **Nancy says**

#### **1844: A Turning Point in American History**

The presidential election of 1844 was a hard fought contest that solidified America as a nation stretching from coast to coast. The annexation of Texas was a major issue in the election. Henry Clay, the Whig nominee, worried that bringing Texas, a slave state, into the union would tip the balance of power and potentially lead to a breakup of the union. Polk, on the contrary, did not fear annexation and as president brought not only Texas, but Oregon and California into the union.

The presidential election was not the only momentous occurrence in 1844. It was a turbulent time for religion also. The Millerites believed the end of the world was upon them. The Mormons were facing persecution that resulted in the death of their leader Joseph Smith.

Families were heading west looking for better opportunities. This is also the story of wagon trains and John C. Fremont's exploration of vast tracts of the West.

If you enjoy history, this is an excellent book. It highlights an era that always seems to be glossed over in the history of America, but in fact it was an era that changed the character of America for all time. John Bicknell has done an excellent job of bringing the events of 1844 to life. I liked his presentation. Instead of concentrating on dry facts, he brought in some of the people in the era, like Fremont's wife, Jessica. The story of Fremont's campaign reads almost like fiction. Likewise the stories of the wagon train bring real

people into the story. They faced hardships and tragedy, but also had fun. Moses, a teenage boy going West with his family, enjoyed the adventures, particularly hunting.

I recommend this book. It shows that many of the controversies, like immigration, that trouble the nation today were also an issue in 1844. The picture of our past can help us understand who we are today.

I reviewed this book for Net Galley.

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### **Diane Moyle says**

I really enjoyed this book. It is non-fiction and it tells the story of the growing pains experienced by the young United States during 1844. It focuses specifically on this year which was very pivotal. From the debates involving the annexation of Texas to the persecution of the early day Mormon, Adventists and Irish, it is the good, the bad and the ugly of our history. Because of Polk's presidency, events were set into motion that led us up to the Civil War. Many settlers headed west for the free land and to set up a new life and encountered hardships and death.

The author did a wonderful job detailing this time period. I loved his style. Where possible, he delivered the historical facts in an effortless, story-telling fashion that kept me turning pages. He was very adept at tying all the facts together to insure that the book flowed and you were kept aware of what was happening on all fronts in chronological order.

Make no mistake, this is a history book. Although Mr. Bicknell is masterful at keeping it entertaining, at times it can be tedious. If you are fascinated with this time period and intent on getting an in depth look at the events that were intermingling and building to the powder keg that cracks the foundations of our country, you will definitely want to read this book!!!

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### **Philip says**

This is a superb way to get history. You focus on one year and do it in depth. And with that you get a huge understanding not only of that year but of the era. This book does not disappoint in that it covers all from the Westward Movement to the election of Polk, a vastly underrated President. And the religious movements of the time are also dealt with. A great read.

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### **Jessica says**

With several undergraduate classes on American history and American politics for my history minor, I wasn't expecting anything earth-shattering out of this book, but the title intrigued me. Let me just say, the book met and exceeded my expectations.

While most of the "big" information contained in this volume was familiar to me, the author did a fantastic job of laying everything out sequentially (as much as it is possible to do so when three or four things are

happening concurrently), using supporting primary documents to highlight important but minor details, and drawing parallels of which I was not previously aware. The interrelationship between political figures and the importance of cronyism cannot be ignored. Little did I know how far reaching was the influence of Andrew Jackson after he left office.

Political machinations, secret deals, control of newspapers, etc., from that time period make the current political mess seem like a transparent kosher system.

Overall, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in American history and American politics.

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### **Tom says**

It's fair to say that neither John Tyler nor James Polk rank very highly as memorable Presidents of the United States.

If he had lived slightly longer perhaps Tyler might at least have become infamous – he was elected to the Congress of the Confederate States of America but died soon after, sparing the USA the sting of seeing one of its ex-Presidents serving the secessionist South.

But as author John Bicknell makes clear in *America 1844* perhaps these two largely forgotten occupants of the White should be better known because momentous events were set in train during their terms – events that would have far-reaching consequences, not just for America but much of the world.

1844 was an election year in America, and Bicknell takes this as his jumping off point. President John Tyler harboured hopes of running for a second term; his opponents manoeuvred to replace him.

Tyler was unusual in not having a party solidly behind him – he had been elected as Vice President in 1840 on the same ticket as President William Henry Harrison of the Whig party. Tyler was the first Vice President to succeed to the Presidency when Harrison died in office, just 30 days after his inauguration on 4 March 1841.

As President (His Accidency as wits dubbed him), Tyler was expelled from the Whig party for vetoing a number of its proposals. Without a dedicated following he needed nothing short of a miracle to win re-election. To Tyler's mind, that miracle would be the annexation of Texas – bring that vast land of opportunity into the Union and he would sweep the election of 1844.

The story of that election bookends and scaffolds this volume's central narrative. Rather than focus entirely on politics, Bicknell skilfully weaves into this tale of electoral chicanery other fascinating aspects of a rapidly changing America that would transform and convulse the new nation in years to come.

Slavery and territorial expansion were closely tied to political wrangling, intimately linked to each other and both were inextricably bound up with the future shape of America. Should the US spread beyond its existing boundaries and settle the question of slavery as it did? Or should it consolidate its achievements for a time, given it was still a young and recent creation with many internal issues to resolve?

While Congress and state politicians ponderously discussed and debated, migrants voted with their feet. Thousands of settlers journeyed into the unknown, towards what they hoped would be better lives in the

West – despite not knowing much of what lay there.

Trying to change that in 1844 was John C Frémont, who had set off the previous year to explore the vast unknown areas of what today are parts of Idaho, Oregon, Utah, Nevada and California and map a reliable route westwards. His expedition included the famous ‘mountain man’ Kit Carson. Throughout much of 1844 Frémont’s wife Jessie waited anxiously for news that travelled at snail’s pace across the vast distances involved. Letters intended for the east arrived haphazardly and sporadically.

Samuel Morse’s new invention, the telegraph, was just undergoing its first practical trials in 1844 and would soon render Jessie Benton Frémont’s long agonising wait for news from her husband a thing of the past. Asa Whitney, a New York merchant had an even more radical plan to bind America together not with copper wire but iron rails – his day had not yet arrived but it was a harbinger of the railroads his advocacy and perseverance would eventually bring about.

Add in the social upheavals caused by violent riots against Catholic Irish immigrants in Philadelphia and a large group of religious Americans who were fervently convinced the end of world was nigh and 1844 truly was an eventful year in American history – with more long term importance than anyone could have known at the time.

John Bicknell writes about all of these themes with a telling eye for insightful personal stories and human interest angles that allow the reader to relate to the era. Equally many of the issues that transfixed America then have resonance today – a nation deeply divided, unsure about the impact of immigration, on the cusp of great technological promise while still beset by paralysing fears for and of the future.

A great tale well told and one that provides the reader with both enjoyment and food for thought.

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### **Marjorie says**

#### **Given To Me For An Honest Review**

This book shares insight of the election of 1844. Had Henry Clay won that election instead of James Polk our nation would be so much different today. After winning the 1844 election, Polk was able to enable the westward expansion bringing Texas, California and Oregon into the Union.

There was a lot of religious turmoil during this time. There was anti-Mormon and anti-Catholic violence and "The Great Disappointment". Polk's election brought into the country's vision of a continental nation. A very good book for those who enjoy learning history. I enjoyed reading it and learned more about our country. I recommend it to all.

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