

[Hartmann on Hamilton, 'Advocate: On History's Front Lines from Watergate to the Keating Five, Clinton Impeachment, and Benghazi'](#)

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James Hamilton. *Advocate: On History's Front Lines from Watergate to the Keating Five, Clinton Impeachment, and Benghazi.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2022. xiv + 250 pp. \$32.95

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Reviewed by Susan M. Hartmann (The Ohio State University) **Published on** H-FedHist (January, 2023) **Commissioned by** Caryn E. Neumann (Miami University of Ohio Regionals)

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James Hamilton's memoir takes readers into the work of a prominent Washington, DC, lawyer, shedding light on major political events ranging from Watergate to the Obama administration. Born in 1938, he grew up in the South Carolina, attended Davidson College in North Carolina, earned a law degree from Yale, served in the army in Germany at the height of the Cold War, received a master of laws degree from the London School of Economics, and began his Washington career at the prestigious law firm of Covington and Burlington.

Hamilton's first entry into Washington politics provides an inside view of congressional investigations, when he served as one of three assistant chief counsels to the Senate committee investigating the break-in at the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee in the lead-up to the 1972 election. In addition to describing how the committee discovered key evidence, including the revelation that White House conversations were taped, he illustrates the roles of key members of the committee, and—from the perspective of the current divisiveness of national politics—expresses awe at the bipartisanship practiced by the committee.

Hamilton describes other important congressional investigations to which he had a front-row seat. In 1990, he served as counsel to Dennis DeConcini, Democratic senator from Arizona, in the Senate Ethics Committee hearings into the so-called Keating Five, senators accused of performing favors for a major campaign contributor. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on US operations in Benghazi, Libya, in 2012, he was co-counsel to retired admiral Michael G. Mullen, under investigation by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee for his role in the government report on the attacks, which Republicans claimed was a whitewash. In both cases, he illuminates the role of counsel in preparing his clients for questioning, and in the latter emphasizes the partisan nature of the interrogation.

Charges of scandal in the Clinton administration kept Hamilton busy in the 1990s. In his role as vetter for White House appointments, he came to know Vincent Foster, an Arkansas associate of the Clintons who was named as deputy White House counsel shortly after Bill Clinton's inauguration. After Foster committed suicide in July 1993 amidst charges of unfair dismissals of White House

personnel, his death became a target of investigation by independent counsel Kenneth Starr. Hamilton's account demonstrates the construction of legal strategies in court proceedings as he argued two successful Supreme Court cases. The first, in which he faced off against Brett Kavanaugh, a member of Starr's team, preserved the client-attorney privilege of confidentiality regarding conversations he had had with Foster. The second, pitting Hamilton against freedom of information advocates, preserved the right to privacy for Foster's survivors by restricting the release of photographs of Foster's dead body. Hamilton also reflects on his decision to testify to the House Judiciary Committee considering Clinton's impeachment that the president's conduct with Monica Lewinsky, while reprehensible, did not warrant removal from office.

In addition to these major cases, and an extended discussion of the vetting of presidential appointments during the Clinton and Obama administrations, Hamilton recounts his defense of various national politicians as well as several baseball players accused of using steroids, his counsel to journalist Robert Novak in the Valerie Plame affair, his investigation into a disputed election in Palau, and a humorous exchange with then-Prince Charles of Great Britain on the ethics of foxhunting. Hamilton's wit along with his accessible prose will engage general readers, and his firsthand accounts of major events where law connected with politics will enlighten historians and legal scholars.

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