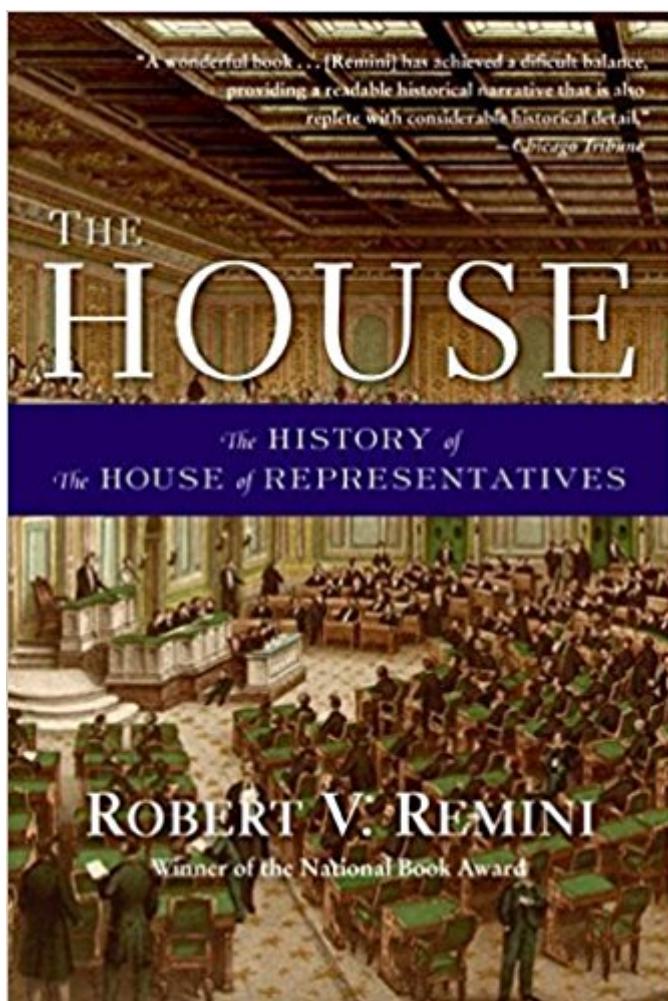


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# The House: The History Of The House Of Representatives



## Synopsis

Throughout America's history, the House has played a central role in shaping the nation's destiny. In this incomparable single-volume history, distinguished historian Robert V. Remini traces the institution from a struggling, nascent body to the venerable powerhouse it has become since America's rise on the world stage. The essential drama of democracy—the struggle between principle and pragmatism—is showcased throughout the book, and through it the history of America's successful experiment with democracy unfurls.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. National Book Award winner Remini (Andrew Jackson) offers the definitive history of "the People's House." Envisioned as the more democratic half of America's bicameral legislature, the House first convened on April 1, 1789. As Remini shows, in the early decades, Henry Clay's leadership was crucial—his willingness to go head-to-head with the Monroe administration helped establish the House's power and autonomy. During the Civil War, the House provided crucial support for the Union by passing legislation to print greenbacks and create a military draft. Remini treats the 16 black congressmen who served during Reconstruction in a few, general paragraphs; this particular era in the institution's history deserves more attention. Turning to the 20th century, Remini examines the House's response to the Great Depression, the Cold War, civil rights, Vietnam and Watergate. His concluding chapter addresses the "Conservative Revolution" of the 1980s and '90s. Here Newt Gingrich gets the spotlight: he was determined to give the House a more prominent

position in the legislative process, but also helped usher in "an era of incivility and personal attack and partisanship" that, says Remini, continues today. Written at the instruction of Congress,, this tome is highly readable though encyclopedic. B&w photos. (May 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

The unrivaled scholar of the Jacksonian era of American history, Remini is also a skillful popular historian, as evident in accessibly vibrant histories such as *The Battle of New Orleans* (1999). The latter spirit infuses this chronicle of the U.S. House of Representatives. It bears no trace of dreary institutional history but, rather, emphasizes the most prominent figures among the 10,000 people who have been its members. Another successful strategy Remini adopts is his manner of illustrating how the House operates. Rather than explain parliamentary procedure, he dramatizes it in episodes such as the debate over the Wilmot Proviso. In the aggregate, Remini's narratives make memorable how the pendulum of the House's powers has swung, both within its committees and the office of speaker, and in its external power struggle with the presidency and the Senate. Published under the aegis of the House itself, Remini's work is nonpartisan, civic-minded, and deserving of every library's consideration. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

I have to say, that given the scope of the subject, Robert Remini has done a very good job in detailing the history of the House of Representatives. However, even with all of the information that was in it, I had to fight through large sections of it. Every few years, the House rules were changed and Remini examines them in depth. Sometimes this is important in explaining the rise and fall of the prominence of the Speaker, but a lot of it could have been streamlined. Also, the House is made to look somewhat better than it probably is. Remini probably felt he had to burnish their image by only reluctantly going into a couple of the scandals that emerged from the House. Individual members might have been unpleasant, but the institution always is made to look good. Even the feud over the compromise of 1850 that almost shut the government down is made to look a more like a mild disagreement. Given the cast of characters (and many of these representatives truly are characters), I feel like the people that made up the House were frequently given a passing nod. Only a handful of representatives are profiled and most, no matter their impact on events, are ignored completely in comparison to the examination of conflicts over the rules.

This book is rather informative. I'm only a few chapters into it, but I would say that so far it is something that should be required reading in high schools across America. In reading this book, one not only learns about the House of Representatives in Congress, but about its interplay with the Senate and the Executive Branch. The hallmark of a good book is that it contextualizes issues for the reader. This book, so far, meets that standard.

A few months ago, I read *The Most Exclusive Club*, Lewis Gould's history of the modern U.S. Senate. When I saw that a book about the House of Representatives was coming out, I knew that it would be a good companion piece to Gould's book. Then I saw it was by Robert Remini, the fabulous biographer of Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster and knew that this book was a must-read. And though Remini has expanded beyond the Jacksonian era he has specialized in, he has still written a great book. Naturally enough, Remini starts at the beginning of the House in 1789. In the early going, the institution was trying to define itself and its role in the government. With travel to the capital so difficult (first in New York, then Philadelphia and finally Washington), it wasn't surprising that most Congressmen served only a couple terms. Although there were big names in the first Congresses (such as James Madison), few stood out for their actual work in the institution. That would come with the next generation in the early 1800s: Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John Calhoun would thrust the House into greater prominence. Clay in particular is something of a star, transforming the Speakership into a position of power. In the tug of war between Congress and the Presidency, first one side would have the advantage, then the other, but in the antebellum era, the legislative branch probably had the edge overall. Unfortunately, as regional differences grew greater, the level of debate got lower and sometimes even descended into violence. Nonetheless, Remini has even less good to say about the post-Civil War House, which was ineffective and filled with corruption. In the 20th century, probably the greatest single development was the rise of the perpetual politician; Congressmen (and eventually Congresswomen) began serving for decades instead of just a few sessions. As a result, seniority came to be a big issue, and the South (where representatives were rarely ousted) came to dominate committees and clog up legislation, particularly on civil rights. Eventually, some of this would be cleaned up, but new issues would rise as Congress entered the present era, as the members became constant campaigners and more media-savvy. Essentially, within 500 pages, we get a history of the United States from the perspective of the House of Representatives. In addition, in appendices, we get lists of all the Speakers and Congressional leaders as well as sergeants-at-arms and other positions as well as other miscellaneous information. Overall, Remini retains objectivity, even with more recent politics.

For example, while he is critical of Newt Gingrich for making reducing civility in the House, this is not a criticism of Gingrich's politics but rather his behavior. Remini has plenty of good and bad to say about both Republicans and Democrats. This is one reason that his book is better than Gould's decent but sometimes slanted book; another reason is that Remini is just a better writer. This is a great book by a great writer and highly recommended for those who enjoy reading American history.

Great, in depth and informative.

This text was actually a required one for one of my political science classes, but it was a very enjoyable and detailed history of the Congress that we all have all come to know and hate. Great book.

Great service. I contacted them with a question and they responded immediately. I had a special case and they tackled it promptly. I received my book ahead of time. Will go with them again. They truly are Great Guys with Books!

I gave this book a rating of three only because I have not had a chance to read it, but I know that Robert Remini is one of the finest historians in the United States. Just because I make a purchase from , it does not follow that I will immediately read a purchase cover to cover immediately. If I have to rate every single purchase I make with , I will simply stop purchasing. I don't like being pestered. This is the second purchase I have made recently and I have had to "rate" the purchase experience or the product (book). Don't be such a bother. Your company is doing just fine. It doesn't need constant from consumers, otherwise known as "human beings."

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