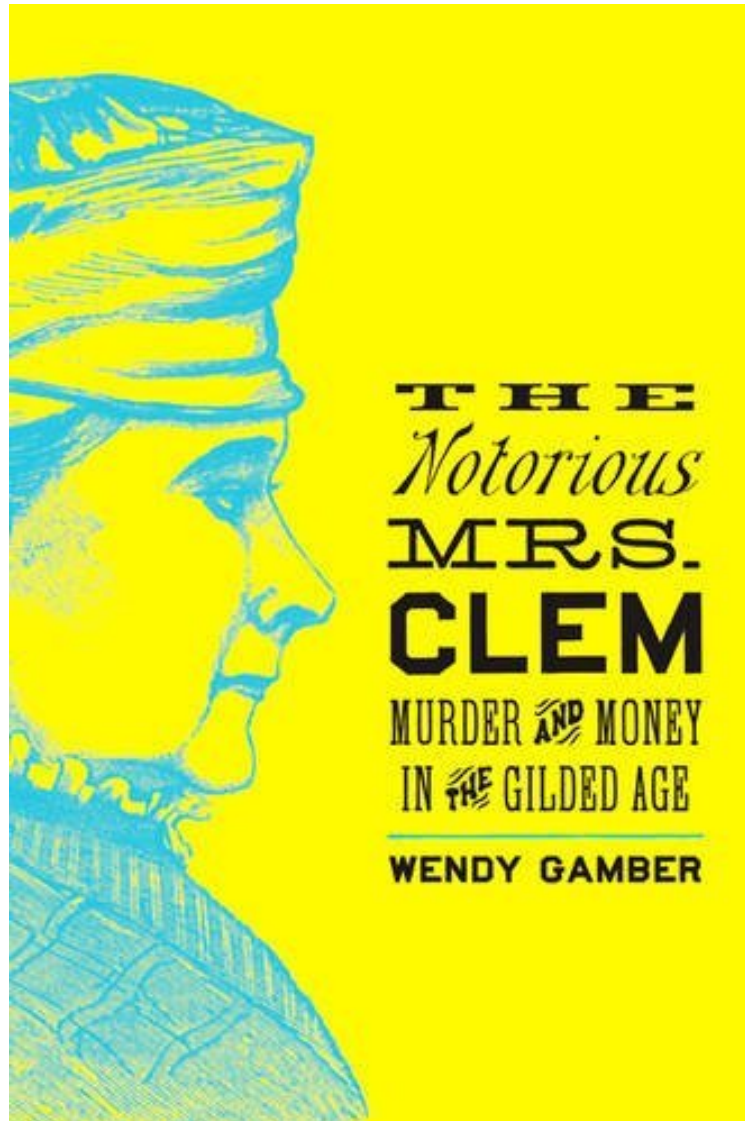


(Free) The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age

## The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age

Wendy Gamber

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**Wendy Gamber : The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book, Well researched presentedBy BAH NC, OhioA very good book! Well written, and fantastic number of details were presented as clearly as anyone could have done!2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Mrs ClemBy Ricardo R.Slow moving plot.7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. More for academics than general readers: a dry, academic account of a potentially

fascinating slice of history By JoJoleb Wendy Gamber *The Notorious Mrs. Clem: Murder and Money in the Gilded Age* opens up with a cold blooded murder. It is 1868 and the upper middle class Jacob and Nancy Young are found dead on the banks of Indianapolis White River. Jacobs face was blown off by a shotgun. More gruesome, Nancy--a small delicate woman--appears to have been shot with a pistol. The prosecution conjectured that when Nancy refused to die she was hit in the head with a blunt instrument. Although it was not clear from the outset why Nancys body was burned from the chest down. These facts alone would be an incredible set up for a historical murder mystery, but it actually gets better. Nancy Clem, a seemingly respectable woman, and two business associates are arrested for the crime. All the players seem to have colluded with Jacob Young in shady investment schemes that bilked their marks out of considerable sums of money. More intriguing for the late 1800s, the mastermind of the con--who seems to have invented the Ponzi scheme long before Charles Ponzi was born--was the notorious Mrs. Clem of the title. These are not spoilers--you find out all of the above from the preface to the book and the blurb on the books cover. And perhaps that is part of the problem with the book. The author has amassed a trove of well-researched facts about Clems trials (yes, trials) and tribulations. There is an incredible amount of background information, all potentially interesting, about the colorful personalities involved, sensational press coverage, 19th Century police investigation and forensic science, politics, court proceedings, and popular reaction to Clem. There is even a court performance by lawyer Benjamin Harrison who would go on to become our 23rd president. Even the setting--the nascent boom town of Indianapolis--should also have been captivating. But even though the core elements for a riveting, historical account are all there, nothing ever quite pops off the page. Gamber absolutely tries but doesnt succeed in making this murder mystery or the Gilded Age come alive. The book often stagnates rather than builds. Facts are laid out, without regard to pacing or plot, so the book reads more like a stale academic account than a historical novel. And thats a pity. Because in different hands you could see this book reworked, for example, into a historically accurate, blockbuster movie. As such, Gammers account has historic value and will have appeal to academics specifically interested in this time period. Thats okay, but it easily could have appealed to a wider audience of general readers had it been written in an equally factual but less cut and dry way. This is 5 star material in a 3 star package.

In September 1868, the remains of Jacob and Nancy Jane Young were found lying near the banks of Indianas White River. It was a gruesome scene. Part of Jacobs face had been blown off, apparently by the shotgun that lay a few feet away. Spiders and black beetles crawled over his wound. Smoke rose from his wifes smoldering body, which was so badly burned that her intestines were exposed, the flesh on her thighs gone, and the bones partially reduced to powder. Suspicion for both deaths turned to Nancy Clem, a housewife who was also one of Mr. Youngs former business partners. In *The Notorious Mrs. Clem*, Wendy Gamber chronicles the life and times of this charming and persuasive Gilded Age confidence woman, who became famous not only as an accused murderess but also as an itinerant peddler of patent medicine and the supposed originator of the Ponzi scheme. Clems story is a shocking tale of friendship and betrayal, crime and punishment, courtroom drama and partisan politicking, get-rich-quick schemes and shady business deals. It also raises fascinating questions about womens place in an evolving urban economy. As they argued over Clems guilt or innocence, lawyers, jurors, and ordinary citizens pondered competing ideas about gender, money, and marriage. Was Clem on trial because she allegedly murdered her business partner? Or was she on trial because she engaged in business? Along the way, Gamber introduces a host of equally compelling characters, from prosecuting attorney and future U.S. president Benjamin Harrison to folksy defense lawyer John Hanna, daring detective Peter Wilkins, pioneering "lady news writer" Laura Ream, and female-remedy manufacturer Michael Slavin. Based on extensive sources, including newspapers, trial documents, and local histories, this gripping account of a seemingly typical woman who achieved extraordinary notoriety will appeal to true crime lovers and historians alike.

"The murder of a business partner doesnt sound very sexy. But Gamber raises a provocative issue when she studies the eras disapproving attitude toward any woman who dared to benefit from the commercial opportunities of a postwar world especially if that commerce happened to be illegal." (New York Times Book Review) "An evocative, deeply-researched account of an infamous murder that takes the reader into the tangled gender politics of Gilded-Age America. Gamber has an eye for detail and a flair for narrative that makes this book both a gripping read and a perceptive analysis of late nineteenth-century social mores." (Stephen Mihm, coauthor of *Crisis Economics: A Crash Course in the Future of Finance* and author of *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States*.) "A fascinating, deeply researched, and analytically complex book, *The Notorious Mrs. Clem* is both well conceived and well written." (Alecia P. Long, author of *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*) "At its best, a great history book is a great mystery story and *The Notorious Mrs. Clem* is both. Double Murder! Mutilated corpses! Ponzi schemes! Snake oil! Womens rights! Covering the four murder trials of an inscrutable Indianapolis housewife whose only crime may have been that she was a shrewd and independent business woman, master historian Wendy Gamber lets the story speak for itself while deftly interweaving insights about the margins of American business, marriage, and womanhood during the Gilded Age. So tight and fast-paced that it can be read in a pleasant afternoon, *The Notorious Mrs. Clem* will leave you pondering the greatest mystery of them all: that

history is ultimately the record of what we just dont know." (Scott A. Sandage, author of *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*)

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**About the Author**Wendy Gamber is the Robert F. Byrnes Professor in History at Indiana University Bloomington. She is the author of *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* and *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930*.