In this year’s issue

3 The American Civil War ended in England

Next year it will be 150 years since the American Civil War started. England played a pivotal but often ignored role in the conflict, and Tom Sebrell explores the part played in particular by the cities of London and Liverpool, and outlines his plans to make the commemoration a focus for tourism.

9 President Barack Obama and the Contemporary Politics of Race in the United States

Lorraine Evans Orr writes about the impact of the election of America’s first African-American President on people’s perceptions of racial identity.

16 Public Memorials in American Life

By Mona Doreen Greenberg and Robert P. Watson

Americans have a great passion for their public memorials and this article examines what meaning and purpose they have in American life.

26 America’s Midlife Crisis

Gary R. Weaver and Adam Mendelson use the analogy of a person growing up from childhood to maturity to trace the evolution of America’s attitude to the outside world.

They conclude that, under Barack Obama, America has the opportunity to develop a true maturity in international politics.

Book Reviews

34 Literature

40 Culture

48 History

53 Religion

56 Biography

Visit us on the web at
http://www.americansc.org.uk/Online/index.htm

Photo credits
3-8 Tom Sebrell
9 US Embassy
17, 20 Ruth Graham
The American Civil War ended in England

By Thomas E. Sebrell II

Next year it will be 150 years since the American Civil war started. England played a pivotal but often ignored role in the conflict, and Tom Sebrell explores the part played in particular by the cities of London and Liverpool, and outlines his plans to make the commemoration a focus for tourism.

April 2011 will see the start of a four-year, 150th-anniversary observance of the American Civil War all across the United States, analysing its influences on numerous aspects of society, including politics, race, gender, the military, and, of course, how the historic event helped shape the country it is today. Such a commemoration ought not to surprise anyone – books on the American Civil War outsell all other subjects of history combined in the States. What will probably surprise most people, in both the United States and Great Britain, is that active steps are being taken in Liverpool and London to mark the event and analyse how it impacted their cities, and Britain as a whole. At the close of the war in 1865, however, very few on either side of the Atlantic would be surprised that future commemorations would involve British participation, as the war’s outcome was largely decided by Her Majesty’s Government’s decision not to intervene.

The impact of the war on Britain

I am an American, born and bred in Virginia, but have lived in England since 2004 when I started work towards my PhD on Union and Confederate propaganda movements in Britain at Queen Mary, University of London. The project required four years of research in 37 archives in 18 cities and towns, all but two of them in England. During the experience, I learned that the war’s impact on Britain was much greater than historiography to date has stated, but also noticed that previous historians who have tackled the subject only consulted a small number of archives, some not looking beyond the British Library, National Archives, and Library of Congress. A more in-depth understanding of the matter requires far more exploration. Emancipation societies in Britain grew during the American Civil War, and ended in England.
War, as did Anglo-Confederate groups springing up in numerous regions such as the Southern Independence Association and the Society for Promoting a Cessation of Hostilities in America. An extensive list of Parliamentarians partial to both sides also shows the impact of the conflict on Westminster, as well as their constituencies. Papers of these societies and influential individuals are scattered all over Britain, and are very significant towards our understanding of the subject.

Unfortunately, much of this saga has been forgotten in British History, but thankfully steps are being taken to correct this. In August 2009 I was called in for an informal meeting with two Liverpool City Councillors wishing to explore the idea of developing American Civil War tourism in their city. As an American, the idea was a no-brainer – Civil War tourism in the US is a very marketable business, with museums and battlefields significant to the subject regularly receiving thousands, if not over a million, tourists annually. Furthermore, with such a high percentage of Americans deeply interested in the subject who are constantly looking for more sites to visit, it is more than obvious that Liverpool would see a sharp increase in tourist numbers during the 2011-15 period. The following two days, I was interviewed by the city’s leading dailies, the Liverpool Daily Post and Liverpool Echo, and have written a slew of articles about the Sesquicentennial.

Liverpool’s role in the war

A few months later, I was contacted by the Lord Mayor’s office and during our subsequent meeting we outlined possible plans for Liverpool’s roles in the Sesquicentennial – a couple of guided walking tours in and near the city centre, a bus tour going into other areas such as Waterloo, Anfield, Wavertree, and Allerton. Indeed, there is no shortage of significant American Civil War sites in Liverpool. In Rumford Place, the Confederate ‘bankrollers’ and shipbuilders, Fraser, Trenholm & Co., were headquartered. Not having the means to construct a naval fleet in their own harbours owing to a severe lack of supplies, made worse because of the Union blockade, forced the South to look abroad to construct its navy.

This was more easily facilitated due to the fact that prior to the war, the Charleston, South Carolina-based company opened its Liverpool office to help facilitate the cotton trade. Once Southern secession commenced, however, the firm dramatically changed its operations to that of ‘blockade running’, taking British-made munitions and supplies to the Confederate armies. Fraser, Trenholm & Co. then began orchestrating the construction of some of the South’s most notorious naval ships, including the Alabama, Florida, and Shenandoah (the first two constructed in Birkenhead and Toxteth, respec-
tively), with South Carolinian Charles K. Prioleau providing the finances and Georgian James Dunwoody Bulloch overseeing the actual operations.

Not everyone in Rumford Place was a Confederate supporter, however. Next door was C. E. Dixon, a Northern sympathiser. Just around the corner in Tower Buildings, Water Street, was the US Consulate. The Consul, Thomas H. Dudley of New Jersey, was the leader of Lincoln’s largest espionage network operated throughout the entire war – keeping a close eye on the construction of Confederate navy vessels, and preventing it when possible. Upstairs in the same building was where the ‘Southern Club’, which consisted of British and Southern citizens, frequently met.

Perhaps the best surviving wartime Confederate interior architecture is in Abercromby Square at the former home of Fraser, Trenholm & Co.’s Charles Kuhn Prioleau. The Charlestonian, who had married Mary Elizabeth Wright of Allerton Hall shortly before war broke out in 1861, had Confederate and South Carolina symbols placed throughout his newly-constructed home – stars from the Bonnie Blue Flag, yellow jasmine, the palmetto tree (with a serpent wrapped at its base – a sign of defiance and war), crescent moons – in addition to ceiling paintings depicting Southern culture, and a circular ceiling image in the dining room of the Prioleaus surrounded by people yet to be identified. By nothing short of a miracle, busts of the couple are also still on display in the house affixed above archways. The building is of most important cultural significance and a gem of transatlantic history.

Also still-standing is the home of Liverpudlian-born George Thompson, the leader of the Emancipation Society, based in London and viciously pro-Union. Upland, US Consul Dudley’s home, also remains. Numerous Confederates decided not to return to the South after the war as they were uncertain of how they would be received by US authorities, and some prominent South-erners, including James Dunwoody Bulloch, are buried in Liverpool.

Most people are unaware of the fact that Liverpool’s most well-known historic sites are also significant to the American Civil War. St. George’s Hall is probably the grandest building in the city, yet hardly anyone is aware that Mary Elizabeth Prioleau, with the help of a large number of British and Southern women, hosted a five-day bazaar inside the Great Hall raising £17,000 to aid Confederate prisoners-of-war held in Northern camps. A majority of Civil War enthusiasts, including those in the United States, are unaware that the war actually ended in Liverpool on 6 November 1865 when the Confederate navy vessel Shenandoah surrendered to British authorities at what is now ‘The Pier’, seven months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to his Union counterpart, Ulysses S. Grant, at Appomattox, Virginia, which is usually referred to as the end of the war. Of course, 12 years after the war Grant stayed at Liverpool’s Adelphi Hotel whilst touring Britain!

It came as no surprise to me that the Lord Mayor, after I had taken him to several of these sites, realised the potential American Civil War tourism has for his city’s economy, as well as to further develop Liverpool’s image as a good destination for tourism.

The role of London

London’s tourism industry also sees the real potential the American Civil War has for luring even larger numbers of American visitors during the Sesquicentennial of 2011-15. In February, the London Development Agency contacted me to suggest I discuss the British capital’s Union and Confederate-related sites with Mary Rance of UKInbound, which represents and advises over 250 tourism operators in Britain. Shortly after we met in her office in the Strand and I told her of the unofficial three-hour ‘American Civil War Walking Tour’ I had pieced together a couple years ago for visitors from the States, and that the feedback was quite good – people are consistently in complete disbelief that so many crucial sites related to their Civil War are in London, and all have said it has altered their perception of the war as a whole. At tourism

The offices of Fraser, Trenholm & Co., Rumford Place, Liverpool. From this building, the construction of a large portion of the Confederacy’s navy and blockade running was orchestrated. Just around the corner at 22 Water Street was the US Consulate, keeping a close eye on Prioleau’s activities. In the same building as the US Consulate was the regular meeting place of the Liverpool Southern Club, of which the city’s Lord Mayor was a member.
leaders’ recommendation, I have broken up the three-hour tour into three individual ones in Piccadilly/Mayfair, Marylebone, and City; and have developed a fourth in Belsize Park.

Whilst Liverpool’s American Civil War sites tend to emphasise issues of naval construction, blockade running, and espionage, London’s focus is on the other half of the story – diplomacy, propaganda, and agenda-driven Anglo-Union and Confederate social organisations. As is the case in Liverpool, London’s sites have remained largely unaltered since 1865. While the Fleet Street offices of the pro-Union (and often anti-British) propaganda newspaper, *The London American*, unfortunately was a casualty of late-Victorian urban renewal, and the headquarters of the London Emancipation Society (also situated in Fleet Street) was sadly destroyed in the Blitz, along with the Bunhill Row shops where the Confederate government’s stationery and postage stamps were printed, the rest of the city’s American Civil War sites can be seen by today’s tourists as they appeared during the war. This list includes, but is not limited to, the headquarters of the exclusively-British aristocratic Southern Independence Association, both wartime US embassies used by ambassador Charles Francis Adams (son and grandson of former Presidents John Quincy Adams and John Adams), homes and offices of Confederate emissaries William Yancey and James Murray Mason (grandson of Founding Father George Mason, ‘Father of the Bill of Rights’), sites used for the Emancipation Society’s public speeches, the Confederate Commercial Agency, and much more.

Shortly after outlining the four tours, it was suggested I ‘test-run’ one of them, and shortly after I took a tourism leader on the Piccadilly/Mayfair stretch, and at the end of the hour he stated he was fully convinced that American Civil War tourism is more than marketable in London and that his company would organise and run the four walking tours regularly, with the aim of starting in Summer 2010.

Other developments continue to spring up. Shortly after my earlier meeting with UKInbound, they forwarded details of the Sesquicentennial project to numerous tourism operators, and several immediately came forward asking to be responsible for orchestrating the tour packages. Also, the Museum of London has informally agreed that during the war’s Sesquicentennial of 2011-15 they would create a one-room exhibit detailing how the American conflict affected the city. I have discussed with the Lord Mayor about Liverpool doing the same at either the Merseyside Maritime Museum or Museum of Liverpool. Naturally, the Maritime Museum at Albert Dock would be an ideal location con-

*Confederate Commercial Agency in Savile Row, London, and home of Henry Hotze (Confederate Commercial Agent to London and editor of the pro-South propaganda journal *The Index*). When Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin (the ONLY Jewish Secretary of State in American History) fled America after Richmond’s fall, he went straight to this Mayfair, London address. He soon served as a member of Lincoln’s Court.*
Considering the International Slave Trade Museum, a closely-related topic, is in the same building and would prove a popular and relevant destination for American tourists, especially as the United States still lacks a museum dedicated to the history of the ‘peculiar institution’.

The response in the States

What is the response to Liverpool’s and London’s initiatives in the States? One of pure excitement. For the ever-increasing number of Civil War enthusiasts seeking new territory to explore relating to the topic, England is seriously whetting their appetites. The Charleston Mercury has written two articles on the subject, the first making the front page. This was followed by the city’s other newspaper, the Post & Courier, also writing about the British involvement in the Sesquicentennial. During a visit to the States two months ago, I had a meeting in Richmond, Virginia, with Cheryl Jackson, the executive director of that state’s Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission, and Richard Lewis, Virginia’s public relations manager, who were both very vocal about how attractive Britain’s Sesquicentennial plans would be to swarms of American history enthusiasts, who will easily transform into tourists. Furthermore, they have agreed to promote the Liverpool and London tours on their website.

The next day I received an e-mail from Rob Wilkins, the director of audience development at the Weider History Group, a large publishing house based in the Washington, D.C. area. He had received a phone call from Cheryl Jackson shortly after my meeting with her, and now I was being summoned to another meeting. Joining us were the editors of Civil War Times and America’s Civil War, both very highly-subscribed-to magazines in the States. I was interrogated about Liverpool’s and London’s sites and what sorts of tours were in the works, and the unanimous decision was that they wished to promote it through regular advertising in their bi-monthly magazines. These historians and editors were stunned by the ‘new ground’ being broken in Civil War History, and realised that by not promoting it they might even be doing a disservice to the memory of the subject. Now they, too, were onboard, and the greatest form of advertising was secured.

Upon my return to London, meetings with tourism leaders continued. They were enthralled by the Weider History Group’s desire to become involved, and agreed with their recommendation (and Virginia’s, too) that the Liverpool and London projects join efforts in order to create one holiday package for American tourists to purchase, spending three days in each city visiting Civil War sites. The packages would, of course, also include bonuses such as hotels, theatre tickets, passes for The Beatles ‘Magical Mystery Tour’ – no American will want to go to Liverpool without seeing places significant to the Fab Four – and rail fare between Lime Street and Euston Stations. Combining the two Civil War initiatives into one package should sound logical to Liverpool as well – tourists will obviously prefer purchasing one single holiday package for the ‘American Civil War Experience in Britain’ rather than trying to make two separate ones coordinate with each other, which could possibly even result in fewer tourists coming from across the pond.

Of the tourism companies I have held discussions with, Discover Travel & Tours appeared to be best-positioned for the task, and so I have agreed to work with them on this project and to allow them to organise the tour packages and itineraries.

In spite of the promise of this project’s success, there is work left to be done before it comes to fruition. As with all initiatives, funds are required to ‘jump-start’ them. I am currently co-writing letters with the Lord Mayor of Liverpool in an attempt to procure funds from British and US-based businesses and historical societies. In London, Discover Travel & Tours and I are strategising how to procure funds for the early stages of the tours, and it is likely we will approach businesses for £10,000 with payback schemes.

The relevance to today

The great potential for the American Civil War Sesquicentennial of
2011-15 in Britain is more than obvious. Perhaps most importantly, it is significant in the sense that it sheds light on a too-often ignored and important aspect of the war’s history. Furthermore, the American Civil War played a huge role in shaping Victorian and Transatlantic histories, and in that sense was a very British affair. Also, Americans too often forget that a leading factor in winning the War of Independence in 1783 was that the colonists’ succeeded in gaining intervention by the French. When the American Civil War broke out in 1861, the Confederates realised they would have to procure at least recognition of their independence from the United States by Europe, and they understood that Britain was the country most likely to take such a bold step. This resulted in the South sending numerous agents to London and Liverpool, and for Lincoln to organise a movement to prevent them from attaining their goal. With Britain’s decision to not intervene into the conflict, it is right to say that the war was largely lost in London. The many traces left behind by both parties are, by good fortune, still available for scholars and enthusiasts to see today, therefore allowing an easy resurrection an entire dimension of a most important piece of history largely forgotten. This makes the American Civil War Sesquicentennial of 2011-15 in Britain the most exciting project pertaining to the subject in years.

This project will also prove valuable in addressing the greater issue of Anglo-American relations. During the 1860s the construction of Confederate warships on the Mersey nearly set off a war between the United States and Great Britain. The two world wars, of course, brought the two nations perhaps permanently close, but the recent tensions with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and what many perceive as President Barack Obama’s ‘British bashing’ show that the ‘special relationship’ is still capable of being strained. Events such as these make analysing Britain’s near entry into the American Civil War even more necessary.

Online articles
Charleston Mercury: [http://www.charlestonmercury.com/articles/2009/10/30/art_and_culture/doc4acd08a1a8b6f45697911.prt](http://www.charlestonmercury.com/articles/2009/10/30/art_and_culture/doc4acd08a1a8b6f45697911.prt)


Arklow House, the home of A. J. B. Beresford-Hope and the HQ of London’s branch of the Southern Independence Association. The exclusively-British aristocratic society counted 21 MPs as members, including future prime minister Lord Robert Cecil (later known as Lord Salisbury),
President Barack Obama and the Contemporary Politics of Race in the United States

By Lorraine Evans Orr
Liverpool John Moores University, American Studies

Abstract
The recent Presidential campaign and subsequent election of President Barack Obama captured the imagination of the world. Obama campaigned on a mantra of ‘change’, an impressively vague, yet no less powerful notion. There is nothing new about candidates who promise change to a weary and frustrated electorate, however the Obama campaign seemed to offer something different, something special and intangible. He provoked widespread excitement which can be attributed in part to the possibility that he offered of a black man being elected the President of the United States of America. Taking the premise that the 2008 Presidential election was in many ways largely about race as a starting point, the purpose of this essay is to explore the racial identity and politics of President Barack Obama. It will examine how he was perceived by his fellow African Americans and white voters, his personal identification as a black man, and finally how these elements combined to inform his political standpoint on the issue of race, focusing closely upon the contradictions and ambiguities which characterised and bolstered the Obama campaign. It is important to note at this point that the African American community cannot be referred to as a single body with a single consciousness. However, the generalisations that I will make are representative of documented African American opinions and can therefore, it is reasonable to assume, be attributed to a portion of other African Americans. Indeed, the issues to which I refer, such as that of black authenticity or the expectation that a black candidate will act as an advocate for so-called black issues, have received much academic and media scrutiny, evidencing the extent of their prominence.

The first part of my article will explore the perceptions of Obama from the standpoint of both black and white Americans. I will address the claim of some African Americans during the election campaign that Obama was ‘not black enough’ to warrant their support, and the tendency of some white Americans to insist upon making the distinction that Obama is ‘mixed race’ or ‘half-white’ in order to facilitate unproblematic identification, rather than unequivocally accepting him as a black candidate. These tendencies highlight the investment voters have placed in Obama, or what they expect from him, for example his so-called ability as a candidate to ‘transcend’ the racial divide. From here, I will explore Obama’s self-representation of his racial identity through his memoir, Dreams from my Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance (Obama, 2007), and how this is elaborated in his political manifesto, The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream. (Obama, 2008) Finally, I will examine Obama’s self-representation throughout his political career, particularly his centrist, inoffensive politics in relation to race.

Not black enough?
Throughout his political career President Barack Obama has often been perceived as being ‘not black enough’ to represent the African American community. In order to understand this point of view, it is first necessary to examine what is actually meant when someone is dismissed as being ‘not black enough.’ E. Patrick Johnson has highlighted the main, though by no means definitive, ways in which a black person can attract such a judgement. The first relates to skin tone – whether it is too light or not. The others are behavioural, relating to the way in which African Americans choose to conduct themselves, for example to speak in accordance with grammatically correct standards of English rather than in the vernacular is often deemed to be ‘talking white.’ To be dedicated to study and educational success is similarly thought of as ‘acting white.’ Johnson further argues that ‘individuals or groups appropriate [blackness] in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups.’ (Johnson, 2003, p.3) Neither talking nor acting white is desirable within this context and these criticisms are therefore a means of attacking the blackness of other African Americans. These attacks betray a certain sense of insecurity in relation to black identity.

In his memoir, Dreams From My Father, which was first published in 1995 before Obama became a...
politician, Obama recalls suggesting that a young black student ‘should change his name from Tim to Tom’ on the basis that he ‘was not a conscious brother... [he] wore argyle sweaters and pressed jeans and... planned to major in business’ (Obama, 2008, p.102). The older Obama acknowledges that his sneering ‘Uncle Tom’ insult stemmed from a need to conceal his own racial confusion and insecurity by deflecting attention towards someone else, in this case, Tim. Asserting that another is somehow not black enough is simultaneously an implicit assertion of one’s own blackness and sense of secure racial identity, whether it is really secure or not. Gary Younge has observed that the insult ‘Uncle Tom’ was appropriated by the black community ‘to represent the lackey, the moderate, the conciliator and the sell-out’ (2002), in order to influence notions of black authenticity. It is therefore probable that this same confusion and insecurity accounts for some of the criticism directed towards Obama. Furthermore, the inclusion of this particular incident highlights Obama’s own awareness of these racial politics, and possibly signals an anticipation of the same accusations in relation to himself.

Black authenticity

I would also argue that a further definition of black authenticity exists in relation to black politicians. The perception that a black politician displays a disinterest or a lack of advocacy with regard to so-called ‘black issues’ can also attract much of the same criticism. Throughout his political career Barack Obama has repeatedly had his blackness called into question, usually, as Gwen Ifill has observed, by rival black politicians, black journalists and from within the more general black community itself (2009, p.161). For many African Americans across a broad spectrum of society then, this is clearly an important issue, and blackness as an identity can, within this context, be further defined as synonymous with a group-centric outlook, and the as yet unrealised group struggle for real equality in the United States.

The most notorious instance of disapproval of Obama and his racial policies came from the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who, during an appearance on CNN, publicly (though unwittingly) accused Obama of ‘talking down to black people’ (Los Angeles Times, 2008) because of the conservative emphasis upon personal responsibility and family values at African American community rallies. Jackson, a civil rights activist and politician who had strenuously promoted ‘black’ issues, such as reparations for the descendants of slaves, during his own presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988, felt angered and betrayed by Obama’s emphasis upon ‘self-help’, a concept which pays credence to the notion that African Americans affected by poverty and the social problems which stem from it are somehow lazy or to be held personally responsible for their own condition.

Jackson additionally perceived inaction on the part of Obama in responding to the events in Jena, Louisiana, in which a group of six black teenagers were perceived to be treated disproportionately after five of the six were charged with attempted murder following a group assault against a white teenager. This development was viewed by many as confirmation that ‘the use of the prison system [is] a means of controlling young black men’ (The New York Times,
Jackson be-
guited here which suggests that
it unequivocally' (his campaign, because I support
hurt that this may have caused
of apology to repair the harm or
campaign to send my statement
Jackson issued the following
ments were broadcast.  Indeed,
tracted after his derisive com-
endorsement which was not re-
– Senator
- Barack
- where there's
- the United States of Amer-
ica... We are one people, all
of us pledging allegiance
to the stars and stripes, all
of us defending the United
States of America (USA
Today, 2004).  In drawing upon
the tenets of American Exception-
alism, Obama promotes a sense
of American unity from which he
is able to profit in terms of posi-
tive voter perception.
This sense of unity facilitated by
patriotism has been underscored
by Obama’s mixed racial heri-
tage. It is particularly interesting

How African Americans
view Obama
The matter is further complicated,
however, by the mixed responses
towards Obama from individual
African Americans. Jackson’s
CNN faux pas and his subsequent
climb-down illustrate another
significant point in relation to
black politics. In March 2007,
Jackson emerged as one of the
first to endorse the then-Senator
Obama in his presidential bid, an
endorsement which was not re-
tracted after his derisive com-
ments were broadcast. Indeed,
Jackson issued the following
statement after the incident: ‘I
immediately called the senator’s
campaign to send my statement
of apology to repair the harm or
hurt that this may have caused
his campaign, because I support
it unequivocally’ (Los Angeles
Times, 2008). There is an ambi-
guity here which suggests that
despite the fact that Jackson be-
lieves that Obama is not fulfilling
his obligations to the African
American electorate, he is willing
to publicly support him anyway.
That is not to say in any way that
Obama was the beneficiary of
Jackson’s endorsement solely
because he was black – Jackson
himself is a Democrat with a simi-
lar partisan ideology. Rather,
Jackson’s ambiguity is probably
indicative of the conflicting feel-
ings produced by the knowledge
that if Obama were to restrict
himself as a single-issue candi-
date, viewed as black rather than
American, or was seen to be an-
tagionising those with a conserva-
tive view of political intervention
into the problems of race, he

Obama, likening his political as-
cendancy to the ultimate realiza-
tion of the American Dream, ro-
mances the American public with
feel-good factor, self-
congratulatory inducements such
as, ‘In no other country on earth
is my story even possible’ (USA
Today, 2004). In drawing upon
the tenets of American Exception-
alism, Obama promotes a sense
of American unity from which he
is able to profit in terms of posi-
tive voter perception.
This sense of unity facilitated by
patriotism has been underscored
by Obama’s mixed racial heri-
tage. It is particularly interesting

‘Obama was not here to prove
he could lead or speak only to
black people. The goal here was
to romance the entire country.’

would, in all probability, have
cost himself votes and seriously
jeopardised his viability. As
Gwen Ifill has succinctly pointed
out, ‘Obama was not here to
prove he could lead or speak only
to black people. The goal here
was to romance the entire coun-
try’ (Ifill, 2009, p. 57).
Indeed, one of the major objec-
tives of the Obama campaign was
to convince the electorate that he
was American enough to be
President. To this end, Obama
repeatedly invoked the melting
pot analogy with regards to his
mixed racial heritage. The Key-
note Speech he delivered at the
Democratic Convention in 2004,
which catapulted him to national
fame, typifies Obama’s rhetoric:

There is not a Black Amer-
ica and a White America
and Latino America and
Asian America -- there’s
the United States of Amer-
ica... We are one people, all
of us pledging allegiance
to the stars and stripes, all
of us defending the United
States of America (USA
Today, 2004).

worse, Obama informs the reader

that, despite the fact that Obama
has made no secret of his strong
sense of self-identification as a
black man, a plurality of white
voters have emphasised the point
that he is ‘half-white’ or a ‘mixed
race’ politician rather than a black
one (guardian.co.uk, 2008). This
stands in stark contrast with the
assertion that race was not a fac-
tor in a decision to vote for
Obama. To assert that Obama is
either half-white or simply mixed
race seems to evidence a need on
the part of white voters to identify
with him as something other than
black, to ‘claim’ him for them-
selves in favour of casting a vote
for the racial ‘other.’ Indeed, this
is a tendency which Obama has
consciously embraced during the
presidential campaign in order to
garner maximum popularity. His
frequent emphasis upon the
‘values [he had learned] straight
from the Kansas heartland’ was
designed to remind voters of his
white familial connections.

How does Barack
Obama see himself?
In Dreams from My Father, how-
ever, Obama informs the reader

2007), an outraged reference to
the comparatively high numbers
of black offenders held in the
American prison system. In re-
response to Obama’s failure to par-
ticipate in the large civil rights
demonstrations which followed
the incident, Jackson allegedly
stated that Obama was ‘acting
like he’s white’ (The Huffington
Post, 2007).

Obama, however, did make press
releases in support of the black
teenagers, asserting in one that
‘Outrage over an injustice like the
Jena 6 isn’t a matter of black and
white. It’s a matter of right and
wrong’ (Fox News, 2007), a re-
strained and astute sentiment
guaranteed not to excite any con-
troversy and to avoid being
dragged into a debate in which
the issue of race would predomi-
nate. It would seem then, that
what Jackson actually wanted
from Obama was a more asser-
tive approach, akin to that of a
previous generation of black poli-
ticians and activists whose strug-
gle and rheroric were based upon
racial inequality. These examples
allow a clear insight into and pro-
vide evidence of what is expected
of Obama as a political represen-
tative of the black community.

How African Americans
view Obama
The matter is further complicated,
however, by the mixed responses
towards Obama from individual
African Americans. Jackson’s
CNN faux pas and his subsequent
climb-down illustrate another
significant point in relation to
black politics. In March 2007,
Jackson emerged as one of the
first to endorse the then-Senator
Obama in his presidential bid, an
endorsement which was not re-
tracted after his derisive com-
ments were broadcast. Indeed,
Jackson issued the following
statement after the incident: ‘I
immediately called the senator’s
campaign to send my statement
of apology to repair the harm or
hurt that this may have caused
his campaign, because I support
it unequivocally’ (Los Angeles
Times, 2008). There is an ambi-
guity here which suggests that
despite the fact that Jackson be-
that he had ‘ceased to advertise my mother’s race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites’ (Obama, 2008, p.xv). This admission reveals that white people made certain assumptions about him based upon the colour of his skin and were not willing to interact with him as an equal or an individual until they realised that he was ‘half-white’, an insinuation which is supported by his recollections of ‘the split-second adjustments they have to make’ (Obama, 2008, p.xv) when communicating with him. In an assertion of his blackness and equality, Obama simply began to keep the fact that his family was white to himself. This might seem inconsistent if it were not for the fact that Obama was speaking of himself as a young adult whose racial identity was precarious, a problem the adult Obama does not have to contend with, at least on a personal level. Obama’s inclusion of this information speaks to and encourages black voters to identify more closely with him.

In The Audacity of Hope, his political manifesto, Obama claims that I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views’ (Obama, 2007, p.11). This claim can, in light of this discussion of Obama’s rhetorical exploitation of his white heredity and measured, centrist approach to racial politics, be extended to race and the way in which white voters have appropriated him as their own. Self-identifying as a black man and having a broad, racially inclusive political agenda, do not, therefore, necessarily have to be mutually exclusive.

In a passage from the memoir which has caused particular controversy, Obama recalls an incident which happened in the United States Embassy in Jakarta as the moment of revelation which commenced his journey to find a secure black identity. Obama informs the reader that ‘I came across the picture in Life magazine of the black man who had tried to peel off his skin. I imagine other black children, then and now, undergoing similar moments of revelation.’ (Obama, 2008, p.51) In light of evidence produced by journalists whose intention was to discredit Obama that no such photograph has ever appeared in Life, this extract obviously cannot be taken literally. Rather, it must instead be read as metaphorical; symbolic of the realisation of the discrimination and suffering which so often accompanies black skin. It is a significant point that Obama, raised in Jakarta and Hawaii, areas which were less obviously affected by ideologies of white supremacy, should display such a deep personal awareness of the racial divide. This racial awareness evidences the extent to which the United States mainland exports its own peculiar racial divisions and issues. This is not to say that other parts of the world are unaffected by the legacy of colonialism or white supremacy independently, although it does emphasise the political nature of Obama’s racial awareness which was undoubtedly fuelled by an immersion in African American political texts which were provided to him by his mother, such as the Autobiography of Malcolm X. In such a scenario, Life magazine can be seen as symbolic of white American intrusion into and influence upon other cultures which would not necessarily have felt the racial divide quite so keenly without it. It is conceivable then, that Barack Obama is able to identify and feel racial solidarity with African Americans who could not ‘cross the boundaries of a particular neighbourhood… hav[e] hair like Barbie’ or who suffered ‘humiliation at the hands of an employer or cop’ (Obama, 2008, p.51), without ever having personally lived through such experiences. This in itself serves an important function in respect of Obama’s campaign, in that, whereas the allusions to Kansas are a reminder of the white family who originated there, this episode not only evidences the fact that Obama is able to identify closely with African Americans, it invites other African Americans to similarly identify with him.

Obama thus becomes an active participant in the American black community rather than a mere observing outsider.

Obama’s stance on race in the political manifesto The Audacity of Hope is, however, noticeably more restrained and tempered than Dreams from my Father. Published after he delivered the Democratic Convention Keynote Speech as a United States Senator in 2004, Obama was already a politician who was generating much excitement and high expectations. Many already tipped him to one day become President of the United States. Within this context it is clear that The Audacity of Hope was written with this aspiration in mind and in this sense it can be evaluated within the context of a protracted invisible primary in which Obama’s viability as a candidate for president was actively being tested.

Here, the policies which are proposed by Obama are fairly centrist, and he uses the book as a clever tool, firstly to set his agenda and secondly as a forum which allows him to smoothly diffuse potential political ammunition, such as the inclusion of his explanation as to why his website once labelled pro-life advocates as ‘right-wing ideologues who want to take away a woman’s right to choose’ (Obama, 2007, p.195). Obama is also able to use the book effectively to style himself as a common-sense thinker,

In his ‘Speech on Race’, Obama demonstrated why he was being hailed as a politician who could transcend race.
someone who is able to transcend frustrating partisan ideologies in order to do the best for America. In this sense, The Audacity of Hope was the first astute step of a political campaign which culminated in Obama’s election to the White House in 2008.

The centrist approach adopted by Obama also extends to the issue of race. Within the opening pages of the book’s section on race, Obama immediately clarifies his political standpoint. He reassures readers that he is not an ‘archetypal angry black man’ through his response to Hurricane Katrina. He asserts that the abysmal failure of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the wake of the storm was based upon ‘color-blind’ (Obama, 2007, p.229) inaptitude rather than racist antipathy, an assertion that FEMA was fundamentally ill-equipped to cope with a social and natural disaster on the scale of Katrina, regardless of whether it affected blacks or whites. In framing the issue in this way, Obama deftly avoids the controversy which was generated by Kanye West when he suggested that ‘George Bush doesn’t care about black people’ (The Washington Post, 2005), the rapper’s response to the lack of aid which was received by the predominantly black victims of Katrina. In doing so, Obama immediately asserts that the real issue is ‘inner-city poverty’ (Obama, 2007, p.229), thus ensuring that his rhetoric is inoffensively general rather than alienating and racial, choosing to focus upon class rather than race inequalities. This is an example of the racial political savvy pioneered by President Bill Clinton and adopted by Obama, based upon the fact that inner-city poverty is more or less synonymous with poor blacks, but with the caveat that one needn’t go so far as to draw attention to it. Obama thus assures white voters that, despite being a black candidate, he will not allow the colour of his skin to dictate an affinitive political stance. This is a prudent tactic, and necessary so as not to excite any resentment.

Transcending the racial divide

Nevertheless, throughout the presidential campaign, Obama has been heralded by blacks and whites alike as the candidate who could transcend the racial animosity which has so long been a burden to the United States. This sentiment can readily be likened to the concept of ‘colour-blindness’, in which it is advocated that all people, regardless of their race, should be treated equally and without prejudice as a solution to racial disparity, which would simply cease to exist under such circumstances. This ‘colour-blind’ point of view in relation to the Obama ascendancy has proved to be extremely popular and the assertion that the election of a black man to the White House is a signal that the last remaining racial hurdle has been cleared is obviously an attractive one for a United States scarred by the legacy of slavery.

This assertion is, however, idealistic at best and actually flies in the face of Obama’s own acknowledgment of ongoing racial issues in his celebrated ‘A More Perfect Union’ (The Huffington Post, 2008) speech, or the ‘Speech on Race’, as it has been dubbed, in Philadelphia, and also in other instances throughout the campaign. Although his election to office is indeed an indication of immense progress, of which Americans can be justifiably proud, it is nonetheless impossible to deny that racism and racial inequality remain very real issues of political and social importance in the United States. Either way, the statistics evidencing overwhelming disparities in income, access to adequate medical care, adequate schools, infant mortality rates, and countless other indicators of privilege and wealth between blacks and whites, alongside evidence of racial profiling in stores and law enforcement, is unavoidable. My emphasis upon race is not intended to downplay the other factors which undoubtedly contributed to Obama’s success, which included his superb oratory skills and an astutely managed campaign, instead it is an acknowledgement that race, however much it may be claimed otherwise by the proponents of Obama’s ‘transcendence’, also played an integral role.

This is particularly interesting, given the extent to which the opposing Republican and Democrat candidates attempted to avoid the subject at all costs. After the controversial Wright sermons entered the public forum, Senator John McCain, Obama’s opponent, was heavily criticised for his initial refusal to address race during his campaign (2008, Fox News.com). This seemed to make no sense to some conservatives, given the fact that McCain considered Obama’s links with the terrorist William Ayers fair game. Wright offered McCain the opportunity to attack Obama’s patriotism, always a popular and potentially effective target during an election. McCain’s unpopularity was defended by his Chief Advisor, Charlie Black, who asserted that ‘There’s a big difference between an unrepentant terrorist who blew up the Pentagon and the Capitol and somebody’s pastor, even if we might not agree with the views of the pastor’ (2008, Telegraph.co.uk). It is evident, however, that by taking up the issue of Wright, McCain would be opening up a racial can of worms rather than merely disagreeing with Wright’s opinions; any discussion of the Wright sermons would inevitably alienate some proportion of the electorate, something which candidates at election time are particularly unwilling to do.

Maintaining a centrist approach

Obama, however, was left with virtually no choice but to address the issue. In the ‘Speech on Race’, Obama cast Wright as an eccentric relic of a past time, the inevitable product of another generation’s injustices. Furthermore, in order not to alienate black voters, Obama compared Wright to his white grandmother, ‘a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on
the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe’ (2008, *The Huffington Post*). In this speech, Obama is also empathetic towards both black and white anger, affirming that both ‘sides’ have cause for complaint, whilst expertly directing the blame for these grievances towards a race-neutral and faceless ‘corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many’ (2008, *The Huffington Post*). This strategy won widespread acclaim for Obama. The truly magnificent aspect of this speech was the manner in which Obama effectively took a bitterly divisive issue and repackage it as a continuing struggle which binds black and white Americans together.

The campaign and subsequent election of President Barack Obama brought into sharp focus the discourse around race, all the more because of the insistence, on the part of Obama, as well as members of the press and public, that the election was not affected or characterised by the issue of race. Obama himself has faced accusations from the African American community that he is ‘not black enough’ to represent them, an assertion that his failure to concentrate upon or promote specifically black political issues or interests undermines his blackness and ability to stand as a visible black candidate. It can be reasoned that these accusations emerge as a result of insecurity on the part of African Americans who have not yet achieved a stable sense of their own racial identity, or who see themselves as marginalised by politicians who brush the very real and present inequalities to the side in order to further their careers by not antagonising or alienating white or conservative voters. In maintaining a race-neutral, centrist approach, Obama has negotiated precarious racial issues, such as the case of the Jena 6 or the disgraceful treatment of the pre-dominantly black victims of Hurricane Katrina, without sustaining significant damage to either his reputation or viability. He has framed the issues in a way that most Americans, whether black or white, can identify with, such as basic moral values or governmental incompetence.

Furthermore, in his ‘Speech on Race’, Obama demonstrated why he was being hailed as a politician who could transcend race. Not only is Obama biologically of mixed-race – a metaphorical symbol of the fusion of black and white America – he spoke of race in terms which were designed to be offensive to no-one, which accommodated all sides of the argument and channelled the residual sense of resentment on the part of both blacks and whites away from the racial ‘other’, directing it instead towards a more neutral and abstract object of blame – ‘the bureaucracy’. It is no surprise then, that Obama appeared to offer hope of redemption, despite not explicitly framing himself as such. That is not to say that Obama and his team did not actively manipulate perceptions in order to capitalise upon this sense of hope; in avoiding the issue of race, Obama actually encouraged discourse around it and, in doing so, also allowed the electorate to negotiate the related controversies without getting too deeply involved himself. Additionally, this strategy resulted in a certain ambiguity which the public resolved by imposing their own expectations upon Obama. The 2008 United States Presidential campaign highlighted not that race no longer played a factor in politics or success, but the extent to which Americans must still contend with the issue. Whether it be the explicit denial that the decision to vote for Obama – or not – was based either wholly or partially upon race, whether it be the assertion that Obama is ‘too black’, ‘not black enough’, ‘mixed-race’ or ‘half-white’, or whether it be an avoidance of the issue altogether (thus signalling that there is an issue to be avoided), the intricacies and contradictory claims which informed Obama’s campaign clearly demonstrate, despite emphatic denials and aspirations to the contrary, that race still matters greatly when it comes to politics, as in other areas of American life. The strength of the Obama campaign came in part from its willingness and ability to exploit this fact without ever appearing to have done so.

**Bibliography**


‘Former Republican Presidential Candidate Mike Huckabee on Rev. Wright; McCain’s Future V.P. Pick.’ Fox News.com [Internet], 28th April 2008. Available from: http://www.foxnews.com/
Public Memorials in American Life

By Mona Doreen Greenberg and Robert P. Watson

Abstract

What does America’s passion for public memorials tell us about the nation and its people, and what meaning and purpose do memorials have in American life? These and other questions have no simple answer, as there has been insufficient scholarly research into the nature and significance of public memorials. To help answer these questions, this study attempts to identify important physical, political, social, and cultural elements that appear to be common to memorials and to develop a conceptual model of the purpose and meaning of public memorials.

American Memorials

Simply stated, Americans love their memorials. Public memorials and monuments attract millions of visitors each year and, in town squares throughout the country, it is common to find memorials honoring fallen soldiers, the town’s founder, or a significant event in the community’s history. The National Mall in Washington, D.C., has become defined by the numerous memorials that line the broad pedestrian boulevard and, for a people thought to be ahistorical, Americans have enshrined sites such as the Lincoln Memorial, Mount Rushmore, and the Alamo as part of the national creed.

What do we know about public memorials in terms of what they tell us about the nation and its people? To answer this question, first it is necessary to attempt to understand the purpose and meaning of public memorials in America. While numerous studies have been conducted on individual memorials, and a few on specific elements of those memorials (architectural design, visitors, etc.), insufficient attention has been paid to the larger questions surrounding the meaning of memorials, commonalities among memorials, and their place in American society. There are, after all, many memorials with great variation among them. Memorials serve an apparent array of functions such as preserving history, remembering, the grieving process, educating visitors, and so on. In this paper, a conceptual model of public memorials is developed in an attempt to both better understand the purpose and meaning of memorials and assess their significance in American life.

Memorials in America date nearly to the founding of the nation. Throughout American history, memorials have been established in honor of great American political leaders and events. Indeed, most Americans are familiar with the Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Wall, and other tributes in the nation’s capital and numerous memorials throughout the country. America’s passion for public memorials seems to have begun in 1783 when Congress proposed the development of a memorial in recognition of George Washington. Although no memorial was funded or built as a result of the initial gesture, both interest in and support for such a project grew and culminated on July 4, 1848, with the laying of the cornerstone for the Washington Monument. The dedication of the completed work finally occurred in 1885.

Perhaps the first significant American memorial to be constructed was completed in 1825. It honored those lost during the defense of the city of Baltimore from British attack in September of 1814 during the War of 1812. Other early memorials began to appear on the American landscape also honoring battles and soldiers, including one in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Completed in 1843, it was dedicated to the American casualties of the Battle of Bunker Hill during the Revolutionary War.
and ordered military commanders to designate sites at the battlefields for burying those lost in battle. (1) Congress also began acquiring land for the development of national cemeteries in 1862 both in the vicinity of the actual battles and at sites such as Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

From that time onward, family members, veterans, the press, and the general public have expressed an interest in memorializing the dead, battlefields, and the causes of conflict. As one scholar has noted of such memorials, “as landscapes of memory they serve as a reminder that war memorials, and war memorializing, can take many forms, both sacred and secular, public and private, political and personal.” (2) The Civil War promoted the act of memorializing the dead and heroes by public monuments to the point where it has arguably become an American custom. (3) More than simply a memorial for the dead, however, this custom appears to serve numerous purposes in American society. For instance, President Abraham Lincoln viewed these monuments and battlefields as not only memorials for the dead but also reminders for the living and tributes for veterans of war. (4)

Gettysburg National Cemetery was probably the most impressive and widely regarded example of the new memorials. The standard was established when the State of Pennsylvania chartered the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association in 1864 and, by 1890, over 300 memorials and monuments to the deadly and decisive battle of July 1863 were established on and around the site. In the years after the Civil War, many communities and organizations across the nation began building memorials in town squares, at the site of battles, and at the birthplaces of heroes. Likewise, communities, states, and foundations established trusts and boards to begin formalizing the process of erecting memorials.

Another crucial moment in the history of public memorials in America was the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, more commonly known as the Vietnam Wall, in 1982. The project, like the war itself, was controversial and has become one of the most visited and one of the most popular and recognizable memorials in the country. As one study of the memorial concluded, “More than any U.S. war since the Civil War, Vietnam divided America and made us re-evaluate our society.” (5) The Vietnam Memorial represents a new kind of memorial and possibly a new role for memorials: To reflect on controversial and difficult historical events and possibly heal deep scars in American society. In this capacity, the Vietnam Wall has become an integral part of and physical centerpiece for America’s debate on that war.

Both the trend for establishing memorials to momentous and tragic events as well as the nation’s passion for memorials continues. In recent times, three of the most noteworthy memorials have been in honor of those lost not in conventional wars but to acts of terror. Thus, the memorials reflect the changing focus of American national security and identify: The Oklahoma City bombing, the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City, and the campus shootings at Virginia Tech. The act of erecting public tributes has clearly not been limited to the political realm and warfare. It appears to be a distinctly American notion that memorials have grown to cover the full range of triumph and tragedy in the American experience, including natural disasters, scientific discovery, heroic deeds, historic firsts, and the loss of life.

**Methodology**

Little research has been done on the purpose and meaning of public memorials in the United States. (6) Perhaps one of the reasons is the wide array of types of memorials and their diversity in terms of the size, cost, number of visitors, architectural design, and location around the country. Not surprisingly, one also discovers that there are numerous definitions used by scholars and the memorial foundations themselves for what constitutes a public memorial. For example, the American Battle Monuments Commission described their effort as “to honor those who died in service to our nation, not for the sake of nostalgia, but out of respect for their unselfish contribution to the heritage we enjoy.” (7) This mission has various practical results. The Galveston Hurricane Memorial is narrowly focused on preserving the memory of that
deadly disaster in 1900, while the Wounded Knee Memorial Museum endeavors to clearly tell the story of Native Americans, both through the battle and in a larger sense in American history.

It says something about the role of memorials in American life that most definitions of memorials recognize their role in honoring and remembering great individuals, events, and ideas. Therefore, memorials exist at the intersection of memory and history and bond us to our past. In this regard, one scholar states quite flatly about memorials that they are one of the ways we “conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest.” (8) They are also representations of historical places, ideals, and individuals that are valued by American culture, thereby both reflecting the culture and shaping it. (9) Definitions also imply that memorials exist for the public, and appear to be primary components of the American concept of public space. But such definitions of memorials might fail to capture the full measure of that being memorialized. Struggling to give meaning to the battle and cemetery at Gettysburg, Lincoln suggested as much: “But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract.” (10)

Studies of memorials differ greatly in their aims and methods, and there appears to be no single, best, or even agreed upon approach to the study of memorials. (11) Some scholars, for instance, have focused their energies on examining the reasons memorials are developed. (12) Others have attempted to seek an understanding of memorials by examining the artifacts visitors leave at the site. (13) The memorials themselves track the number of visitors to the site and memorial staffs often employ evaluations designed to measure visitor use and satisfaction.

What remains is the need to pull all these studies together and synthesize the findings in an attempt to understand the significance of memorials in American life and to develop a model to explain the purpose and meaning of public memorials. To accomplish these goals, a comprehensive review of the literature on memorials was undertaken in order to identify the primary elements – social, political, physical, and otherwise – of public memorials. Based on the analysis of the literature, it was possible to identify 10 elements – referred to herein as “constructs” – that appeared with some frequency in the scholarship on public memorials. In order to be included in our list of constructs, items had to be the subject of multiple studies in scholarly journals, scholarly books, or academic conference papers and deemed by the authors of the studies to be important to our understanding of memorials. The constructs identified in this list did not need to be included in every study, as some of the studies listed one construct while others listed several of the constructs; and some appeared with more frequency in the studies than others.

The term “construct” is borrowed from the sociological and anthropological concept of social construction, whereby meaning is created from context and uses. Constructs are concepts that assume meaning based on foundational characteristics and interpretations. For example, memorials function to construct memory insofar as the nature of memorials is to help us remember. They might also construct our notions and practice of grieving or, through historical interpretation, the memorials might construct the meaning of warfare or the sacrifice of the fallen. The 10 constructs identified from the literature base are listed in table 1.

In order to test whether the list of constructs identified is useful to our understanding of the purpose and meaning of memorials, hypotheses were developed for each construct. These are listed in table 2.

In order to test the hypotheses, in early 2008, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts and administrators at 16 public memorials around the country. Those interviewed included memorial directors, CEOs, superintendents, and deputy superintendents, as well as curators, historians, chiefs of interpretation, senior advisors to the museum, and chiefs of staff at the site. These interviews included long and detailed telephone calls, email and mailed correspondence, follow-up contacts, and questionnaires. The memorials selected for study included three of the most recent and high-profile memorials in the United States – Oklahoma City, September 11, and Virginia Tech – and one of the nation’s most famous memorials, the Vietnam Wall. These four were selected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-1</td>
<td>We the Living: Visitors to Memorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-2</td>
<td>Those Left Behind: Memory and Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-3</td>
<td>Public or Private Grieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-4</td>
<td>Education: Learning from the Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-5</td>
<td>Artifacts: A Physical Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-6</td>
<td>Personalization: Names at Memorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-7</td>
<td>Architecture and Design: Physical Elements of Memorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-8</td>
<td>Cost: What Price for Memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-9</td>
<td>Connectivity: A Sense of Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-10</td>
<td>Technology: A Virtual Past for a Virtual Community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because of their prominence and preeminence among public me-
memorials today. The remaining dozen memorials studied were
selected by us in order to reflect the broad array of American me-
morials, thus constituting a pur-
posive sample. Purposive sam-
ples (sometimes referred to as
judgment samples) are selected
subjectively in an attempt to ob-
tain a sample that appears to be
representative of the population.
The memorials selected in this
study were chosen from the
population of national memorials,
which includes 29 national me-
morials administered by the Na-
tional Park Service and 93 na-
tional monuments administered
or owned by the federal govern-
ment. In addition to the four
noteworthy memorials listed
above, the other dozen reflect the
broad diversity of the nation’s
memorials in terms of geography,
time, number of visitors, and
focus of the memorial. For exam-
ple, they cover the geographic expanse of the country from
Washington, D.C., to New York
City, to Hawaii. The list also in-
cludes most well known as well as
less well known memorials
such as the memorials to the Gal-
veston Hurricane, Fallen Firefig-
ters, and Wounded Knee. There
are memorials for one person
such as the Martin Luther King,
Jr. National Historic Site, a small
group, as in the memorial to the
Space Shuttle Challenger, and
large population, as is the case
for the National World War II Me-
Memorial. The memorials under
study span the period of time
from the 19th century (1836) to the
new millennium (2007), and in-
clude a wide array of types from
natural disasters to veterans to
war to space exploration to cul-
tural diversity to campus vio-
lence.
We concede that there are limita-
tions of this study owing to a
small “N” and non-probability
sample. However, social scien-
tists have used purposive sam-
ples with success, especially in
the case of exploratory studies
attempting to propose an initial
model or theory. (14) Such is the
present situation. The memorials
under study appear in table 3 and
are listed in chronological order.

Table 2. Construct Hypotheses

| C-1 | Visitors to memorials are important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-2 | Memory of the individual/event memorialized is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-3 | Grieving is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-4 | Education is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-5 | Artifacts left at memorials are important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-6 | Names placed at the memorial are important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-7 | Architectural design is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-8 | The cost of memorials is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-9 | Connectivity is important to our understanding of memorials |
| C-10 | Technology is important to our understanding of memorials |

Table 3. Memorials Studied

| M-1 | Alamo Memorial (189 killed fighting for Texas, 1836) |
| M-2 | Gettysburg Memorial (51,000 killed, 1863) |
| M-3 | Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (263 killed, 1876) |
| M-4 | Wounded Knee Memorial (175 killed, 1890) |
| M-5 | Galveston 1900 Hurricane Memorial (8,000 killed, 1900) |
| M-6 | USS Arizona Memorial (1,177 killed, 1941) |
| M-7 | National World War II Memorial (404,800 killed, 1941-1945) |
| M-8 | U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial/Iwo Jima Memorial (6,800 killed, 1941-1945) |
| M-9 | Korean War Veterans Memorial (36,940 killed, 1950-1953) |
| M-10 | Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site (1 assassinated, 1968) |
| M-11 | Vietnam Veterans Memorial (58, 195 killed, 1959-1973) |
| M-12 | National Fallen Firefighters Memorial (3,147 killed, 1981-2008) |
| M-13 | Space Shuttle Challenger Memorial (7 killed, 1986) |
| M-14 | Oklahoma City National Memorial (168 killed, 1995) |
| M-15 | National September 11 Memorial (2,974 killed, 2001) |
| M-16 | Virginia Tech Memorial (33 killed, 2007) |
Public Memorials and the Social Construction of American Life

Visitors

One potentially important construct is the visitors to a memorial in terms of who visits, why they visit, when they visit, and how many visit the site. Visitors help pay for memorials, leave comments and suggestions, participate in educational and interpretive programs, and, of course, take away meaning of the individual(s) and event memorialized. Roughly 1.8 million people each year visit Gettysburg Battlefield, the vast majority being white males. The Memorial is currently attempting to attract more minority and female visitors in order to more fully portray the significance of the site. (15)

Memory and Meaning

Another construct is the connection of memory and meaning. Memorials construct memory and meaning by helping to “ease dying through eternal monuments.” (16) Savage describes memorials as “forever a place for collective memory.” The notion of memory and meaning impacts visitation, as “finding meaning after a loved one has disappeared also requires continued participation in family and community rituals and celebrations, finding some spiritual or optimistic interpretations, learning to tolerate uncertainty, and participating in storytelling and reminiscing.” (17) Kavanagh suggests that “social remembering” – a collective recounting of the past – through the commemoration of events is important for healing. (18) Here again, memorials may help to construct our notion and practice of healing. In a way, memorials function much as the national holiday, Memorial Day, which became a day of national remembrance in 1868. Collective remembrance helps to further define or redefine both history and the event. For example, Middleton and Edwards point out that “when people remember things together, seeking to compare and contrast different accounts, to construct and defend plausible versions or to criticize or doubt their accuracy, they articulate the grounds and criteria for what is remembered.” (19) While the physical structure remains the same, the perceptions and meaning of memorials and the event or individual they honor may change.

Grieving

Because of the modern news media and advances in electronic communication, the tragedy and grief of the shootings on the campus of Virginia Tech in April of 2007 were brought almost instantaneously to much of the world. The spontaneous gathering of students, lighting of candles, writing of poems, and even the laying of a semi-circle of “Hokie stones” on campus both reflected and assisted the grieving process for students, staff, and loved ones. The array of vigils held on campus included both public and private examples of grieving, which appears to be another construct of memorials. Memorials, as noted by Winter and as suggested throughout this paper, not only commemorate but fulfill a part of the mourning and bereavement processes. (20) Likewise, a number of scholars view memorials as places for expressing grief. (21) The physical arrangements at memorials, the act of visitors leaving behind artifacts, the ability to touch objects and experience the intimacy of the site, and the listing of names of the lost at memorials are all parts of grieving, be it the private sadness of an individual or collective sadness of society over the futility of war. As such, memorials are constructed for the living in honor of loved ones lost. (22)

Education

Most memorials offer an array of educational programs and exhibits that “interpret” the function and meaning of the site for visitors. This includes guest speakers, guided tours, exhibits, and even Junior Ranger programs for children that offer badges, patches, certifications, and an array of activities. Most memorials also have museum-like elements such as interpretive signs, handouts and brochures, docents, and more. The National Park Service, who administers many of the country’s memorials and monuments, states that interpretative services available on site exist for both the visitor’s enjoyment and an understanding of the memorial. As such, education would appear to be a construct for understanding memorials and, in turn, helps to construct meaning for visitors.

Artifacts

Another construct identified in the literature is artifacts. Visitors to memorials often bring and leave behind artifacts such as flowers, photographs, stuffed toys, combat boots, military awards and unit patches, flags,
and personal notes. Many people find this to be therapeutic or helpful in remembering or connecting with the event or individual lost. Hass suggests that such letters and notes are ways the living have of “speaking to the dead and to the place of the dead in culture.” (23) Foss sees the objects left behind at memorials as reflections of our own lives, relationships, and views on death (24); and some suggest that the act is often spontaneous and appears to be on the increase at memorials. (25) National Park Service curators have catalogued more than one million artifacts – what is sometimes referred to as “offerings at the wall” – placed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and many memorials are recording and keeping artifacts deposited on site. (26)

Names

One apparently important construct of memorials is to list names, something which used to be common on local or town memorials but is now seen at some national memorials. (27) The Vietnam Wall was the first national memorial to include names of all those lost in the war, which was part of the original design criteria. Names are a part of such recent memorials as the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial, Oklahoma City National Memorial, the Space Shuttle Challenger Memorial, and the Virginia Tech Memorial. Winter writes that, “Touching war memorials, and in particular, touching the names of those who died, is an important part of the rituals of separation which surrounded them.” (28) Naming offers a sense of personalization to the memorial both for those lost and the surviving loved ones. It also interacts with other constructs identified in that naming assists with grieving, gives memory and meaning to the site, and transcends the limitations of place and time.

Styles

A variety of architectural styles and designs, from marble and bronze statues to headstones and tombs to walls and even chairs, have been incorporated in memorials. The use of water, mirrors, and other physical materials and surfaces have also helped memorials to become places of reflection. (29) Likewise, the design of memorials, which sometimes includes a space set aside for family members and mourners, serves to comfort the bereaved as well as to educate visitors. (30) The USS Arizona National Memorial rests beneath the waters of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii while the Galveston Hurricane Memorial overlooks the sea that brought the devastating storm. Both thus incorporate space into the architectural design in a way that inextricably ties the memorial to the event it memorializes. Perhaps the most famous and controversial architecture at a memorial is the design of the stark black wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which has been criticized for its “lack of people” but also ingeniously offers a reflective surface that allows visitors to both reflect on the roll call of the 58,000 dead but also on their own image staring back at them. (31)

Cost

Life and memory in American culture have no price, but there is a cost for memorializing the dead. Individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments support memorials. Sometimes all these groups share the costs, as in the case of the Oklahoma City National Memorial which received a $5 million appropriation from the federal government, matching funds from the State of Oklahoma, and roughly $17 million raised through private donations by the memorial’s trust. The costs, which some argue are important in understanding the nature of memorials, vary, especially over time. For instance, the National Mall in Washington, DC includes memorials with price tags as low as $3 million; whereas the World War II Memorial, dedicated in 2004, cost in excess of $182 million. Cost has become an issue in the development of the National September 11 Memorial at the former site of the World Trade Center because some estimates have put the project at $1 billion.

A sense of place

Another construct for memorials is a sense of place and connectivity to the hallowed ground at the memorial. Most memorials share the land where the event occurred or are built at a site of importance to the individual or event. So too do architects incorporate the landscape into the design in order to achieve a sense of place. For example, the Oklahoma City National Memorial uses the “Survivor Tree” to establish a sense of protection and places chairs at the site.
Technology

The final construct identified in the literature is technology. Many memorials include “cyber-shrines” or web pages that contain facts and information, photos, or “web ranger” programs that are interactive. Here, virtual visitors can learn about the people, animals, history, or nature of the memorial through games and activities. Virtual memorials allow visitors to experience the site anytime and from any location. (32) Websites often spring up spontaneously, such as after the collapse of the bonfire at Texas A&M University, which allow individuals to record their thoughts, extend condolences, or grieve from a remote location yet with some connectivity to the site. Visitors to or viewers of the memorials online are often invited to leave comments on their experiences.

Conceptual Model

Experts at and directors of 16 memorials were asked during comprehensive interviews and by written questionnaires whether or not the 10 constructs were important to an understanding of the purpose and meaning of their particular memorial. They were also asked to rank the constructs in order of importance. The results of the questionnaire are listed in table 4 with each of the 16 memorial director’s scores in the rows and the constructs in the columns. The scores at the bottom of the columns reflect the rankings of the memorial directors for each construct, with the lowest totals reflecting the most important constructs.

Based on these results, it is possible to accept or reject the 10 hypotheses (one for each construct hypothesized to be important to memorials). In addition to the total scores listed in table 4, the hypotheses were tested using measures of central tendency, as listed in table 5. The authors determined that hypotheses would be rejected if the total score is in excess of 80 (the score if 5 – half the total number of constructs – is multiplied by 16, which is the total number of memorials) and the arithmetic mean is higher than 5 (which is half of 10, which is the total number of constructs).

As evident in tables 4 and 5, it is possible to accept five of the hypotheses/constructs: Memory/meaning; Education; Sense of Place; Grieving; and Visitors. It was also possible to reject five hypotheses/constructs: Technology; Costs; Artifacts; Architecture/Design; Personalization. It was not possible to either accept or reject with any confidence the hypothesis/construct “Personalization,” as the results were near to the point used to accept them. This is also apparent in the scores for the median and mode for that hypothesis/construct. As such, it is recommended that “Personalization” be considered in future research in order to determine whether it plays a role in representing the purpose and meaning of public memorials.

In general, there is some consensus among the directors of memorials as to the purpose and meaning of memorials. There was some consistency in responses by memorial directors in that they agreed as to which of the constructs defined memorials and which certainly did not define memorials. This is apparent in the constructs with the lowest and highest scores.

The goal was to then develop a conceptual model of the functions and meaning of public memorials. The construct “Memory and Meaning” (C-2) had the lowest score (42) and the lowest mean (2.63), and therefore appears to be the most important construct in understanding memorials, followed by “Education” (C-4) with a total score of 62 and mean of 3.88, “Sense of Place” (C-9) with...
a similar total score of 66 and mean of 4.0, “Grieving” (C-3) with a total score of 72 and a mean of 4.50, and “Visitors” with a total score of 76 and mean of 4.75. As such, these five constructs – and possibly a sixth (“Personalization”) appear to best reflect the purpose and meaning of public memorials. Therefore, together they constitute our conceptual model of public memorials in America, a model which should help scholars better understand the purpose and meaning of memorials and how memorials reflect and influence the people and values of America.

The Meaning of American Memorials

In America, memorializing the past is quite different from the practice in much of the world, and especially in Europe. This tells us something about the American character. For instance, Americans memorialize history through the unique act of historical reconstruction, such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, Old Mystic Seaport in coastal Connecticut, and Tombstone in Arizona. Whether it is New Salem, Sleepy Hollow, or Jamestown, history is brought to life and visitors truly experience that history. In America, Civil War reenactors are commonplace, consumed with great enjoyment, and are a part of the process of memorializing history. As such, American memorials are less for remembering than they are for experiencing, and through the extensive array of educational and interpretive elements, they create a sense of place and give meaning to visitors. A visitor to the Roman Coliseum or the Athenian Acropolis, or

most memorials in Europe, is far less likely to experience interactive exhibits, interpreters and reenactors, and extensive signage. The act of memorializing in much of the world includes “do not touch” signs, whereas, in America, elements such as access and experience are defining traits of memorials. There has been a conscious and concerted effort to achieve a popular interpretation of American history. In this regard, there is a democratic nature to memorials and history in America.

The power of memorials as not just cultural reflections of American life but as interpreters of the American experience can be seen in the various education and interpretive programs at memorials. Mayo notes that war memorials do not simply remember the fighting and the lost but sometimes question the war, frame the cause of conflict, and promote peace. (33) Lowenthal suggests that memories serve not just “to preserve the past, but to adapt (them) so as to enrich and manipulate the present,” which reflects the power of memorials and the experiences of many people who visit them. (34) A good example is provided through Little Bighorn Battlefield where the preponderance of artifacts left behind by Native American visi-
tors helped to change both the focus and name of the site. Until the late 20th century the memorial was known as Custer National Cemetery, but it has increasingly become an important cultural site for Native Americans. The memorial now honors the fallen from both sides of the conflict and serves both the past and present.

To that end, public memorials seem to have a role in maintaining and promoting what Whitehead calls “the symbolic code” of society. (35) All societies have varying degrees of reverence for their national and cultural symbols and memorials provide not just a sense of place but important ways of celebrating and enshrining the symbols of a nation. Mosse maintains that memorials reflect an expression of national pride and help to strengthen national identity. (36) This appears to be especially true in the United States. As this study demonstrates, memorials offer memory and meaning for iconic individuals and events, provide and recreate a sense of place for the individuals and events Americans most cherish, educate the citi-

zens about their history and culture, and serve as a gathering place for Americans to grieve, interpret, and remember.

The former Librarian of Congress and noted historian, Daniel Boorstin observed that the European experience has often been to honor the crumbling monuments of ancient castles, forts, and palaces by restoration, but only in a way that would not “cover up the masters’ sure touch with the bungling brush strokes of latter-day amateurs.” (37) As such, ruins must be left un repaired in order to preserve their magnificence. Also, many monuments in older cultures were built from and on top of the old ruins of earlier civilizations. But, America’s monuments and memorials to the past are quite different, argues Boorstin, as Americans tend to “view the present as the climax of history.” (38) The greatness of America’s Founding and Founders, for example, is celebrated in large measure because it lives in Americans today. It is still alive. Many monuments around the world have invited destruction. Think of the cries of “Down with the Bastille!” or the defacement of statues at Notre Dame during the French Revolution. Likewise, the destruction of some of the monuments of the Roman Catholic Church was done by dutiful protestant reformers and, some Middle East cultures and religions have desecrated or destroyed the monuments of other cultures and religions. Ideologues have burned ideologies that came before them and we have observed that the erecting of icons prepares the country for iconoclasts of the future. But, in America the monuments and relics of the past have been removed or replaced not to deny them or oppose them, but to fulfill their promise or to improve upon them. Americans preserve history as the living current of American society today. So, in America, unlike in much of the world, memorials give meaning to our present.

Public memorials exist as representations of American culture and values. They capture Americans history and function to preserve and shape national identity or what might be deemed the American creed.

Notes


10. Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address; see www.alpm.org/education/The_Gettysburg_Address-2008/11/19.


America's Midlife Crisis

by Gary R. Weaver and Adam Mendelson

On his Inauguration day last year, Barack Obama’s approval rating hovered between the mid-sixties and low seventies. According to Gallup, just before the Inauguration, over 3 in 4 Americans approved of him, an exceptional statistic in an exceedingly partisan era. His sweep to power and cresting popularity drove observers to seek comparisons. Would he be a new Eisenhower, whose approval ratings averaged 65% over his eight years in the office? The next Kennedy, whose approval peaked at 83% and never dropped below 56%? Observers rushed to pronounce judgment on what Obama’s presidency would be like before it even began.

Over a year later, many new comparisons and judgments are now being bandied about as the administration fends off economic, political, and foreign policy crises. Is Obama Reagan in ’82? Clinton in ’94? Or, depending on your political viewpoint, is he the next Jimmy Carter – whose approval ratings slowly, consistently trickled down from a post-Inaugural 75% to a consistent place in the 30s and 40s? Or perhaps Harry Truman (a comparison that George W. Bush liked to make with his own presidency) – whose popularity oscillated wildly, dipping to a low of 22%, before ultimately being vindicated by historians?

In the waning days of the Bush administration, observers tried to determine and quantify his presidency. In April 2008, the History News Network released an informal survey of 109 professional historians, asking whether the Bush presidency was a success or a failure. All but two — just 1.2% — called it a failure. Nearly two-thirds called it the worst presidency ever. Clearly, much of Obama’s early popularity was fueled by the fact that he was simply not George W. Bush.

With such a consensus (informal as it may be) among the historians who will quite literally write the books on how we remember the Bush presidency, is it even possible that the administration will be characterized as anything but the darkest of days? Similarly, how can we gain perspective on the Obama presidency when we are constantly deluged with commentators purporting to give the final, definitive judgment on the meaning and trajectory of his still young administration?

Once history makes its judgment on a president, it is exceedingly hard to challenge or even add nuance to it. Americans love black and white. We grew up on cowboy movies in which the hero wears a white hat, the villain wears a black hat, and the general store doesn’t stock gray hats, because there is no in between. In practice, we often echo the mantra of John Wayne, who said, “If everything isn’t black and white, I say ‘Why the hell not?’”

Many historians tell us that James Buchanan was one of the worst presidents, if not the worst. Numerous surveys and polls over the years have placed Buchanan in the presidential cellar, where he is typically kept ignominious company by the likes of Warren Harding, Franklin Pierce, and Andrew Johnson.

Maligned during his day, before he died Buchanan gruffly argued that “history will vindicate my memory from every unjust aspersion.” Yet, the opposite has been the case: the book on Buchanan was written quickly and, it seems, irrevocably. Buchanan remains a president held in such low esteem that one would think that in addition to fiddling as the embers of the Civil War grew into flames, he kicked puppies and pushed old ladies, among countless other base outrages.
Yet the real picture is slightly cloudier. While Buchanan certainly did not do all he could to save the Union and prevent the Civil War, many events were beyond his control and were true Gordian Knots waiting in vain for a solution that never came; the country was evolving in ways that perhaps could not be controlled by one person. Moreover, his administration was not all doom and gloom and should be seen in more shades than just black and white. The first transatlantic cable was completed. Oil was found in Pennsylvania. The legendary Pony Express began. And...well, 400 gallons of oysters were eaten at his inaugural ball, which one assumes must have been some sort of record.

Buchanan’s successor, Abraham Lincoln, is often found at the other end of the spectrum: he is the frequent top dog of polls and surveys assessing who the best president was, and in case we forget, Mount Rushmore and the Lincoln Memorial are always there to remind us of his greatness. His “official” historical representation is nearly pure white with no black or shades of gray.

However, this popular perception also oversimplifies the controversies that plagued his presidency. The suspension of habeas corpus set a dangerous precedent for the compromising of civil liberties during times of war. Draft riots, sometimes envenomed by racial hatred, painted a bloody background to the conduct of the Civil War in the North. And, the dreaded income tax was first implemented in America during his presidency.

Part of these two presidents’ successes and failures were dependent on their actions, personality, and initiative (or lack thereof). Yet many of their actions and levels of accomplishment also were due to the times in which they were in office. We can never know how one president would fare during another’s term. How would Teddy Roosevelt have done during the Cold War? What would have happened if Woodrow Wilson was at the helm during Reconstruction? While Lincoln’s superior skills may have enabled him to excel during many periods other than his own (and the inverse may be true for Buchanan), we should never discount the importance of when a president was in office to their success or failure.

**The Growth of American National Identity**

The development and character of the country at the time of his presidency, and its standing in the world, are essential to judging a president’s skill. Neither nations nor people develop in a vacuum; rather, we judge them both by their pasts and by their peers. When we’re six, we’re expected to be able to tie our shoelaces; our peers can do so. Soon after, we should be able to join the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and learn to tie even more intricate knots. Not only is it what many of our peers are doing, but our past behavior has shown that we’re capable knotmakers. Eventually, we tackle more and more complex things — going to school, searching for a steady job, getting married, having and raising children — based not only on the accumulation of our skills and experience, but in order to do things “appropriate” to our age. We develop our unique character, and judge and rate ourselves based on our past accomplishments and our standing relative to our age and peers.

Countries evolve in much the same way. National economies start relatively simple and become increasingly complex and mature. Political systems are conceived of, tested, and reformed. As a country ages, it develops a collective historical experience and national identity as well as a national image of itself in the global system of nation-states.

The national identity of a people grows and develops as a result of unique shared historical experiences and natural resources. While there are individual, ethnic, racial, and regional differences, most Americans share common national values and beliefs which are continually reinforced in schools and the mass media. Just as individuals mature, over time the American national identity has changed, and there are stages of growth and crises we have gone through that have altered our worldview and national image. It’s important to understand where we came from in order to best assess where we are as a country today and to appropriately judge our leaders’ actions. As the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has written, “History is to the nation as memory is to the individual. As persons deprived of memory become disoriented and lost, not knowing where they are going, so a nation denied a conception of the past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future.”

---

**About the authors**

Dr. Gary Weaver is founder and Executive Director of the Intercultural Management Institute (IMI) and for four decades a professor in the School of International Service at American University.

Adam Mendelson is former Managing Editor of The Middle East Journal and serves on the Editorial Review Board of Intercultural Management Quarterly (IMQ).

They are the co-authors of America’s Midlife Crisis: The Future of a Troubled Superpower (Intercultural Press, 2008).
Childhood: Innocence, Utopianism, and Insulation from the World

When we take a bird’s eye, whirlwind tour of the development of the nation, what do we see? Until the late 19th century, American national identity was analogous to the state of an over-protected child with a worldview of naive utopianism. Immigrants came to the country chasing the American Dream of economic success and personal freedom. The country was seen as a land in which anything was possible, where a “city upon a hill” could be achieved that would be a “beacon to all humanity,” in the words of John Winthrop. Buffeted by two massive oceans from the intrigues of the Old World, and with no local rivals for power, the country grew in power, optimism, and self-confidence. While far from wholly abstaining from the international community, the country followed the advice of George Washington’s Farewell Address, in which he cautioned that “The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to domestic nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation...Therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.”

This prolonged childhood and its contemporaneous idealism was perpetuated by the nation’s incredible economic success and its isolation and insulation from the rest of the world. The continual economic growth and political stability of this very young nation was considered as evidence that somehow the United States was an exceptional country with exceptional people — a prodigal son among the family of nations. Just as children go through the emotional turmoil and ambivalence of adolescence, with its conflicting bouts of overconfidence and fear as they socialize with others outside the warm protection and love of their family, in much the same way the United States eventually, haltingly entered onto the world stage, oscillating between periods of total involvement followed by a relative withdrawal.

With the Spanish-American War the United States left its relatively peaceful isolation and insulation from the turmoil of the rest of the world. The mood of the country was for expansion and for the display of its palpably felt domestic power on the international stage. “A new consciousness seems to have come upon us — the consciousness of strength — and with it a new appetite,” wrote a Washington Post editorial in the late 1890s. "The taste of Empire,” it continued, “is in the mouth of the people as the taste of blood in the jungle.”

Adolescence: Idealism, Rejection, and Cynicism

The period from the beginning of the Spanish-American War until the end of World War II can be regarded as the adolescence of the United States. Adolescents leave the warmth and security of the family to enter both friendly and unfriendly relationships with outsiders. This involvement is often very emotionally intense, highly idealistic with unrealistic and naive expectations, and usually very awkward. Sometimes it leads to acceptance, but it often ends up with rejection. At that moment, many adolescents vow to never get involved again, and become mired in apathy or withdrawal. For example, unrequited love can lead to withdrawal and from relationships are often characteristic of the ambivalent extremes of adolescents.

Of course, during the childhood period, the new country was always commercially involved in the rest of the world because trade, especially agricultural trade, was a primary way to bring capital to the New World. Even the earliest British colony at Jamestown in Virginia was a business venture, not just a matter of Europeans fleeing religious persecution and political stagnation. However, when it came to military involvement and foreign policy, historically the United States has shown something of a pendulum pattern: A period of total — and often military — internationalism, often based upon some kind of crusade or high idealism, is followed by relative foreign policy and military disengagement or isolationism and a focus on internal affairs.

The United States went into the Spanish-American War with the noble and idealistic intention of liberating Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines from a colonial power, Spain. While the war was a military success, it was followed by a period of overwhelming disillusionment and disappointment when the US was viewed as an...the most dramatic example of adolescent idealism came when Woodrow Wilson led the United States into a major war in Europe — World War I.
imperialistic occupier by many in these newly independent nations. Soon after American troops landed in the Philippines, fighting broke out between Filipinos trying to establish their independence and Americans trying to establish their control. Years of fighting resulted in the deaths of thousands of Americans and tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of Filipinos.

Perhaps the most dramatic — and famous — example of adolescent idealism came when Woodrow Wilson led the United States into a major war in Europe — World War I. This war was not depicted as simply a matter of helping friendly nations or crass national interests. It was seen as a “war to end all wars” and a “war to make the world safe for democracy.”

When the war ended, Wilson tried to extend American constitutionalism and values to the entire world, through the vehicle of the League of Nations and his Fourteen Points, many of which reflected classic liberal American values. This was internationalism with a Yankee Doodle missionary zeal; if we could just create the structure where people could come together with good hearts and minds, they would choose to negotiate and cooperate rather than fight wars. In many ways Wilson’s sweeping post-World War I dreams were similar to those of George Bush’s visions of nation building in Iraq, with Bush’s unilateral interventionism substituting for Wilson’s American-ized internationalism.

Wilson’s efforts failed spectacularly. Realpolitik combined with an isolationist desire to withdraw from the world trumped Wilson’s global version of American idealism. He once said, “Sometimes people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American.” The settlement of the war did not occur according to the Wilsonian discourse or ideals. Without any kind of enforcement mechanism, the League of Nations was a paper tiger. Indeed, in the League all nations were not equal, as each nation had the same vote on world issues. Rather than having a United Nations-style Security Council it was an international version of the US Senate. Even the US Congress would not allow the US to join the League and most Americans simply wanted to withdraw from the world of power politics following the experience of World War I.

Adolescent America had experienced another instance of rejection — thus jilted, the country turned away from the world in the subsequent decades. Warren Harding seized on this mood in the 1920 election, proclaiming that “America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration … not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustenance in triumphant nationality.”

The country’s adolescence — and its ability to effectively avoid international commitments — ended with World War II. The United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor in 1941, Hitler had invaded most of Europe, and our allies were being occupied by Nazi troops. Franklin Roosevelt had to take action and defend his country. This time the US faced genuine hegemonic military aggression and its involvement in this war was a matter of realism, not idealism.

Young Adulthood: Mature Participation in the International Community

Young adulthood began with World War II, and the United States could no longer remain withdrawn behind its own borders. The Cold War, beginning after the conclusion of the Second World War, demanded continual involvement and a more mature, adult America to handle its challenges. There was no possibility of withdrawal again. Like a young adult who must now get a steady job, pay the bills, and act maturely, the US could no longer shirk its role as a world leader. Nevertheless, the longing to return to the simple innocence of youthful noninvolvement without the complexity and responsibility of adulthood was a sentiment which always had some degree of resonance in the country.

A national crisis can increase patriotism and strengthen a people’s resolve to stand by traditional civic values, but it also can move the country in new and unexpected directions. World War II gave Americans a deep and broad sense of national unity, and for two or three decades, traditional American “can-do” optimism soared. Throughout this period, there was a strongly held belief — despite many national and international crises — that Americans could achieve great things. Men and women with enormous talent and vision gave us the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, NATO, the G.I. Bill, the interstate highway program, the Peace Corps, the space program, the Civil Rights Act, and much more. Although this was the era of the Cold War and the atomic bomb — along with the Korean War and the Vietnam War — which put Americans in continual or potential military conflict, it also led to the increased use of diplomacy and greater American involvement in international organizations. Like a young adult finding a secure job and a stable family life, the country was settling into stability at home and mature engagement with others in the community of nations.

When the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Americans celebrated a further proof of the exceptional nature of the country. But, there were no parades for this victory of the American way, and the US seemed adrift: not only was the role of the world’s lone superpower a difficult, often lonely burden, but it was also one in which no clear enemy, no cowboy in a black hat, could be easily identified. The country was extraordinarily successful and an economic and military juggernaut. Although it was far from a primary concern, some wondered how America’s international role in the world could be defined as it grew into a powerful, mature...
member of a seemingly less bellicose international community. This created a certain level of stress in the country as we struggled to identify friends and foes (for example, the consternation over Japan’s rise in the 1990s) and argued over whether our preeminent power should make us more or less involved with the rest of the world and its problems.

Adulthood and Nostalgia

Adults under stress can regress to an earlier and immature behavior that once provided security. There have been times of regression to early eras of oppression and extremism, simplistic utopianism, and jingoism throughout American history. With the end of the Cold War, many nostalgically wanted to withdraw into a pre-Cold War era of isolation from international alliances and their potential obligation to fight wars. Nevertheless, following the end of the Cold War, the US developed alliances to control nuclear armaments and it participated in numerous international forums and organizations to foster better care of the environment, control the spread of diseases such as AIDS, and to bring war criminals to trial in the World Court.

However, in 2000, President Bush was reluctant to support the internationalism and interventionism of the previous decade. He viewed the US involvement in the Bosnian War as “nation building” and believed that such involvement in the world was not in the national interests of the US. Bush refused to sign the Kyoto Accords to control global warming, he withdrew the US from the antiballistic missile treaty with Russia, he would not allow the US to join the International Criminal Court, and he threatened to withhold money from the UN. If the Clinton years (and, to some extent the administration of President George H.W. Bush) represented the more internationalist argument, the George W. Bush years represented the more domestic-centric argument — the other end of the spectrum of a withdrawal from world politics and international organizations and agreements. Whereas George H.W. Bush saw globalization as internationalism, his son, George W. Bush, viewed internationalism as unnecessary with the end of the Cold War and the dawn of a unipolar world. Globalization was seen as a teleologically Americanizing process, which could be promoted through unilateral, and perhaps bilateral, involvement.

With the attacks of 9/11, there was no way the President could continue to withdraw from the international community. An attack from beyond America’s borders similarly required the country to go beyond its borders to punish the perpetrators. But the US’s involvement after 9/11 was primarily one of unilateralism, and the use of military force rather than the international negotiation and consensus-building which the US had increasingly practiced as it aged. The Bush administration declared that there was an “Axis of Evil” between Iran, Iraq, and North Korea that threatened the US and world peace, recalling the black and white, Manichean cowboy movies of old. The unilateralism evident in the Iraq War showed an America wary of the world beyond its borders and willing to go it alone to get what it wanted — like a pioneer of old going out West. This was a return to the earlier, less mature behavior of the US during its early years — its childhood and early adolescence. These actions recalled the US of the Mexican-American War and the Monroe Doctrine, not the more recent (and more mature) US of the Marshall Plan and NATO.

America’s Midlife Crisis

Continuing our analogy between the development of an individual and the nation, we can say that the stress caused by 9/11 catalyzed a sort of national midlife crisis in the US. Just as individuals undergoing a midlife crisis exhibit behaviors incommensurate with their maturity and station in life, our country did the same following 9/11, and returned in many ways to the simplicities of an idealized past and past behavior.

When we go through a traumatic and stressful life event we often long for the simplicity and security of childhood or carefree adolescence. Some of us regress to these youthful behaviors and identities when we are faced with the pain and responsibilities of adulthood. A country experiencing the fear and insecurity of war similarly will often return to the national images of its past. Faced with a difficult, hard to define crisis (much like a midlife crisis), the US couldn’t buy a sports car to make itself feel better.

The country needed to address what was perceived as both an existential and very real threat with concrete actions — with the “can do” spirit. Yet, this desire for action can be rash and misdirected. In their hurt and anger, individuals will sometimes irrationally lash out at any apparent enemy; the people of a country also often want to strike out at any enemy who seems to be a threat. A year after the attacks of World War II gave Americans a deep and broad sense of national unity, and for two or three decades, traditional American “can-do” optimism soared.
9/11, over 60 percent of Americans believed that “we should get even” with anyone who crosses the US — a 20 percent increase over a pre-9/11 poll asking the same question. Rather than accepting the tragic reality and uncertainties of a dangerous world where there are no clearly defined good guys and bad guys, we perhaps regressed to an ear-

lier worldview. In many ways, the reaction of the American government was very traditional: we resorted to a dualistic, black and white, unambiguous and melodramatic worldview.

As with any individual under stress, there is a nostalgic desire to return to a perceived past when life was simple and clear-cut — a time when there were very explicit distinctions between right and wrong, and our own family provided a safe haven from the threats of the outside world. Post-9/11 insecurities caused Americans to accept simple answers to the many complex problems and ambiguities of the world. We accepted idealized, oversimplified panaceas to complicated problems — believing that the war on terrorism was quantifiably winnable through military means alone, and that our soldiers in Iraq would be greeted with roses and candy. Somehow a “victory” in Iraq and Afghanistan was believed to be able to create a domino effect and bring about democracy throughout the Middle East. We took insufficient time to examine our motives and the repercussions of our actions — a behavior which the country exhibited in its youth and caused such debacles as the legalization of slavery in the Constitution and the Mexican-American and Spanish-American wars.

Presidents tap into the temper of the times — and also shape it. If they do neither, they are ineffec-
tual. If they do both, they are bound for the history books, for better or worse. To some degree, Bush operated in the context of his time — America’s station and development as a nation and the national values of American culture. And in a country where a premium is placed on “doing,” after 9/11, no American president could refrain from taking some kind of bold action.

Yet how and what the president “did” is what matters. One hundred and sixty years ago, the mood of the country was for national expansion. Cries of manifest destiny animated the politics of the nation and the wagon-wheels of American settlers pushing West. President James Polk seized on this mood and sought to help shape it through his own policies. One way that he did this was by embarking upon the Mexican-American War. Lincoln, who protested the war from its start, wrote to a colleague: “Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such pur-
pose, and you allow him to make war at pleasure…If to-day he should choose to say he thinks it necessary to invade Canada to prevent the British from invading us, how could you stop him? You may say to him, — I see no prob-
ability of the British invading us’; but he will say to you, ‘Be silent: I see it, if you don’t.’” Lincoln was not alone in his protests — Tho-
reau’s famous Civil Disobedience was penned as he sat in a Massa-
chusetts jail for opposing the war. (Ralph Waldo Emerson visited his friend Thoreau in jail, asking in horror, “Henry, what are you do-
ing in there?” Thoreau calmly replied, “Waldo, the question is what are you doing out there?”) The dissenters’ protestations were borne out: the debate over whether or not to extend slavery into the territory the US acquired through the Mexican-American War helped to foment the Civil War.

The Mexican-American War (1846-48) was disastrous for the US, although it achieved its primary aim of acquiring territory and slaking the nation’s manifest destiny-inspired fever. Few thought through the war’s consequences. And so it was with Iraq. Bush picked up on the burgeoning midlife crisis and took the country down a course of action which, though resonant with some of the country’s cultural values, was not resonant with the country’s maturation. Context was ignored — in America and in Iraq itself. It is no coincidence that at the beginning of the occupation, Iraq was put under the authority of those who placed not enough value on local context. Nor is it coincidental that General David Petraeus’ context-savvy approach has proven much more successful. Context matters, at home and abroad.

Is Bush destined to join Buchanan on the slow train to presidential infamy? It’s highly likely. Most Americans don’t prefer to dwell upon their midlife crises as their high points — and neither will most think the years of the Bush presidency – the time of America’s midlife crisis - as a high point.

Is this fair? Yes and no. Buchanan
did little to prevent the impending national crisis of the Civil War and Bush certainly did little to stymie the country’s midlife crisis. Just as doing is a national value, so are optimism and a willingness to tackle new obstacles with ingenuity — to solve every problem. These values, however, were not much drawn upon in the administration’s response to the crisis. And of course the catalytic event of this crisis, 9/11, would have been very hard, if not impossible, for the Bush Administration to avert. Like Buchanan, Bush was an average or below average president in the most trying of times. Therefore, a great – possibly unfair – amount of hope was placed on Obama that he could be the Lincoln of our times. During his campaign, Obama certainly tapped into the nation’s temper. Cries for change could not have been met with an audience much readier to receive them. While Obama has unequivocally attempted to implement bold policy shifts and programs, the jury must remain out on their long-term effects and consequences.

When we emerge from a midlife crisis we can rely upon the stable, established parts of our life (our job, family, friends, personal character, etc) to overcome the personal crisis. Moreover, having weathered the crisis we are seasoned and strengthened with new strength, wisdom, and maturity. The same may be true for a nation. Just as an often black and white, Manichean perspective and action for action’s sake (despite the potential consequences) have been hallmarks of American culture, so have egalitarianism, a focus on a better future, and optimism. The country must draw upon values such as these in order to successfully move beyond its midlife crisis and into the next stage of its development. Indeed, there are many signs that the US could be emerging from its midlife crisis and grow into the steady and resolute maturity that many in the US — and beyond — look forward to.

Many saw Obama’s election as a symbolic, if not actual, first step in this development or rebirth. Breaking America’s longest held racial taboo, the election of an African-American to the highest office in the country marked a dramatic break from the past and a willingness to embrace change and move ahead, rather than the more backward-looking, navel-gazing qualities that marked its midlife crisis. While domestic policy has been contentious — and the need to address the after-shocks of the economic earthquake last autumn certainly would have derailed any president’s agenda, more discernible shifts can be observed in the realm of foreign policy. The Obama administration’s greater engagement with international institutions (as well as pariah states such as Iran) and concern for improving the global image of the US — seen most dramatically in Obama’s public diplomacy initiatives and speeches in the Muslim world — are evidence of this. These moves were not ideologically motivated, but rather drew upon the country’s mood and that of its people.

Indeed, when it comes to national policy, the American people may be more sophisticated, mature, and progressive than many of their political leaders. They do not want to withdraw from the world and they do not support unilateral military intervention; they favor international involvement and international organizations; and they would like to use diplomacy and negotiation rather than military force. While the majority of them want to end the war in Iraq, they are not sure how this can be done effectively and with the least amount of harm to the US and Iraq. They are unsure as to how the US will militarily disengage from the Iraq War, but it is clear that they want American troops to return home. A similarly nuanced portrait could be drawn for the public’s attitude towards Afghanistan.

This was also the situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s when it came to the Vietnam War. The majority of Americans were united in the firm belief that the war must end, but there was a great deal of uncertainty as to how that might be done. However, when the Vietnam War ended, the US remained fully involved in international affairs, it expanded its involvement in international organizations, and today the US has given Vietnam a “most favored” nation status.

At times in the past, Americans have longed to withdraw from the brutish and tragic aspects of world politics and return to some sort of isolationism from the international arena following a costly military engagement, and yet just the opposite seems to be true today. Furthermore, although Americans are not fatalistically cynical they are also not blindly utopian idealists. They seem to understand that involvement may mean sacrifice and compromise, but it also requires values and ideals to guide public policy. This is a remarkable indication of a more mature and realistic attitude among Americans toward the US role in the world community. As a nation, we have come to realize that it is impossible to disengage from the international system of nations. In a 2007 Pew poll tracking 20 years worth of American political values and “core attitudes,” nearly 9 in 10 Americans asserted their belief that it is best for the US to be active in international affairs, a number which had been consistently high since the poll’s inception. Despite the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, frustrations with Iran and North Korea, economic tensions with China, and palpable American unpopularity around much of the world, this number has barely declined when the poll last asked this question in 2003. The most recent (2008) report of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs — which has been asking a similarly worded question since 1974 — also found the majority of Americans to be in favor of an active role in world affairs, as they had whenever the Council had polled on the question in the last 36 years. If this number was “soft” — i.e., if Americans did not feel strongly about it — we would expect this number to drop precipitously given all of these frustrations; we would expect Americans to want to distance them-
selves from the world behind their two oceans. Yet the numbers have not declined, showing that Americans are willing global citizens.

Similarly, in 2002 the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs found that 41 percent of the problems which Americans mentioned as facing the nation were related to foreign affairs. Certainly people in other countries might find this percentage to be fairly low in light of the impact the United States has on the rest of the world. However, one must bear in mind that in 1998, this number was just 7 percent. The trend has continued: the number of Americans who take an active interest in foreign affairs news has increased markedly over the last several years, and is statistically greater than the respective numbers of Chinese, South Koreans, and Indians who follow foreign affairs.

Americans as a whole are also moving toward a multilateral rather than unilateral global posture, even if this posture has not yet fully “bubbled up” to the upper echelons of government. In 2007, the lowest percentage ever of respondents in the 20 years of Pew Values Surveys indicated that they agreed with the statement “The best way to ensure peace is through military strength.” There is strong support for many multilateral treaties and organizations. According to the Chicago Council’s 2008 polling, over 70 percent of Americans support an international treaty to address climate change and greenhouse gases. Nearly 90 percent support the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Around 70 percent support US participation in the International Criminal Court. And majorities favor giving the UN more powers in a wide variety of areas.

The dichotomy between the people and the government of the US, which many international observers have noted, is often real. Yet, just as someone going through a midlife crisis must eventually make their actions appropriate to their age in order to pass through the crisis, the US government must better reflect the majority sentiments of its people in order to pass through its own midlife crisis. Obama’s increased multilateralism may be reflective of such a trend. In the next decade, political leaders who focus on the future and share these more progressive, internationalist views are likely to win the support of the American people. While fear may have motivated the either/or, dualistic, melodramatic national mind-set after 9/11, it appears that Americans are returning to their traditional optimism and that they are seeking leaders who will restore the moral confidence of the American people.

If there has been a regular oscillation between international involvement and a tendency to withdraw behind the two oceans, for this nation that oscillation has probably ended with the Iraq War. The United States is politically, economically, and militarily interconnected with the rest of the world, and it is now impossible to maintain a policy of noninvolvement in international affairs — or to conduct a foreign policy based on unilateral militarism. Polls clearly show that somehow the national image held by most Americans has indeed become more sophisticated; the country expects its leaders to be actively involved in the world. As the country begins to assume this role, its midlife crisis will pass, and it may look forward to years of a proud, steady and even ruffled, maturity. What kind of president Barack Obama is remembered as may well rest on his ability to fully tap into this era’s mood and make the country’s direction match the vision of its people. If he can do this, his presidency will be compared not to the trajectory or comparative polling numbers of his predecessors, but on its own unique merits.

Endnotes
7 Woodrow Wilson, Address supporting the League of Nations, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, September 8, 1919.
David Seed’s *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction* (2010) chronicles the development of “American” literature whereby the epithet is defused of its supposed hegemony through documenting the ‘progressive pluralisation of American identities’ (p.2). Split into two parts, the first dealing with ‘Genres, Traditions, and Subject Areas’ and the second with ‘Selected Writers’, the *Companion*, by way of astute essays from 53 scholars, amalgamates and elucidates the fiction of the United States in the twentieth century. The argument for the multifariousness of United States fiction is evident in the range of genres, traditions and subject areas that it has traversed. Ranging from America’s ‘joyous season’ (p.11) of modernism to its relationship with ‘Trash Fiction’, it showcases the dexterity of American literature, always through enthusiastic writing. The second section is a chronological torrent of informed, entertaining articles on numerous American writers, ranging from the Pulitzer-Prize winning Edith Wharton to the transnational Bharati Mukherjee. Included between them are essays concerning the stalwarts of American literature such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Roth, which are flanked alongside essays on writers not immediately on the tip of one’s literary tongue when thinking of ‘American writers’ - Barbara Wylie’s entry on Vladimir Nabokov, arguably ‘American as April in Arizona’ (p.369), for example, is especially noteworthy. Each essay is appended by ‘References and Further Reading’ whereby the reader can immediately furrow the themes given in a particular essay.

There are a few niggling details however. Firstly, the fact that the *Companion* succeeds *A Companion to American Fiction 1865-1914* (2005) is not immediately clear from its title for those with an interest in United States fiction between the turn of the century and World War I. Also, ‘Part 1’ fails to include any thorough discussion of the seminal Beat Movement (Burroughs features in the ‘Selected Writers’ section whilst Ginsberg and Kerouac do not) whilst notable writers such as Capote, Plath, and David Foster Wallace seem AWOL in the second.

Seed’s *Companion*, however, in attempting to circumvent a range of fiction as monolithic as that of twentieth-century America’s, does an admirable job. The text is an inviting one, relevant to both the student of American literature and to the veteran. Written in clear, crisp prose, the *Companion* will be an invaluable work for those wishing to gain knowledge of New World writing. In underscoring the hallmarks of American literature alongside providing insightful contextual discussion, the *Companion* triumphs in its aim to show just how protean twentieth-century United States fiction has been.


ISBN 0195309634, HBK, xxxviii + 481. £60.00.

Reviewed by David Seed, Liverpool University

These seem to be boom times for reprints of nineteenth-century African American classics. Since 2008 alone no less than six works by William Wells Brown have appeared and also a reader. The present selection appears within the Oxford University Press Collected Black Writings series and assembles 22 pieces from a broad cross-section of his work. The editors argue convincingly that Brown addressed a female readership primarily, hence his emphasis on the domestic in his writings, and draw a strong contrast with the defiantly heroic stance of Frederick Douglass. In his speeches, in America and...
England alike, Brown attacked slavery as a betrayal of American national ideals and for its moral corruption. His autobiographies direct irony against the way Christian piety was used to mask power relations and in his famous 1853 novel Clotel he explores the sexual dangers confronted by the female slave. In his travel writings Brown pays dutiful homage to the places he visits but weaves into his travels thoughtful meditations on the relation between the USA and Britain, and on the crudity of the term ‘savage.’ This selection makes clear the range of Brown’s interests, extending into contemporary race theory, and clearly embody a purpose he states in the preface to Clotel, namely to ‘lay bare the institution’ of slavery.

In the course of his travels Brown acknowledged the importance of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the production of an annotated edition has an obvious value in itself. The present volume also includes 14 pages of colour plates and many other illustrations within the text taken from different editions and adaptations. The latter would justify a separate collection in order to trace out the different graphic interpretations of key scenes in the novel or of Tom himself, presenting him as a teacher, patriarch, or figure of piety. In his characteristically thoughtful and suggestive introduction, Henry Louis Gates discusses the importance of home in Stowe’s narrative and explores the complex relation of sentiment to sexuality in the novel. The annotations concentrate on three main tasks: glossing unfamiliar terms, supplying concise historical information, and identifying quotations from Stowe’s main sources, namely Shakespeare and the Bible. In the latter case, one odd omission is the explicit quotation from the Song of Songs in Chapter 19, but otherwise the annotations are thorough and demonstrate the important point that Stowe was turning the Bible polemically against slavery, in defiance of its apologists. Another example which could have been expanded is the title of Chapter 21 (“Kentuck”), which, apart from the state, alludes to the statement of a Kentucky preacher from the 1820s that “Heaven is a Kentuck of a place.” Those sections dealing with Topsy and the death of Evangeline are particularly successful in combining graphics with literary and biblical allusion. However, on the negative side, there are far too many chatty asides (“George is a bit too talky in this scene”) and two striking omissions. It is now common knowledge that Stowe drew on The Life of Josiah Henson (1849) for her depiction of Uncle Tom. Indeed, in an extraordinary act of appropriation an 1876 edition appeared with the title Uncle Tom’s Story of His Life. It would have been helpful to have information on how this source was used and it would also have been useful to see passages from Stowe’s A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1853), which was designed to demonstrate the “truth” of her novel. The Annotated Edition, in short, is valuable, but unevenly so.

In his first chapter, Flota proclaims adherence to critical multiculturalism, along with asserting that the Bay Area rivals New York as a centre of multiculturalist production. By ‘multiculturalist’, Flota means multiple cultures. Following his logic, James Baldwin’s Go Tell it on the Mountain (1952) is not multiculturalist because its focus is African America, whereas the work of white Beat writers Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg is multiculturalist because it is open to nonwhite and queer experiences—even if exoticized. In Chapters Two and Three, Flota discusses the Beat Movement of the 1950s, offering close readings of various Ginsberg and Kerouac texts in their biographical and historical contexts, before linking this Movement to the Westward Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s by way of reference to bebop jazz musician Charlie Parker and his influence on Kerouac; Bob Kaufman and Ishmael Reed. Chapter Four focuses on the post-Beat moment and development of radical political coalitions, for example, the Black Panther Party, alongside white, Latino and African American writers. Flota con-
veys the energy of this historical context in a succinct way, a compelling approach he repeats in Chapter Six when discussing the proliferation of multiculturalist texts in the 1970s. Important to Flota’s book is Reed whose multiculturalist vision is realized in a variety of fields. In literature, Reed utilizes Wild West and Egyptian mythologies to ‘broaden the African diaspora in its American context’ (p23). In promotion and publishing, Reed supported Westward Movement writers such as the Aiiiiieeeel group (Chapter Five). In Chapter Seven, Flota argues that Aiiiiieeeel writer Frank Chin and his arch-rival Maxine Hong Kingston actually share thematic concerns with ‘the framing of Chinese American identity as American identity, resistance to white assimilation, and the influence of non-Chinese American culture upon their characters’ identity formation’ (p220).

For the most part, the Beat and Westward Movements are celebrated, although Flota does recognize their limitations, particularly regarding mainstream assumptions, for example, Kerouac on race and sexuality, Reed on gender and Kingston on mental health. In these early versions of multiculturalism, ‘the cultural in multicultural was discursively limited to ethnicity and … cultures of gender, sexuality, and bodily ability … were not widely considered’ (p241). Flota does consider them in Chapter Eight, arguably a little too briefly when discussing disability, multiculturalism and the concept of dismodernism. Flota’s last chapter looks at texts by Kingston, Chin and Reed from the 1980s and 1990s in a way that further reinforces the Bay Area’s importance to multiculturalist production.

I would recommend Bay Literature to academic and general readers. For literature students, Flota’s biographical and historical material should enliven their understanding of a vibrant period in American history. There is also sufficient textual analysis to warrant Bay Literature’s inclusion on courses about Beat, African American and Asian American writing, with the continuities Flota highlights between them helping to challenge easy assumptions about genre and multiculturalism.


Reviewed by Despina Feleki, PhD Candidate: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Department of English Language and Literature, Greece

Nothing Abstract: Investigations in the American Literary Imagination is a collection of reprinted essays, which, in the present edition, serve the particular purpose of the author, Professor Tom Quirk, to defend literary geneticism against poststructuralist theories and secure its place in literary criticism.

The “Introduction” and the first part of the book entitled “The Proof” constitute Quirk’s protestation against attackers of genetic inquiry, and he often has to resort to Kenneth Burke’s and William James’ argumentation for support. In the first essay “Sources, Influences, and Intertexts” he rejects the theory of “Intertextuality” supported by distinguished literary scholars such as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. Instead, he regards geneticism—from the study of the creative imagination … [of] original and gifted writers” (2), a form of inquiry that draws material from “biographical and textual criticism, literary history, and source and influence study” (2) – as the appropriate tool for textual analysis. According to Quirk, every instance of literary expression is indicative of “the whole physiological and emotional condition that impelled it,” and what critics should be trying to answer is “what motives or impulses have been satisfied” (42). Elsewhere, he provocatively compares the “intertext” to the “analoque” and diminishes its value by equating it to “literary discourse one is apt to hear at cocktail parties and in faculty lounges” (16). However, he, ultimately, resorts to his version of the theory of the “intertext” to confront accusations of geneticism following a reductionist practice.

In the second essay “Authors, Intentions, and Texts” his views on authorship can offer a lot to literary criticism. The concept of the author is central in genetic engineering and his professed rebirth is a counter-attack on Barthes’ long “dead” author. He correctly acknowledges the problems involved in textual editing. In the creative process the author is reduced to a “privileged interpreter” (44) and not the authoritative identity we have been accustomed to.

In the second part of the book characterized as “The Pudding” he actually practices what he has been preaching in “The Proof.” His captivating essays constitute descriptive accounts that enlighten the student and scholar of American literary imaginative writing on matters concerning the composition of literary works. All textual evidence is drawn from American literature dating from the 19th century to the early 21st and among the authors discussed are Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Ambrose Bierce, Wallace Stevens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather and Joyce Carol Oates. Of special interest is his essay on Wallace Stevens’ poetry, which gives an insight into the problems
concerning the definition and the essence of realism in prose and poetry in America, the two essays on the qualities of Mark Twain’s ingenious writings, the inquiry into Hawthorne’s last tales, which deal with artistic creation, as well as the study on the analogies connecting Fitzgerald’s to Cather’s fiction.

**Nothing Abstract**’s inspiring essays and its beautiful language that flows uninhibitedly make it a great “read” for those wishing to explore the mysterious and full of potential world of “contextuality,” – rather than “intertextuality.” It will definitely prove to be useful to the student of American literature as well as a source of inspiration and a pedagogical tool for academics. However, supporters of poststructuralist and later literary theory might be left feeling frustrated, as it misses the vibrant power of the “intertext,” and looks out for the author everywhere else but inside the text.


Pp. ix & 244. ISBN: 0-521-86539-5 0521865395
Reviewed by G. B. Murgatroyd  
Lancaster University

In The Making of Racial Sentiment, Tawil positions frontier romance literature as a vital and unique influence on Anglo-American understanding of racial difference during the antebellum period. The book begins with an overview of the ways in which American discourse about race began to alter during the early nineteenth century. Tawil demonstrates that during these years, accepted Anglo-American thought changed from one which viewed physical and cultural differences in humans as being governed by environmental factors, to one which posited essentialised and ‘immutable’ racial characteristics. It is in 1820s frontier romance, Tawil intriguingly asserts, that this new concept of race was developed and popularized. By persuasively contending that Cooper, Child and Sedgwick’s frontier romances can all be interpreted as works of the same domestic genre, the author demonstrates, through some very effective, cohesive close readings, the ways in which the binary between the Native American and, especially, the white female began to evolve. Here, in the book’s finest chapters, interior emotion and subjectivity – the title’s ‘racial sentiment’ – emerges as being the key to racial identity, as opposed to any exterior physical difference. The white heroine who ends up living as an acculturated Indian can never fully be Indian, because, so frontier romances emphasize, an essential sentimental bond to her mother will always, no matter what, mean she is white. What is so striking in these close readings is how the sympathy between white and Native American characters is used to shore up racial differences. In Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie, for example, though a Native American woman is seen as a ‘friend and a [metaphorical] sister’ (123) to a white man, the message is that it would be ‘unnatural and hence undesirable’ (125) for them to become lovers.

The penultimate chapter of The Making of the Racial Sentiment attempts to explain how the racial discourse found in frontier romance acted as a precursor to slave narratives, using Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a case in point. This suggestion is indeed thought-provoking, but a forty-page section, with its focus on just one novel, doesn’t seem substantial enough to hold up such a contention, especially after Tawil’s previous interconnected and argumentatively cumulative chapters. However, by offering convincing evidence to show the influence of frontier romance racial sentiment on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the close reading - in particular the discussion of the impressibility of African American characters - displays real originality. Tawil finishes his book with a fascinating reflection on Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, which he sees as a clever critique of racial sentimentalism. In a final, fitting touch, *Benito Cereno* is situated as an ‘incipient...analysis’ in arguing that frontier romance can be best understood in terms of racial sentiment. The arguments and readings Tawil develops are significant additions to research on frontier romance and sentimental racialism, but also help to open up new, stimulating spaces for debate on the wider influences of such discourse.


Reviewed by Mark Storey  
University of Nottingham

Few American novels appear on reading lists and syllabuses as often as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925). A poetic arraignment of American excess, its relative brevity and accessibility ensure it retains a wider readership than its nineteenth-century rivals for the Great American Novel – unlike *Gatsby*, Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851) must be the most-
discussed and least-read American novel of all. The towering reputation and enduring popularity of *Gatsby*, however, has tended to obscure Fitzgerald’s other works, not least his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). Published when he was just 23, it has more often been seen as sophisticated juvenilia, a somewhat inchoate initiation of the themes and concerns that would become his hallmark and lacking the crystalline elegance of his later work.

Jackson R. Bryer, in his new introduction to *Oxford World’s Classics* latest edition of the novel, does not, thankfully, really seek to undo this assessment. Instead, he offers a fascinating account of the novel’s hasty conception, its publishing history, and its initial critical reception, all of which may not offer anything particularly new but does offer a concise and well-researched summary of various other Fitzgerald authorities. More suggestively, Bryer points out that much of the scholarly condescension towards the novel’s unusual structure – it mixes conventional prose with poems, playlets, letters, and even stream-of-consciousness, a strategy that gives the work a ragbag and not altogether coherent feel – is put into interesting perspective by the generally more positive reaction of reviewers at the time, who were “charmed and astonished” by the brazenly modernist approach of the young author (xxiv). Bryer is also particularly good at pinpointing the huge personal impact of the novel’s success on Fitzgerald himself: with a wry matter-of-factness, he points out that when Fitzgerald’s earn-

ings leapt from $879 in 1919 to $18,850 in 1920, his beloved Zelda suddenly had second thoughts about calling off their engagement – they would marry just eight days after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*.

This biographical approach is perhaps the key to reading *This Side of Paradise* as, even more than his other deeply personal novels, it is the work that earned him that most ambivalent of cultural assignments, the ‘voice of a generation’. For this reason if no other, as Bryer states, the novel “should and can stand on its own merits as a significant literary achievement” (xxxvi). That Fitzgerald’s own life should so tragically mirror the rise and fall of the Jazz Age itself – glittering wealth and celebrity that would slide, painfully and inexorably, into financial struggle and the ravages of alcoholism – lends the youthful vigour and energy of *This Side of Paradise* a certain poignant power. A novel that seemed at the time to announce the discovery of a distinctly representative voice, a spokesman for the flappers and philosophers of the roaring twenties, seems now to be the opening strains of an elegy for a generation.


ISBN: 0804730156

Reviewed by Rachel Malkin, University of Cambridge

There are no direct references to Wallace Stevens in Pamela Schirmeister’s eloquent demonstration of the possibilities opened by Emerson’s style, but the allusion of the book’s title keeps poetry apty in the foreground. Schirmeister’s discussion is one in which tropism, figuration and the inchings of final form bear directly on the relationship between private desires and philosophy’s hopes for our lives in common.

Like Stevens, Schirmeister effects a kind of marriage between French and American influences, with key debts to Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Stanley Cavell. Indeed, one of the book’s convincing achievements is to bring Derrida and Cavell together under Emerson’s aegis at the head of a philosophical tradition concerned with its own rhetorical conditions, a connection acknowledged and at times avoided by Cavell himself. She thanks both philosophers personally, as sources of inspiration, and handles what could be convoluted genealogical material with a light touch, claiming Emerson as ‘the ambivalent parent of both a deconstructive and a pragmatic child’. Lacan provides what she calls the ‘third term’ of psychology. In the course of her argument, psychoanalytic dynamics account for the mobile nature of affect and desire, and for the intersubjective dimension of reading. Despite all this theoretical freight, the presence of these ideas in the book never seems forced or contrived. Rather, they are immanent to an ongoing conversation between America and Europe that starts with German romanticism.
community. It’s no easy task keeping such a complex set of terms in play. But while Less Legible Meanings is a dense book, it’s admirably lucid and clear. Schirmeister is good at summarising the kinds of philosophical concepts that easily tie less succinct thinkers in knots (Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgement, for example). And whether or not one shares her view of Emersonian reading as transference, one understands just how this case can be made.

Schirmeister’s way of getting to the bottom of what Emerson means is not to impose theories on his essays from above, but to read them closely, almost forensically. She is particularly strong on tracing the etymological roots of words with double or proliferating senses. This method might be inspired by Cavell’s habit of scrutinising Emerson’s vocabulary, and his belief that ‘the connotations of words are as available as their denotations’, but her readings are often striking and original. She re-interprets the canonical as well as the less philosophically read of Emerson’s essays, including in particular the lectures in Representative Men. The notion of representativeness is important for her version of how the transition from private to public happens, and more than this, for her definition of democracy (after Derrida more than Cavell, here) as a politics ‘with difference as its necessity’. In order for this to work, she needs to explain some of Emerson’s inhosparable sounding pronouncements – and his political silences. This is perhaps Schirmeister’s most controversial gesture, since Emerson’s place in the promulgation of American ideology is a vexed issue, as she concedes. Her case is sophisticated and neat, though to follow her this far is to place a great faith in the powers of reading and the process of taking on another’s words. It is precisely this faith that the book aims to encourage.


Reviewed by Karen Veitch, University of Sussex.

Katherine Adams’ Owning Up – Privacy, Property, & Belonging in U.S. Women’s Life Writing is an ambitious text. As stated in the lengthy introductory chapter, Adams aims at no less than to ‘shift current understandings of nineteenth-century privacy and its role within national and democratic imaginaries’. The implications of enacting such a shift are profound, unsettling a longstanding American tradition of understanding autobiography to be, as William Dean Howells stated in 1910, ‘the most democratic province of literature’. Adams’ focus on women’s writing of the time challenges an understanding of the history of privacy relations which, for the most part, has been derived from the study of texts by canonical male authors such as Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James. The introduction makes clear the significance of cultural and legal ideas of privacy to American political history more broadly, arguing that ‘nineteenth-century Americans incessantly posed privacy as a nationalist cause’. Focussing on women’s life-writings, then, allows Adams to more fully investigate the role ideas of privacy have had in shaping the democratic idealism upheld by what Thomas Couser has elsewhere referred to as, ‘the special relationship between American culture and autobiographical discourse’.

The book follows a clear structure that reflects the significance of the civil war as an event that profoundly shaped American understandings of the relationship between privacy, market relations and national political culture. The first two of the book’s four main chapters focus on the antebellum writings of Margaret Fuller and Harriet Beecher Stowe, followed by two chapters that focus on the postbellum work of Elizabeth Keckley and Louisa May Alcott. In these chapters, Adams succeeds in using ‘the rhetoric of privacy’ as an analytical category useful in investigating the relationship between national politics, and the politics of self-expression. In this respect, this study of nineteenth century literature produces a critical approach that will be useful to scholars beyond this immediate field. Adams’ discussion of how the rhetoric of privacy can inform our understanding of Bill Clinton’s presidency demonstrates the relevance of this discourse to present day politics. Beginning with Toni Morrison’s declaration that Clinton was ‘our first black president’, the section, ‘Presidential Privation’, provides a useful bridge between Adams’ discussion of the racial aspect of Stowe’s political imagination, and the subsequent discussion of Keckley’s 1868 autobiography Behind the Scenes; or Thirty Years as a Slave and Four Years in the White House. However, although Owning Up was published in 2009, the reader is left to wonder about the implications that Adam’s argument has for our understanding of the real first black presidency. Adams’ discussion of the way in which the ideologies of race and capital intersect in producing a common idea of ‘executive privacy’ as a utopian symbol of white democratic identity cries out for a comparative application to the Obama presidency.

The concluding chapter is less successful in its attempt to demonstrate the relevance of this study of nineteenth century writ-
The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne is an invaluable resource for students and scholars. Richard H. Millington’s brief yet telling review of examples of Hawthorne’s relevance nowadays and Gordon Hutner’s probing “Whose Hawthorne?” deftly frame a collection offering new directions for the study and teaching of Hawthorne.

The anthology opens with refreshing approaches to the significance of Hawthorne’s socio-cultural context in his life and work. Larry J. Reynolds, for instance, is interested in how Concord and the ‘new experiments in living’ championed through figures like Emerson became the lynchpin of the ethical and socio-sexual dilemmas that inform Hawthorne’s writing. Expanding on this, T. Walter Herbert reads Hawthorne’s insecurities as typical of male experiences in the wake of the mid-century call for self-reliant, self-made men. Likewise, Alison Easton maps Hawthorne’s conflicted attitudes towards women onto the gender definition changes taking place between the 1820s and the 1860s. Joel Pfister, on his part, finds evidence of Hawthorne’s pioneering work as cultural theorist in the awareness of current issues around gender and class ideologies revealed by his representation of processes of ‘selfing.’

Going further, Christopher Castiglia investigates Hawthorne’s characters and their embodiment of forms of deviance - or interior queerness - through their emotional excesses and inscrutability. These split inner character from social identity and mark the latter as being only a selected performance of the former.

Hawthorne’s reaction to contemporary practices is also examined in articles dealing with his deployment of sympathy. Here, Brook Thomas studies sympathy, as representing natural laws, in the context of - or rather as counter to - justice, or the laws of civil liberty based on politics and notions of religious accountability. And he suggests that Hawthorne’s radicalism centres around his very insinuation that the former might prevail over the latter. Further, Robert S. Levine explains Hawthorne’s ambivalent response to reform movements by attending to contemporary understandings of sympathetic encounters as double-edged, simultaneously enabling the identification of and reinforcing the distance between ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Similarly, Emily Miller Budick concentrates on Hawthorne’s uses of character pairings and binary opposites as ways of querying the feasibility of truly sympathetic relationships and their individual and global impact.

Influence features too in the middle chapters and their innovative readings of Hawthorne’s use of the literary sketch, the romance, and children’s literature. For Kristie Hamilton, the literary sketch takes Hawthorne one step closer to modernity, given the effectiveness with which it captures the fragmented and ever-changing nature of modern experience and reality. With regards to romances, Gillian Brown considers how their suitability and power as political tools are dependent on their mixture of reality and fantasy. Indeed, Brown and Karen Sánchez-Eppler make it abundantly clear that Hawthorne’s children stories are markedly educational for all readers, young and adult. The stories’ cultural message and transcendence, Brown defends, derive from the omniscience afforded by the use of personified non-human narrators that serve as objective and plausible witnesses of historical national events. Moreover, in Sánchez-Eppler’s reading, Hawthorne’s insistence on making ordinary items ‘things of intellect’ is based on the ascription of consciousness to objects which is typical of children’s imaginations.

Children thus become both the focus of Hawthorne’s stories and the origin of his theory of romance.

Through these nuanced chapters, Hawthorne is presented as deeply engaged in the social, cultural, and political thinking of his time. Ultimately, he emerges as an individual in animated dialogue with key figures of his contemporary world and of greater appeal to modern readers.


Reviewed by James Peacock Keele University

If you were simply to assay the scholarly publications in existence on the subject of New York street art, you would be forgiven for thinking that there was nothing much of special cultural significance except graffiti.
While graffiti both reflected and helped to shape the complex interactions between public urban space, politics, subcultural identity and aesthetics in seventies and eighties New York, it was by no means alone in doing so. Janet Braun-Reinitz and Jane Weismann’s passionately written and beautifully presented cultural history demonstrates the centrality of community murals to the diverse neighbourhoods in which and for which they are painted. Like graffiti, perhaps, they are "a window into the unwritten history of a neighborhood, providing a depth of understanding equal or perhaps greater than that provided by ‘official records’" (1).

The book is organised chronologically by means of what the authors conceive of as five more or less distinct phases of community mural activity. These phases are demarcated by key historical events such as the Vietnam War, as well as by the evolving aesthetic of the murals themselves as painters cease working in isolation and start to communicate across neighbourhood boundaries. Phase 1 begins in 1965 and ends in 1973 and is dominated by "politically charged narratives" (xv); phase 5, "Post September 11," is characterised by unifying "symbols of grief and togetherness" (xvii). The left-wing politics of the book, as this brief synopsis might suggest, are never far from the surface. As the charged rhetoric of Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan’s foreword illustrates in its series of broadsides against advertising hoardings, gentrification and "the juggernaut of commodification" (ix), this volume is both an elegy for a rapidly disappearing history of grassroots community art and a call to bear arms (or at least paintbrushes and sprays cans) against the capitalist homogenisation of urban space that is metaphorically and materially erasing that art.

The depth and detail of research into individual mural projects on display here cannot be faulted, and the book works as an exciting, expertly archived and written narrative. Yet – and I hope I can be forgiven for resorting to cliché here – the real stars of this book are the murals themselves, reproduced in a dazzling series of full and half-page plates. Some are technically accomplished, some naive; some are visual implorations to peace and understanding, some are combative or even aggressive. Every one of them, however, is as colourful and as arresting as the city they adorn. And every one of them takes you there, into the neighbourhood it both creates and is created by.


Reviewed by Lee Sartain, Senior Lecturer in American Studies, University of Portsmouth.

Encyclopedias are lovely things. When they are done well they can start you off at a random entry that guides you to further items until you are the possessor of a range of interconnected ideas, events, and people that makes the world seem somehow more complete and more comprehensible. So for American studies this book is ideal. As a subject American studies is interdisciplinary and its advocates argue that one event never stands alone but is connected by historical, political and social issues that are constantly being interpreted. This encyclopedia on contemporary American culture lives up to these expectations and is perfect for history, politics, and sociology students of the United States at various academic levels and, more importantly, as browsing material if you have a spare five minutes in the library (albeit this will spiral into half an hour or more once you get started).

The encyclopedia has much to commend it and its range is broad, from politics, culture, American cities and regions, and film, television, music and sport. To give a pertinent example of the range of the book you could start with the term ‘cultural studies’. The description shows in bold type a wide number of follow up entries such as feminism, film criticism, anthropology, queer theory, fashions and race, as well as mall shoppers, romance and cultural wars (pp.201-202). This comprehensive approach to knowledge is hugely rewarding and entertaining and helps those students at the start of assignments who may be slightly lost of how to approach a subject.

Similarly ‘popular culture’ (pp.574-576) leads into all sorts of new avenues of interest, including holidays, dance, music, film noir, bowling and food, as well as a short and useful bibliography of academic texts to follow up. Preceding this entry is ‘popcorn’ which, in a mere thirteen lines, gives a cultural history of this “variant on a American Indian staple” which, apparently, can be used “to decorate Christmas trees” (p.575). ‘Turkey’ is one of my favourite entries which is both amusing, educational and sardonic all at the same time. I did not know that Benjamin Franklin, one the Founding Fathers of the American republic, “proposed the turkey as a national bird instead of the eagle, but [the turkey]..."
also renowned for stupidity” and “remains bound to the [Thanksgiving] holiday as a cultural symbol” (p.734). I imagine the author of this short piece gave this entry deliberate political and symbolic undertones. How different would the world be if the US had a turkey on its bank notes and not an eagle? This is the beauty of the encyclopedia that it challenges you to think about a huge range of topics, many of them extremely serious issues to the contemporary world.

As with any encyclopedia there is a problem of constant updating to take account of current trends and events. The copy for review, for example, was published in 2001 so misses the event that changed world affairs and reinterpreted American life for the twenty-first century: 9/11. Also there are always peculiarities that the reader brings to an encyclopedia that brings up the inevitable question of ‘why didn’t they include that?’ A few of my own missing links happen to be the film director D. W. Griffiths and the father of popular culture himself, Ray Browne, the American academic that made the subject an academic discipline.

However the criticisms of such a book are minor and predictable compared to the success of this encyclopedia. This is a must have for all school and university libraries.

pp.xvi + 410. ISBN 0521 637120. 0521637120

Reviewed by Lisa M. Rüll, University of Nottingham

The 1993 first edition of Heilbrun and Gray’s study quickly gained appreciation for its insightful exploration of applied economics; an exploration that specifically, as the original subtitle indicated, focused on ‘an American perspective’ regarding art and culture. For them, art and culture equates to ‘high culture’: the live performing arts of theatre, opera, symphony concerts and dance, plus the fine arts of painting and sculpture, along with art museums, galleries and dealers. Public Service Broadcasting is in on the grounds of its not-for-profit status, but so also is Broadway theatre, despite the latter’s domination by popular musicals. It makes for a contentious definition of art and culture with “ambiguities aplenty” that even the authors acknowledge (p.5).

Nevertheless, such definitional controversies aside, those interested in the economics underpinning engagement with ‘high culture’, and the impact of inflation, consumer demand and the formulae for calculating public funding, will be pleasingly engaged. Divided into five parts, the book boasts nearly sixty tables and 25 figures. Tables track topics such as the estimated size of the (US) art and culture sector (0.218 % of the 1997 US gross domestic product, pp.8-9), whilst figures focus on demand curves and issues such as the marginal social, private and collective benefits of education (p.224). The book begins with an overview of the arts sector, including comparison of trends in attendance and arts activity across Europe, North America and Europe. This reflects the added international dimension of the second edition. Part II addresses ‘The Microeconomics of demand and supply’ and develops from a beginners guide to consumer demand (chapter 4) to an exploration of the impossibility of increasing productivity (“productivity lag” p.137) as a central problem in the financing of the arts. The microeconomic analyses continue into Part III with a case study of the fine art world. This includes discussions on valuing an artwork (chapter 9) through calculating the “wealth elasticity of demand” (the formulae identifying artworks as “luxury goods” and their relative liquidity as an investment). Part Four addresses more of the international dimension of the arts, this time focusing on public policy. Here, the book becomes more of a general social sciences analysis of the justification for expenditure on the arts, at both the state and individual level; for example, it examines the historical tendency in the US for philanthropic sponsorship of the arts to outweigh government contributions to top-up earnings from ticket sales/admissions. Finally, Part Five rounds up the book by looking at the relationship between art, economy and society, ultimately worrying that stagnation and cuts to arts education in public schools will leave the arts at risk of reinforcing class boundaries (p.402).

This book is undoubtedly a valuable insight into the economic practices of ‘high culture’, but the impact of changes over the last decade on all forms of art and culture, not least the global economic turmoil since 2008, potentially demands another further updated edition. Heilbrun and Gray’s analysis is rooted in a pre-digital age, where quaintly chapters can still talk about the innovation of “the newer technologies of cable and the home videocassette player” (p.383). The Internet and 24-hour media have changed booking, publicity and accessibility to even the ‘high culture’ arts. The equations and formulae may not change for supply and demand, but assumptions and justifications for arts expenditure in a tightened economic climate may well require a new analysis, even – or perhaps especially – if nothing has changed.
Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America by E. Fraterrigo, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2009
Reviewed by Lynne Hibberd, Sheffield Hallam University

In ‘Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America’ Elizabeth Fraterrigo offers a fascinating, well written and accessible account of the rise and fall of Playboy magazine. This sees Playboy as a ‘how-to’ guide for the urbane bachelor of the 1950s and 1960s, offering advice on fashion, cooking and conspicuous consumption, essential skills needed to attract women for sex. Fraterrigo regards the creation Playboy as a combination of Hugh Hefner’s personal and professional dissatisfaction and shrewd business sense. This saw the gap left by the decline of Esquire magazine and noted the post-war crisis of masculinity fuelled by the findings of the Kinsey Report (1948). The creation of Playboy in 1953 offered the chance to sell ‘the good life’ to a market of men disillusioned with the pressures exerted by the American government in a bid to restore post-war status quo. Fraterrigo notes how the Playboy lifestyle complemented the culture of consumption being advocated by mainstream media. As the country went about spending its way into an exuberant display of affluence, Playboy magazine offered a guide to the latest gadgets, the right cars, the correct suits needed to create the elegance and urbane charm of the modern bachelor. The book explores the creation of the dream bachelor pad equipped with all the elements needed for seduction, an area where the many labour-saving accoutrements replaced the wife to offer the perfect welcome home. It examines how popular playboys such as Rock Hudson, James Bond and the Rat Pack came to represent the dream lifestyle for the young man, and charts the move of men into the city and away from the suffocating domesticity of the suburbs. Fraterrigo argues that in some ways Playboy offered a subversive counterpoint to the presumption of stable gender roles and sexual norms. Hefner’s insistence that ‘nice girls did’ offered liberation for women to enjoy sex as well as opportunities for bachelors to do the same. However the magazine made little attempt to disrupt the status quo: men offered status and wealth in return for the sexual allure given by women, and any real attempts to change power imbalances were laughed off within the magazine editorials.

The book inevitably focuses more on the male readership that Playboy targeted, and like any good read, ‘Playboy...’ poses more questions than it answers. The role of women is charted in small accounts exploring the role of Playmates and Bunny Girls, with a slightly larger section given to exploring Helen Gurley Brown’s Sex and the Single Girl. (Fraterrigo argues that this text also advocated sex as a pleasurable pastime for single women though like Playboy did little to challenge the status quo of gender roles.) Playboy’s overt heterosexuality is rarely questioned, there is no account of female readership of the magazine and little indication of how the working girls of Playboy Enterprises were perceived beyond the confines of Hefner’s empire. Fraterrigo takes a relatively unfrontational stance towards Hefner’s claims at feminism, but rather argues that in the 1950s and 1960s Playboy operated as part of a ‘consumer nexus’ in which ‘women embraced commodities and used sex appeal to attract men, and men utilised the trappings of status to attract and seduce women.’ (p. 133)

Although the main focus of the book is on Playboy magazine, the last two chapters detail the creation and ascendance of Playboy Enterprises Inc. and the handover of the empire from father to daughter. The corporation that Christie Hefner inherited included the Playboy clubs (with their own ‘Bunny Money’ economy), the exponential rise of associate merchandising and eventual foray into digital media with playboy.com. Fraterrigo concludes that ironically Playboy’s success was its downfall, arguing that a lifestyle based on knowing exclusivity was simply unable to survive in a marketplace which made its products available to all.

Reviewed by Steve Harrison, Journalism Lecturer, Liverpool Screen School

The US press corps has had a long, if not always glorious, presence in the nation’s capital. Black reporters were systematically excluded from the closed shop of the press galleries until as late as 1947, facing discrimination not only from the White House but also from fellow journalists. When Alice Dunnigan became the first female black correspondent later in the
same year, she faced a double battle: “I had not only to convince members of the other race of my capacity, but had to fight against discrimination of Negro men, as well as against envy and jealousy of female members of my own race”.

Donald Ritchie, historian of the US Senate, had begun the history of Washington reporting in his earlier book Press Gallery, and in the present volume covers the period from 1930-2000, from the New Deal to the Drudge Report.

He does so in a lively style which brings the personalities of the time alive, as well as sketching in the historical and political context, skilfully weaving personal accounts into a wider social history.

When Ritchie’s account begins, with the Bonus Riots of 1932, Washington was a sleepy backwater, spurned by seasoned reporters who favoured the pulsating, vibrant atmosphere of America’s news capital: New York.

McCarthy, war and Watergate was to change all this, and Ritchie rattles through the well-worn stories - McCarthy’s attacks on his press critics; the battle over ‘objectivity’ in reporting of Vietnam; the investigative superstars, Woodward and Bernstein, whose dogged reporting toppled a president.

This is also a history of technology, from the early days of radio reporting (“What does it matter on radio?” one correspondent asked in the 1930s, indifferent to getting his facts wrong in a broadcast), through to TV and finally to the Internet.

It was the Web which was to break some of the most significant stories from the 1990s onwards, from the Clinton sex scandal to on-the-spot coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

But the real success of Ritchie’s account is his meticulous research, which allows the voices of the Washington press corps to be heard as individuals. The sourcing and extensive notes are a model of clarity and comprehensiveness.

The sole gripe is that there are no facsimile reproductions of any of the news reports discussed, although there are photographs of many of the main protagonists.

As a sober yet thoroughly readable survey of a turbulent era in US journalism, this book could hardly be bettered.


236 pp ISBN: 9780230218109

Reviewed by Tim Foster, University of Nottingham

Bernice M. Murphy’s stated aim is to add to the burgeoning number of recent scholarly investigations into the representation of the suburbs in fiction, film and television. However, The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture differs from the work of Roger Webster, (ed.), (2000), Catherine Jurca (2001), and Robert Beuka (2004) in that it explicitly seeks to delineate the ways in which the suburban gothic is, in Murphy’s words, “a sub-genre of the wider American gothic tradition.”

In the first chapter, Murphy looks at the work of Shirley Jackson and Richard Matheson and argues that they played a key role in “reconfiguring the tropes and conventions” of existing American gothic literature. As is the case throughout this book, Murphy’s close analysis is exemplary; however, it is here that one of the study’s major problems first becomes evident. The question of just how a multi-genre text such as Matheson’s I Am Legend (1954) - which Murphy herself acknowledges is “part post-apocalyptic fantasy, part paranoid horror” - can be viewed as part of an American gothic tradition that very often resists the thrills and spills of the overtly supernatural, is never satisfactorily resolved.

Murphy’s passion for horror and science-fiction/fantasy is obvious and makes for engaging reading, but it does mean that some of her chosen texts seem tangential to the task of nuancing our understanding of the gothic tradition in American culture. Similarly, in chapter two, Murphy traces the development of the figure of the witch in suburban fiction, film and television, but has to concede that this monstrous vision of the female emerged from the gothic tradition and its use of femme fatales, without ever explicitly being part of it. Chapter three mounts the most persuasive case for a distinctly suburban form of the gothic through a consideration of the ways in which anxieties about the consumerist foundation of postwar suburbia led to the representation of suburbanites as people in danger of losing their selfhoods. Murphy reads Ira Levin’s The Stepford Wives (1972) alongside Betty Friedman’s classic work of sociology The Feminine Mystique (1963) to show how the novel evokes a typically gothic sense of the uncanny. In the next chapter on hauntings in the popular suburban imaginary, Murphy concludes that the suburban gothic reveals the way in which “Americans have become more afraid of the people next door... than the dead that lie beneath their feet.” It is a shame, then, that the book, despite taking the experience of white middle-class suburbanites as its focus, doesn’t take account of what has been one of the key tenets of American gothic, what Toni Morrison in Playing in the Dark (1992) calls, the “Afrofianist other” - not a paranormal antagonist, but one redolent of the American psyche’s deep-seated fear of difference.
Murphy’s book is a valuable and original contribution to the nascent field of suburban studies and will appeal to the general reader as well as scholars working in this area. Nonetheless, The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture might have been improved by greater contextual detail. The ways in which this sub-genre differs from others – the urban gothic, say – are barely touched on, and Murphy’s tendency to treat suburbia as a symbolic landscape sometimes means that the suitability of her chosen texts is rather tenuous. In this regard, her analyses of Psycho (1960) and Invasion of the Bodysnatchers (1956) propose the films as being about the danger to other American landscapes of suburban sprawl, as opposed to being representations of suburbia itself.


ISBN 0748622594

Reviewed by Niall Munro, Oxford Brookes University.

David Eldridge’s book is one volume in Edinburgh’s decade-by-decade Twentieth-Century American Culture series, which completed publication in 2010. Edited by Martin Halliwell, the series ‘reframes the notion of “decade studies” through the prism of cultural production and rethinks the ways in which decades are usually periodised.’ Each volume contains five chapters focussing on various areas of cultural production, with an opening chapter on the intellectual context of the decade, and a conclusion that explores the decade’s cultural legacy. Each also contains a useful, albeit confusingly formatted, chronology of the decade, three case studies per chapter focussing on key works or individuals, and extensive chapter-by-chapter bibliographies.

Early on in this admirable volume, Eldridge observes that ‘the notion of the years 1930-9 as the ‘Red Decade’ does not stand up to scrutiny.’ Pursuing this line throughout the book, Eldridge nonetheless shows how, with such an expansion of federal influence, politics inevitably pervaded every area of cultural production, and with it, the concept of “accessible” and “democratic” art. At the heart of this was a contemporary debate about the value of art as opposed to documentary, with the work of artists like Thornton Wilder and Ansel Adams criticised for not addressing social problems. And yet, as so often in the book, Eldridge explains how such criticism was misguided, showing how Wilder’s play Our Town provides fertile ground for complicating this argument, and how the crafting of so-called documentary photographic images led Adams to express dismay that such works of art were being described in terms of social criticism.

In terms of movies, Eldridge shows how the introduction of the Hollywood Production Code resulted in films that were escapist, but he also describes how, with increasing box office success, realistic storytelling gained a foothold. Nevertheless, whilst some films contained powerful criticisms of social problems, Eldridge argues that these too frequently ended in strange affirmations, which may or may not have diminished the effect of whatever harsh reality had been presented.

In Eldridge’s book the 1930s emerge as a fluid decade, sometimes appropriated later in the century for the purposes of propaganda, but in fact genuinely difficult to classify. The book might have said more about different areas of literature – poetry gets particularly short shrift – and the proof-editing of the volume is below par, but the book’s main strength is in its balanced analysis, strongest in the fine chapters on film and photography, music and radio, and New Deal culture. As a result of this nuanced approach, American Culture in the 1930s can act as more than a wonderful primer for sixth formers and undergraduates – Eldridge suggests room for the critical reassessment of areas of cultural production, inviting further academic research and discussion, and thereby a deepening understanding of this astonishing decade.
A n anthology of essays on American theatre is expected to provide information on the origins of the dramatic art from the time of its creation until the present time. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby compiled thirteen essays, written by some of the most honored academics and writers in America, and divided them into three distinct volumes, two of which I will be reviewing, one covering American theatre from its origins through 1870 and the other starting from the post-World War II until the time that the book stopped being written (late 1990s). Most of these essays examine American theatre in relation to other major issues prevailing at the time, such as religion, class and gender distinctions, and the construction of America as a superpower. The writers comment on how the ideals and values of the entire nation were first introduced by their colonizers and how American people have shaped them during the passage of time.

The editors included essays, like the ones written by Douglass McDermott and Arnold Aronson, which are broad enough to attract even people who are not theatergoers or scholars. The reason their essays are particularly interesting to read is because they manage to connect theatre’s role with the historical and socio-political issues of the time, and that is something that appeals to everyone, no matter how involved he/she is with theatre. But the editors of this compilation wisely also included some theatre-specific essays as well, like the ones written by Simon Williams, Mary C. Henderson, Samuel L. Leiter, Foster Hirch and Ronn Smith that would usually attract people that are involved in theatre such as teachers, writers and artists.

Reading both volumes, there were times when I found some of the essays repetitive—especially the ones that were in the middle of the volumes (that were the most theatre-specific ones). That is not as evident in the first volume, where the historical timeline (from the beginnings until 1870s) is broader, but it is more apparent in the second volume, where I found that the essays written by Laurence Maslon and Mel Guslow intersected with viewpoints and ideas that were first introduced by Arnold Aronson. This may be due to the third volume covering a much shorter period of time, and this period is marked with a specific number of American playwrights and plays that gained recognition, so even if Mason’s and Guslow’s essays were well-written and made some strong points, most of them were already presented and analyzed by Aronson.

As already said, the anthology covers insightful material that serves its double purpose: to be both used as a study guide for those who study theatre but also used as an interesting historical and sociological narrative of American theatre that can appeal to any reader according to his/her needs. The chronological charts, compiled by Don B. Wilmeth and Jonathan Curley, offer a great overview of the events that marked the development of American theatre, the American country and the entire world. The portrayal of multiple viewpoints causes the reader to become more engaged and discover more about the interrelation of theatre to society and other cultural mediums. If “theatre has reflected the diversity of America” (xiv) as Bigsby says in his introduction in the first volume, then certainly these diverse writings are worth being published.


376 pages, HBK ISBN 978-0-19-532762-5. $27.95

Reviewed by Michael Paris, University of Central Lancashire
Springsteen. Clearly, then, there is something about Rodgers’ music, about the Rodgers style, that resonates just as much with today’s audience as it did in 1930s America.

His life has been well-documented in a number of sometimes hagiographical books and articles from his wife’s highly sentimentalised My Husband Jimmie Rodgers published soon after his death; to the scrupulously researched major biography by Nolan Porterfield. Rodgers’ rags to riches story is pretty well-known, the story of a tubercular Mississippi railroad worker and part-time musician, who was discovered by the Victor recording executive Ralph Peer in 1927 in rural Tennessee. Billed as ‘The Singing Brakeman’, he achieved an almost instant success, and spent the next six years as one of America’s most popular recording artists. However, the strain of constant touring and recording took a severe toll on his already fragile health and in 1933, during an exacting recording session in New York, he suffered a fatal haemorrhage. He was just 36 years old.

Barry Mazor’s Meeting Jimmie Rodgers doesn’t really add a great deal to the Rodgers story; in that sense, it’s not a conventional biography, but rather a highly-detailed exploration of how an obscure hillbilly singer came to exert such enormous influence over American roots music.

Mazor explores the Rodgers style in depth: he certainly wasn’t a great guitarist, his voice was stiff, decked out cowboy, suave – but Jimmie did have a couple of aces up his sleeve. One was the ‘Blue Yodel’; his lullabies, railroad songs and conventional three-line blues usually had a yodeling refrain, a cross between a Swiss yodel and a cowboy cattle call, and his records inspired a whole raft of imitators, including Gene Autry, the ‘Singing Cowboy’ and Jimmie Davis, the Blues singing governor of Louisiana. However, it seems to me that far more important than the yodelling, which was essentially a rather corny gimmick, and the sickly sentimental ballads that praised mother and home, it was the way in which Jimmie took the blues he had picked up from black singers on his travels through the South, cleaned up the lyrics, simplified the accompaniment, and sold them to white audiences.

After all, this was the late 1920s, and the blues form was a relatively recent development and unacceptable to many whites on both racial and moral grounds. Yet here was a singularly original sub-genre of roots music that spoke to white and black, old and young. In the late 1920s, then, Jimmie’s sanitised and largely ‘good time blues’ were quirky, original and appealed not only to country folk but to a surprising number of city-dwellers as well.

Jimmie was the ordinary Joe who made it big, a likable and easy-going guy, who enjoyed a drink or four and who may, as Mazor argues, have had an amazing ‘shape-shifting ability to assume many public personas – working stiff, decked-out cowboy, suave ladies man – that connected him to a broad public’. Be that as it may, the Rodgers style, particularly, and essentially the Blue Yodels, had an almost immediate influence on many young singers - Cliffe Carlisle, Gene Autry and Jimmie Davis all covered Rodgers’ own blues and recorded a great deal of other material in the Rodgers style. And that’s the value of Mazor’s work, in that he meticulously details how the Rodgers influence rapidly spread and began to transform American roots music into something that was far more mainstream.

Meeting Jimmie Rodgers is well-written, despite the occasional lapse into clichéd journalæse, and a slight tendency for ‘over-kill’ – do we really need to identify every musician who ever recorded a Rodgers song? But such minor criticisms can be easily be forgiven in what is probably the most detailed record of the musical legacy of Jimmie Rodgers yet published.

The Revenge of Hatpin Mary: Women, Professional Wrestling and Fan Culture in the 1950s by Chad Dell. New York: Peter Lang, 2006

184 pages, ISBN 0-8204-7270-0 0820472700

Reviewed by Janine Bradbury, The University of Sheffield
Dell’s introductory chapter provides an excellent contextual overview for newcomers to the American post-war period and is targeted to those who are unlikely to have an interest in professional wrestling. The remaining chapters investigate ‘the places where women’s fandom of wrestling was most visible’ (p.12). Dell examines televised wrestling programs and the way that female fans were depicted in the media (Life Magazine, Cosmopolitan and The New York Times all had something to say about why such large numbers of women were drawn to the sport). Hatpin Mary, the book’s namesake, was the title given by the press to Mrs. Eloise Patricia Barnett who sat at ringside and physically engaged with the wrestlers, ‘prod[ing] any portion of a protruding anatomy which carelessly present[ed] itself’ (p.40). Dell also explores wrestling magazines, wrestling fan clubs (often run by women) and lastly the memories of those who watched wrestling to reconstruct this overlooked history of women.

Dell closes his book with a brief discussion of what happened to women and wrestling after the 1950s, but unfortunately asks more questions that answers them. There is also the occasional sense when reading the book that the author ‘skims the top’ of his topic to avoid complicating his analysis. An interesting follow-up study might investigate ways in which today’s female spectators reconcile their audience participation with the decidedly anti-feminist program shift that includes explicit involvement of women as sex-objects for the male wrestling fan.

For those interested in professional wrestling, The Revenge of Hatpin Mary is a personal and colorful analysis with a nostalgic edge, harking back to a bygone era before the corporatisation of the industry in the 1980s by Vince K. McMahon (CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment).

However, it is academics and students of American studies and history who will benefit most from this text. Its methodology is fascinating and the book offers a glimpse at the ways that the shared experience of spectatorship allowed women to connect despite the race and class divisions that we often associate with 1950s America (for example, Dell’s mother remembers a friend who watched wrestling with her maid, p.122). The text also constitutes a fascinating example of women subverting what Laura Mulvey describes as ‘the male gaze’ by watching (and occasionally touching) the almost naked physiques of male wrestlers.

Perhaps most valuably, The Revenge of Hatpin Mary offers a special opportunity for us as teachers, students and scholars to confront our own position at the interface of mass culture (in this case, professional wrestling) and high culture (academic study), forcing us to look at an element of American popular culture so often ridiculed, in order to better understand American Studies as a discipline.

Reviewed by G. B. Murgatroyd Lancaster University

From the outset, this remarkable assessment of race in the Southern states exhibits scholastic finesse as well as extensive historical and critical research. The authors move at a steady pace through four hundred years of American history and in doing so, reveal, in a single, easily understandable volume, the ways in which race and racism evolved to shape the South. Though the focus is, unsurprisingly, on white and black relations, the book includes important chapters on Native Ameri- can racial identity and includes examinations of how class and gender influenced or deviated from the subject of race. The chapters progress chronologically, beginning at Chesapeake Bay and cover a huge array of Southern history, from the growth of slavery to the Hurricane Katrina devastation (the book was published prior to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign and his eventual election). Each chapter is helpfully divided into carefully selected shorter subsections, which makes the digestion of such a broad history a manageable affair. Statistical evidence is used to great effect throughout Race in the American South, but eye-witness accounts, as well as sketches of key individual people, are woven into the analysis as well, meaning the authors successfully navigate the path between providing facts and figures and more personal evidence. That said, whilst a few maps are included in the book, they only cover up to the Civil War and more illustrations or photographs could have been incorporated to better enhance the text, particularly for events such as the Great Migration. This is a minor point though, and the authors comprehensively demonstrate throughout this book their contention that ‘race and racism were critical to the historical development of the South’ (8): race and racism are seen to permeate almost every layer of Southern life.
In more ways than one, America has come full circle. Co-authors Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier say as much: ‘George H.W. Bush left Iraq unresolved for Clinton; Clinton handed off the Iraq question for his successor to deal with; and so it is again.’ (p.328) The same could be said for non-state actors who pose challenges to America not only since September 11, 2001 (9/11), but from November, 9, 1989 (11/9). As the scholars succinctly remind us, ‘Just as history did not end on 11/9, it did not begin on 9/11.’ (p. xi)

Yet America between the Wars is more a cautionary history and less an indictment of presidents and Iraq as a post-Cold War preoccupation. Ideas are important and the president should articulate a set of principles but the former State Department officials believe problem-solving to be more important than laying out all-encompassing doctrinal pronouncements like that from another former State Department official, George Kennan. And it is this search for the rhetoric to define the period in international relations between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers that is the overarching theme of this compelling study. The decade of the 1990s, previously an orphan in the literature on U.S. foreign policy, has now been adopted by Chollet and Goldgeier.

In this intellectual history about America’s role in the world, there are three contentions: Bush 41 remained unwilling to articulate a bold vision after 11/9; Bill Clinton remained unable to articulate a bold vision during the 90s; and Bush 43 unnecessarily articulated a bold vision after 9/11. Putting aside any differences of opinion pertaining to Bush Jr. (easy enough considering he features in only two of the eleven chapters), their analysis remains objective, illuminating and beyond reproach.

Chollet and Goldgeier have produced a reader-friendly examination of the policy prescriptions surrounding America’s first steps onto the new post-Cold War stage. Each of the eleven equally-weighted chapters offers an insight into a period of the presidency. The lively prose never fails to excite and there is no undue repetition. Still it is their even-handedness that deserves the most plaudits. Despite covering the partisan wars, the authors remain non-partisan. Even the comings and goings of the neo-conservatives remain nuanced and not hyperbole. Questions could be asked about the authors’ (lack of) informed judgments and their not stepping out of the narrative enough or the (curiously marginal) ink spilled on British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair, but this would be a fruitless exercise.

The authors are primarily limited to published sources, and online or National Security Archive document collections. But this is no bad thing. The pair also make extensive use of interviews with U.S. diplomats and prominent liberal and conservative foreign policy advocates which only adds to the authenticity of the volume. Containing twenty-one black and white photographs, a twelve-page chronology of the events spanning the twelve years and a ten-page bibliography, what we have is nothing if not an indispensable book.

America between the Wars is an uncomplicated tome about a complicated time. It is recommended reading for any serious student or commentator of intellectual, diplomatic and/or political history of American foreign policy.
In June 1899, the Nippon Maru dropped anchor in Honolulu Harbour. Its concerned captain informed the Hawaiian authorities of a fatality among passengers, a Chinese man who had passed away from an unknown illness. An inspection of infected tissue samples indicated the man died from bubonic plague, the dreaded disease which killed half the population of Europe in the fourteenth century. The ship was quarantined for seven days, and after no further cases were apparent, was allowed to proceed to San Francisco. During this time, however, it seems at least one plague-infested rat came ashore. Within weeks, residents of Honolulu’s Chinatown began noticing an unusual number of dead and dying rodents in the area. Soon after, people started falling ill too. An unknown number died in the tight-knit community, comprised mostly of Chinese, Japanese and native Hawaiians, before the first official diagnosis was confirmed in December 1899. You Chong, a healthy 22-year-old Chinese bookkeeper, died within a few days of falling ill. He displayed tell-tale symptoms of swollen, painful lymph glands and high fever. An autopsy revealed internal haemorrhaging. It was now clear; the bubonic plague had arrived in Hawaii.

James C. Mohr (University of Oregon) documents the efforts of the Honolulu Board of Health to combat the plague, which typically kills 75% of those infected (95%, if it progresses to the more lethal and infectious pneumonic plague). Given absolute authority over the Hawaiian Islands by the fledgling ‘Republic of Hawaii’ — an all-white interim government, set up after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy — the Board of Health used its authority to quarantine Chinatown, establish refugee camps, close schools and businesses, limit travel around the city and between islands, and burn the belongings and dwellings of those exposed to the plague. At first, the measures seemed to work: although 100 people had died of the plague by mid-December, no new cases were reported, and the Chinatown quarantine was lifted on 18 December. This was, however, a false dawn. Over the Christmas and New Year period, more residents fell ill and died. Under pressure from Hawaii President Sanford Dole, who wanted a speedy resolution to the crisis threatening to undermine the Republic’s application for full US territorial status, and from white business interests, who wanted Chinatown levelled so their own businesses could expand, the Board of Health ordered more controlled burns. However, on January 20, 1900, firemen lost control of one of these fires, and the whole of Chinatown went up in flames. An area of 50 square blocks was devastated, 7000 residents were forced to flee, and an estimated $3 million damage was caused. Although no one was killed by the inferno, the Board of Health now faced both a health and a refugee crisis. During the next few months, it struggled to find temporary housing and food for the dispossessed. Fortunately, the local community responded generously. New quarantine camps were opened, containing disinfectant showers. New sewers and sanitation sites were proposed, and a crematorium was built to dispose of the dead. Slowly, the situation improved: reports of new plague cases began to trail off, and by the end of April, all restrictions were lifted. The emergency was over.

Mohr’s account of the crisis is compelling. His detailed description of the plague’s spread through Chinatown, and the Board of Health’s efforts to combat it, builds to a dramatic denouement, as Chinatown is incinerated. As the drama unfolds, Mohr carefully weighs the options available to the Board of Health, more often than not, concurrently with its decisions. He provides a balanced account of the overthrow of the legitimate Hawaiian monarchy by white business interests, and of the racial tensions caused by waves of economic immigrants from China, Japan, and the United States. The author’s skilful handling of such difficult issues makes Plague and Fire a valuable addition to our knowledge of Hawaiian history.
The centerpiece of the book is a shortened transcript of the trial proceedings, edited and introduced by Jon Wiener, Professor of History at the University of California Irvine. Through this transcript the reader experiences the frustrations of the defence, the bravery of the defendants, and the comedy of the numerous small acts of rebellion which punctuated the proceedings. In editing the transcript from the original 22,000 pages down to 160 or so, Wiener has chosen the most representative, pivotal or humorous moments. Pen and ink illustrations by Jules Feiffer, made during the trial itself, help the reader visualise the courtroom and its main actors. On a negative note, at times the transcript suffers from a lack of continuity, and remarks occasionally lack clear context. While Jon Wiener’s introduction becomes a little repetitive when read alongside the chronology and the transcript itself, the afterword by Tom Hayden, one of the Chicago Eight defendants, is a wonderful reflection on the role of the trial within a history of radical American protest.

Not being a scholarly edition, Conspiracy in the Streets sacrifices raw information for readability and drama. However, the last two years have seen the publication of a number of new accounts of the trial, and a reader seeking immersion in the atmosphere of the court may prefer Voices of the Chicago Eight: A Generation on Trial (2008). Co-authored by Tom Hayden, Frank Condon and Ron Sossi, it features an acclaimed dramatisation of the trial, constructed entirely from transcript material. Despite such competition, this book remains a highly enjoyable read and a valuable resource on the Chicago Eight trial, offering the reader not just insight into one event, but a chance to gain a wider perspective on the competing viewpoints and ideologies which characterised the sixties.


Hb: 0-393-03788-6.

Reviewed by Joy Porter, School of Arts & Humanities, Swansea University

This book comes with a big personality. Written by the doyenne of New Western history, it is both a reprise of the book that made its author’s name (The Legacy of Conquest) and something of a pot pourri of work previously published elsewhere. Its central premise that “stories have become quite literally something in the Western soil” is hardly shocking: not least from an indigenous perspective, where an acknowledgement of the kinship between American land and its stories is foundational. Yet it is hard not to be charmed by this book. Its author has a wholesome and very un-British enthusiasm for her colleagues and for universities per se. Since she is so well-known and her prior work so ground-breaking we must forgive her continual name-dropping and the potentially self-aggrandising comparisons she makes between herself and everyone from Judy Garland to the intellectual forefather of her field, Frederick Jackson Turner. She writes with a felicity of style and a happy immediacy, peppering her prose with helpful contemporary metaphors and anecdotes.

The charm fades to an extent however when we are confronted with two things, the author’s failure to take an explicit political and moral stand in relation to Western history and her commitment to simplicity in language and to academic accessibility as a panacea for the complex problems surrounding true comprehension of difficult ideas and reflection upon the unromantic past, including that of the West. The book’s most interesting chapter is the first, “Haunted America”, where Limerick grapples with the negative feedback her role as public intellectual has exposed her to since The Legacy of Conquest ripped away many popular delusions about the West as the land of the free and the home of the brave. In its place New Western history showed the West to be a place of multiple, often competing frontiers, intent upon the destruction and displacement of Native peoples and the brutal despoliation of land in the quest to extract resource at speed. Having been faced with accusations that she and her kind have “ruined” the West by taking away its heroes and leaving none in their place, Limerick now places her stress upon ambivalence and complexity, referencing how Indians fought on both sides of most battles and emphasizing “moral and spiritual muddles, in which the lines between good guy and bad guy, victim and villain, twist and meander and interwine” (p63). Many will find such recourse to complexity a dereliction of an intellectual duty we all share to take a stand. When it comes to Indian displacement and death or to Western environmental destruction we simply are not all as bad as each other rather, to the contrary some groups carry the weight of primary responsibility. Limerick’s detailing of the messy way oppression is practiced does not
make it any less oppressive or the oppressors any less culpable. She attempts to extract patterns of conflict through analysis of the Modoc “War” of the 1870s but her conclusions are only possible because she elides the wider context of colonialism in the preceding centuries. With remarkable historical myopia, she even suggests that nineteenth century Indian wars would hardly register when you put the totals of their casualties up against the millions in the twentieth century.” (p.65) In conclusion, Limerick takes refuge in cliché and non-specific language: “Put humans under the terrible pressure of conquest, and the record discloses the great muddle that is human nature”. (p. 48) Regrettably, the true great muddle here is, I suggest, Limerick’s political, cultural and historical stance on conquest and genocide.


Reviewed by Lee P. Ruddin, Roundup Editor, History News Network.

Much has been written about the Vietnam War. Now, more than ever, though, is the time to be reading about this particular Cold War confrontation. The reason has less to do with Iraq resembling a ‘Vietnam in the sand’, however, and more to do with this year’s anniversaries: the fall of Saigon thirty-five years ago and the establishment of Vietnam-U.S. diplomatic relations in 1995.

That said, readers cannot get away from the current U.S. involvement in Iraq. President Obama hopes to extract troops by the contemporary equivalent of the ‘Vietnamization’ policy implemented during the Nixon presidency. Either way, then, Mark Atwood Lawrence’s The Vietnam War is highly welcome.

Lawrence places the events of 1961-1975 within the flow of Vietnamese history in an attempt to explore the strategies of all belligerents that became entangled in Indochina. Notwithstanding the author’s aim of striking a balance between analysing the United States’ role within an international context as the subtitle indicates, the book does not dislodge America from the centre of the narrative. Indeed, the tone of the text is unmistakably American-orientated.

As a scholar, the Associate Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin does not go far enough in penetrating “old walls of secrecy” to reveal newly accessible documentary evidence (p.2). “[N]ew research has begun exposing the motives and calculations that drove policymakers in … Beijing”, Lawrence informs us (Ibid). Relying so heavily on secondary works as the author does, though, readers would be forgiven for thinking The Vietnam War was not a multi-archival history. Interested parties are directed to either Mark Moyar’s Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965 or Michael Lind’s Vietnam – the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America’s Most Disastrous Military Conflict to read about Mao Tse-tung’s (un) willingness to send the People’s Liberation Army into battle had U.S. troops crossed the 17th parallel.

In an effort to guarantee perspicuity, Lawrence focuses on answering four thematic questions that have long attracted the attention of both graduate and general readers alike: First, why did the Vietnamese fight? Second, when did the region become so strategically significant? Third, how do you explain the U.S. defeat? Fourth, what are the legacies of the Vietnam War?

The answers are neither explicit nor exhaustive, yet this should come as no surprise to readers seeing as the author warns us that this would be the case (p.4). If anything, however, Lawrence’s approach of embedding answers within his narrative ensures that readers are kept sufficiently engaged. To be sure, his telling of Vietnamese history as a way to illustrate the spirit of the revolutionary movement the U.S. would confront (p.7-26) and account of the growing stakes between the country’s foreign patrons after the Geneva Accords are both balanced and well written (pp.47-66).

As absorbing and dispassionate as Lawrence’s treatment of questions three (pp. 91-136) and four (pp.161-185) are, however, the author is found wanting when it comes to the concept of limited war.

Talk of JFK’s “limited war” (p. 70) and LBJ’s “middle-ground solution” (p.116), while nuanced, does not reflect the extent to which America’s reluctance to wage a total war against North Vietnam continues to shape the strategic posture of the U.S. to this day. Iraq is a case in point. Precisely for fear of the “Vietnam syndrome” (p.175), President George H. W. Bush did not take the road to Baghdad after expelling Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991. Even when Saddam was eventually toppled, the failures of Vietnam hampered President George W. Bush in planning for the post-conflict reconstruction.

Once again, though, this should come as little surprise given that the book was originally scheduled to be A Very Short Introduction, part of the successful Very Short Introductions series published by Oxford University Press. While The Vietnam War: A Concise International History is by no means the last word on the sub-
ject, this “introductory study” (p.6) – with its eight equally-weighted chapters, further reading list and 21 maps and halftones – is certainly an authoritative primer and one that will likely become a recommended text on under-, if not on post-, graduate reading lists.


PP. 812. ISBN 978-0-691-13771-1

Reviewed by Nick Williams, LJMU

W

When it comes to American History the importance of the Founding Fathers cannot be understated. The actions of these men throughout war and peace has lead to their near deification, making them more paragons than actual people who lived and died. It is the fact that the Founding Fathers are so venerated that makes reading this The Papers of Thomas Jefferson so interesting. Jefferson is considered one of the most influential figures in American history, second only to George Washington, and therefore to read through his personal correspondences allows for a fascinating change of perspective, giving us an aging politician concerned with land disputes and family tragedy rather than the birth of a nation. It would however be wrong to say that Jefferson’s importance is not conveyed in these letters, the sheer number of correspondents seeking Jefferson’s advice on everything from agriculture to politics and military remind the reader that even during his life Jefferson was a hero to the American people. Nevertheless, reading discussions between Jefferson and John Adams on legal troubles or the pacification of hostile Native American tribes help present a man to the reader, and not a god.

The length and number of letters on offer in this volume of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson make it hard to mistake for anything other than a reference text, and the relative mundanity that helps ground the book in reality mean that not every letter is essential reading. While events such as the war of 1812 and attempts to annex Canada provide some historical drama, overall readers wishing to get to better understand Jefferson during the events which made him famous would be better off reading one of the earlier volumes of The Papers of Thomas Jefferson. That is not to say that there is little of interest on offer here however, and most letters are given with context, explaining any names and events mentioned no matter how obscure.

Simply put while this volume does not provide much insight into the events which put Jefferson on the two dollar bill, it does give the reader access to the man behind the legend, and humanises one of the giants of American history.


Reviewed by A.T. Gorton, Pepperdine University (Lausanne Campus)

J

ohn M. Giggie’s impressive study focuses on the spiritual lives of African Americans in the black majority counties of the Mississippi and Arkansas Delta from the years following Reconstruction to the Great Migration of the early decades of the 20th century. He shows how Delta blacks developed a “surprisingly rich and complex sacred culture” (5) in response to the increasingly restrictive, violent practices of Jim Crow racism, and how this culture was in constant flux. Giggie argues that the “intense religious transformation” during the period “shaped the arc of black culture during and after the Great War” (5).

Giggie defines ‘religion’ and the ‘religious’ broadly, because in the Delta African Americans had a popular sense of the sacred and supernatural that “threaded its way into the tapestry of everyday life”(5) and was not defined or restricted by doctrine or creed. He illustrates this with the story told by a former slave of being saved by Jesus, who handed him a ticket while he was waiting at a
After Redemption is divided into five chapters. The first describes the influence of train travel on black religious imagination and practice. Giggie shows that, despite racial segregation, the railroad was evidence of economic progress. It was also a metaphor for African American spiritual and social freedom.

Chapter two examines the relationship between black fraternal orders and churches. Fraternal orders became increasingly popular in this period by offering health and burial insurance, employment opportunities, and secure social networking to members. The relationship between the fraternal orders and the churches was often fraught but a modus vivendi was established by the early 1900s, with churches recognized as the principle spiritual institution and the fraternal orders providing many new resources critical to the survival and progress of the African American community.

Chapter three describes the impact of the consumer market on religion. Rising consumerism was used by churches and preachers to raise money by selling and endorsing products. Chapter four looks at the relationship between material culture and religion. Religion shaped ideas of respectability and what was appropriate decoration for the "black Christian home".

The fifth chapter analyzes the development of the African American Holiness movement of the 1890s which called for a return to the simplicity of early Christianity, a reaction against what was seen by many as the increasingly commercialized, worldly nature of the churches. Within twenty years, however, the Holiness leaders embraced some of the practices they had condemned, selectively using commercial advertising, for example.

The changing position of women is examined throughout the study. In the 1890s women became increasingly marginalized from traditional positions of leadership in the community and began to re-position themselves as the "market's arbiters of public taste and domestic consumption" (21).

Giggie makes use of an enormous range of sources in constructing his picture of the conflicts, complexities, and creativity of black religious life in a period of inequality and violence. These sources include: African American newspapers - the best source for the history of black religion in the Delta; published and unpublished interviews with former slaves by the Works Project Administration during the New Deal; black autobiographies; and early recordings of work hollers, chants, hymns, and blues. In a book of just over 300 pages, there are 100 pages of notes and bibliography.


338 pages. ISBN 0195368029
Reviewed by Stephen Sizer, Vicar, Christ Church, Virginia Water

In recent years there has been an avalanche of books critical of the Christian Zionist movement. Authors include Don Wagner, Timothy Weber, Victoria Clark, Dan Cohen-Sherbok, Naim Ateek and Gary Burge as well as my own. It is therefore perhaps not surprising to find a growing reaction among Jewish Zionists wishing to defend their Christian allies. Stephen Spector’s work is representative of this genre of Jewish apologists.

The book purports to be the story of American evangelical Christian Zionism. It would be more accurate to describe it as a defence for a strand within Christian Zionism that is neither popular nor representative of evangelicalism as a whole, but which nevertheless plays a strategic role within the Israel Lobby. Spector outlines the agenda of organisations such as Eagles Wings, Bridges for Peace, Christian Friends of Israel, Christians United for Israel and the International Christian Embassy. These self appointed para-church organisations have publically disavowed both proselytism as well as apocalypticism. They are primarily lobbyists for a Zionist political agenda based on a reductionist interpretation of the Bible.

While critical of both evangelistic Christian Zionism (such as Jews for Jesus) as well as apocalyptic or dispensational Christian Zionism (such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye), Spector reserves his strongest criticisms for fellow evangelicals who oppose Zionism on theological grounds. So, although Spector interviewed over 70 evangelical and Jewish Zionists, he relies on anecdotes and paraphrases to portray the views of those he deems ‘liberal’ or ‘modernist’ evangelicals who regard biblical Zionism as an oxymoron. The chapter addressing criticisms of Christian Zionism is therefore one of the weakest and least convincing.

It is simply untrue to say that evangelicals who oppose Zionism "are closer to liberal mainline Protestants than to most conservative born-again Christians,” Academics at the bastions of evangelicalism in the USA, such as Fuller and Wheaton, repudiate Christian Zionism just as much as their counterparts in Europe like John Stott who describes ‘Christian Zionism’ as ‘biblical anathema’.

If evangelicalism is defined by the centrality of the proclamation of the evangel, it is Christian Zionists who, having reinterpreted the gospel, are closer in spirit to mainstream liberalism. There is
little evidence that Spector understands the theological presuppositions or tenuous biblical basis for Christian Zionism. He is reassured that none of those he interviewed tried to convert him and that evangelical Zionists can share the gospel by acts of kindness toward the Jews rather than through proselytism. This is not evidence of the orthodoxy, just the opposite.

Christian Zionists are the new Zealots. Like their 1st Century forebears, they are trying to impose a Jewish kingdom by force. Spector cites, without comment, Jack Hayford as promising, “if the Israelis need soldiers, he and his Pentecostal congregants will fight side by side with them.”

In any debate or disagreement Spector poses, it is always Zionists who are given the last word. So, in a dismissal of Walt and Mearsheimer’s definitive work on the Israel Lobby, Spector defers to Alan Dershowitz suggesting the author’s claims “are variations on old anti-Semitic themes of the kind found in the notorious czarist forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and in Nazi literature.” While the rights of Palestinians are repeatedly questioned, Israelis are “the victims of injustice, not the perpetrators.”

Disappointingly, for a book with 82 pages of notes and indexes, there is no conclusion or summary chapter. Ironically, he gives the last sentence in the book to Alan Dershowitz suggesting the author’s claims “are variations on old anti-Semitic themes of the kind found in the notorious czarist forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and in Nazi literature.” While the rights of Palestinians are repeatedly questioned, Israelis are “the victims of injustice, not the perpetrators.”


Reviewed by Roderic Vassie, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of York

It goes without saying that any theological discussion is bound to be academic, yet this is an excellent book and a fascinating read. In it Jackson seeks to address, from the perspective of classical Islamic theology, the question posed by William R. Jones in his provocative work, first published in 1973, Is God a white racist? Against Jones’s affirmative answer to his own question, based on a reading of black Christian theology, Jackson successfully demonstrates that, of the four schools of Sunni thought he examines, (p.158-9) “none of them embraces constructions of omnipotence that would bind God-fearing Black Americans to a piety of quietism, [insofar as each] defies Jones’s contention that the only reason that God would not change an evil such as black suffering is that God is either pleased with it or is incapable of changing it.”

Jackson’s study is divided into an introduction, in which is explored the argument propounded by Jones, five chapters beginning with the development of classical Islamic theology generally, followed by detailed examinations of the core doctrines of Jackson’s four chosen schools, each culminating in an application of their respective teachings to the question of Black theodicy, or divine judgement, all drawn together in a conclusion.

For each school, Jackson teases out the arguments which serve to undermine that of Jones. This is obviously not the place to describe them in depth, but their thrust can perhaps be encapsulated in proverbial sayings commonly used by Arabic-speaking Muslims today:

- Mu’tazilite theology can be summarised as “Justice is the basis of kingship” (al-‘Adl asas al-mulk);
- Ash’arism as “Our Lord wants it thus” (Rabbina ‘ayiz kida) or “Whatever our Lord wants is good” (Illi Rabbina ‘ayzuh kulluh kuwayyis);
- Maturidism as “There must be some wisdom in this” (Bi-ta’-kid fhik mah); and lastly,
- Traditionalism as “God helps those who help themselves” (Koran 13:11 - In Allah la yughayyiru ma bi-qawm hattah yughayyiru ma bi-anfushihim).

Throughout most of the book, one is conscious of an elephant reading over one’s shoulder. Jones’s argument is premised on a fundamental principle of “the categorical evil of all unearned suffering” (p.120). The absence of any relevant scripture renders the prompt dispatch of a non-Zionist Jewish acceptance of transgenerational suffering on an ethnic scale borne of communal responsibility for a breach of covenant. Yet in the final chapter, Jackson demonstrates how, from a Traditionalist perspective (as summarised above), black Americans cannot necessarily be absolved of responsibility for their plight as Jones would wish.

Regardless of whether it is earned or unearned, the quietism in the face of suffering born of God’s will, of which Jones (one suspects over-simplistically) accuses black American theologians, is repeatedly and roundly countered
in Jackson’s analyses of Sunni theology for, as the Koran states (2:258 et passim), “God does not guide the oppressive people.” While the courage is not given to everyone to perform perhaps the highest form of jihad, namely “speaking truth to power,” nevertheless in Islam it remains an immutable prophetic ordinance that “Whoever of you sees a wrong should change it by his hand, if he is able, or by his tongue or in his heart, and that is the weakest of faith.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. by G. Edward White
£14.00 ISBN 0195305361
Reviewed by Richard Parker

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., the son of the poet and physician of the same name, is remembered as the oldest Supreme Court judge to have served, one of the most widely cited United States Supreme Court justices in history and the author of some of the most important and literate judgements to have appeared in the United States. G. Edward White’s biography of Holmes is published in Oxford University Press’s Lives and Legacies series. This series has provided succinct, readable and accommodatingly priced (biographies this volume priced at £14 in the UK) of important figures from disparate disciplines ranging from Isaac Newton to William Faulkner. There has been a tendency, however, towards American writers and thinkers in this series, making it particularly relevant to those with an interest in the field of American studies. And students and scholars of this discipline will find much of interest in the life of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.; his sheer longevity meaning that his career spanned a series of historically crucial periods in the development of the United States.

The scope of Holmes’s activities in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries is astounding. Holmes, born into literary New England circles in 1841, found himself in the shadow of his famous father through his youth and early career, and strongly influenced by his mother, Amelia Lee Jackson, the prominent abolitionist, would fight for the Union in the Civil War. Following the war Holmes would be admitted to the bar in 1866. From this time till his appointment to the United States Supreme Court in 1902 Holmes kept himself admirably busy by, at first, practising law and producing numerous articles and, in 1881, his most important written work, The Common Law, a book that goes some way to enshrining the centrality of judicial decision to the development of American law. White is particularly engaging when he sets down the complex, and to modern ears somewhat dubious, circumstances around the appointment of Holmes to the Supreme Court. Theodore Roosevelt, who had himself achieved the Presidency in inauspicious circumstances would appoint his college friend Holmes in the face of fierce opposition and, as White describes it, in large part because of his conviction of Holmes’s apparently impeccable Republican credentials.

White, who is the David and Mary Harrison Distinguished Professor at the University of Virginia School of Law, is particularly persuasive when describing the legal questions that Holmes elucidated so brilliantly during his time at the Supreme Court; the period that provides the real meat of this book and its raison d’être. Thus we see Holmes involved at the coalface of American politics during the turbulent early years of the twentieth-century, initially making multiple judgements supporting the government’s positions on various rulings, including offering the exceptionally widely cited ‘clear and present danger’ majority opinion in the 1919 case of Schenck v. United States – an opinion that would become a central plank in the United States and her malcontents’ testings of the principal of free speech. Later, however, Holmes would modify his position on some of his early free speech opinions and, after dissenting prominently with a number of majority Supreme Court decisions, be taken up by younger and more radical voices as the ‘Great Dissenter’.

White is careful, however, to moderate Holmes’s radical reputation, insisting on the partisan editorial policies of those responsible for his reputation in the years after his death and the wide range of judgements Holmes made while at the Supreme Court, citing his ambivalent opinions on government intervention around working conditions and his changeable support of free speech as examples of how his acolytes may have simplified the complex character and thought of Holmes.

This book is handsomely illustrated and benefits from the useful inclusion of various primary documents between chapters that mitigate the occasional touch of (probably unavoidable) dryness in White’s legal explications. His lucid prose also serves to negate this danger, as does the admirable succinctness of the book. Its brevity points towards, however, a potential problem, as the book may prove both too general for legal historians and too detailed for the more generally inclined Americanists it must surely be aimed at. White’s far longer study of Holmes, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: Law and the Inner Self (Oxford, 1993) may well be the more appropriate resource for those looking for detailed analysis of Holmes.