Reviews

The Birth of the Anthropocene. By Jeremy Davies (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016) 234 pp. $29.95

The problem of the Anthropocene has hit the academy like a wave, as scholars far beyond the hard sciences are coming to grips with the implications that humanity is not just leaving a polluting mark on the earth but altering the very workings of the earth system. Davies has written an excellent commentary, which will serve both committed scholars and early undergraduates equally well.

The Anthropocene, defined by the point at which the agency of humanity began to irretrievably intervene in the dynamics of planetary atmosphere, geosphere, and biosphere, was first advanced in 2000, and is now under consideration by an international committee for adoption as a formal period in geological time. The presumption is that the committee will establish a formal date, a “golden spike,” for the beginning of the Anthropocene at 1945, with the detonation of the atomic bomb or, more broadly, with the radioactive chemistry embedded in sediments around the world in the nineteen years between the first detonations and the last open-air tests in 1964. But Davies rightly suggests that humanists need to take a much longer view about the implications of an “anthropogenic” geological period in light of the deep chronology required by the idea of geological time, and about the complexity of environmental change throughout planetary history, the “wild drama of deep time” (12).

Davies’ foils are not just climate change deniers but also committed environmentalists (Brower in particular), who romanticize a perfect organic harmony of planetary life disrupted by the Industrial Revolution. Davies proposes a more engaged and complex understanding of our place in the geohistory of the planet. Davies’ most impressive accomplishment in this book is his ability to ease readers into the key contemporary debates. In Chapter 1, “Into Deep Time,” he sketches the modern intellectual revolution that has moved geology from a rigid, virtually atemporal, gradualism to a historical, punctuated neocatastrophism, showing how humanity’s hand might be driving the rapid regime shifts that geologists now see in deep time.

Chapter 2, “Versions of the Anthropocene,” examines the paradox of planetary time and historical time, as explored by Dipesh Chakrabarty, as well as the global justice critique that views the “Anthropocene” as a “Capitalocene” in which the drivers and culprits are the specific actors reshaping the world economy. Davies resolves both of these issues in stressing a “Gaian” role of the biosphere in mediating and reshaping the geophysical planetary structure and proposing that we need to understand intentional economic action as similarly geophysical.

Chapter 3, “Geology of the Future,” opens with a gentle critique of the emerging conclusions of the Anthropocene Working Group to

1 See, for example, David Ross Brower and Steve Chapple, Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run: A Call to Those Who Would Save the Earth (New York, 1995).
suggest—with the political ecologists—that a “golden spike” at 1945 is simply one possible marker of a longer “end of Holocene event” reaching back to the destabilizing of the medieval world and the launching of European voyages of “discovery” and expropriation.

Davies’ first three chapters are a particularly useful discussion of the Anthropocene debate. His final two chapters, which take us into the specifics of deep time, can elicit a few quibbles. Diving into geological time in Chapter 4, “Rungs on the Ladder,” Davies restricts himself to the last 570 million years, the “Phanerozoic,” which he recounts in terms of the five mass extinction events preceding our anthropogenic “sixth extinction.” He might have done well to explore briefly the evolution of the atmosphere back to earth’s origins 4.6 billion ago. Moreover, a review of Phanerozoic geohistory in terms of Fischer’s Greenhouse and Icehouse epochs would have extended and simplified his account, providing a means to contextualize our reaching a CO₂ concentration of 400 parts per million (which Hansen places 35 million years ago in the Oligocene, not 3 million years ago in the Pliocene).²

Davies’ final chapter, “An Obituary for the Holocene,” suffers from an unnecessary millennium-by-millennium review of the contingencies of human history since the Ice Ages, before turning to the simplifying organizing structure of the Early, Mid-, and Late Holocene. Nonetheless, his conclusion that we need to think more broadly about the Anthropocene and about our place in an ongoing “end-of-Holocene event” reaching backward to the late fifteenth century and forward into our challenging future is a welcome and fruitful perspective.

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Comic Democracies: From Ancient Athens to the American Republic. By Angus Fletcher (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016) 209 pp. $49.95

In Comic Democracies, Fletcher offers a sweeping account of the comic form and its potential affinities with democracy. He argues that we ought to view democracy not as the best system of government for promoting the principles of justice, equality, and liberty but as the one with the kind of pluralism, pragmatism, and empiricism that make it a more sensible and effective form of government than its alternatives. Having set out this account of democracy in the introduction, Fletcher proceeds to offer a broad series of case studies illustrating the ability of various comic forms to promote such democratic sensibilities. Starting in classical

Athens with the comedies of Aristophanes, Fletcher argues that plays like the *Lysistrata* and *Frogs* “model an instrumental pluralism” and illustrate a “pragmatic logic” that can serve as resources for promoting democratic sensibilities (23, 24). The remaining chapters proceed in a similar fashion, demonstrating how comic forms in a wide range of texts, from Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1516) and William Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (1600) to Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1776), to name just a few, also resonate with a conception of democracy that is pluralistic, pragmatic, and empirically driven.

Given the range of thinkers and ideas surveyed, *Comic Democracies* is certainly ambitious in scope. The great strength of the book is Fletcher’s ability to draw what are often interesting and suggestive connections between thinkers and texts that are distinct both ideologically and chronologically. Yet, this impressive breadth often comes at the expense of some rather one-sided interpretations. For example, although the pragmatic understanding of Athenian democracy certainly has merit, readers of the Periclean Funeral Oration in Thucydides would likely be surprised to read that “where modern liberals have called on fellow citizens to ‘martyr’ themselves for liberty, ancient proponents of demokratia eschewed such otherworldly appeals” (8). Likewise, Fletcher’s claims that Epicurean philosophy was pragmatic and that Epicurus did not possess a “positive conception of ‘the good’” are odd, to say the least; Epicurus was a dogmatic philosopher who held the good to be pleasure (77). Moreover, even though Fletcher’s contention that Thomas Jefferson’s alteration of John Locke’s “life, liberty, and property” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” bears the influence of an eighteenth-century revival of New Comedy with Epicurean undertones is intriguing, the evidence is ultimately speculative. Furthermore, the idea that “Jefferson’s revision of the Declaration banished the logic of acquisition that had led to the festering inequities of demokratia” is also a stretch (89). Such passages call into question just how robust such connections are between comedy and democracy.

Despite these reservations, Fletcher is to be commended for his ability to bring together such a diverse range of texts and ideas. Although readers are unlikely to agree with all of his conclusions, Fletcher sets forth a suggestive and provocative argument that will be useful to those interested in the political dimensions of the comic form.

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*Global Scientific Practice in an Age of Revolutions, 1750–1850*. Edited by Patrick Manning and Daniel Rood (Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press, 2016) 401 pp. $49.95

Global history is a heavy industry nowadays. Historians have caught pace with the seemingly unstoppable late modern border-free movements of
commodities, capital, and, increasingly, people, turning to the study of past exchanges and circulations on a world scale. Expanding on the hitherto predominant “local” focus, encompassing region and nation, it is becoming increasingly clear that these localities are really the nexus points of a global scope.

That the history of science has been a little slow to join the flow is not surprising. Science, the quintessential modernist global project, is often conceived as a predominantly Western or “Eurocentric” affair—its origins located in European (subsequently Anglo-American) Scientific and Industrial Revolutions and its supposed “universalism” and “objectivity” in lockstep with exploration/conquest and colonialism/imperialism, replacing peripheral indigenous cultures with techno-rationalism. Surprisingly, however, critics and celebrants of the process told the same stories. Within the historiography of science, however, this hegemonic center–periphery model is fast being replaced by one much more multidirectional, in which the accumulation of knowledge occurs through multi-dimensional circulations in the world, resulting in a “renegotiation” of the center and a challenge to its universalism. The negotiation sites are always “encounters,” involving a compromising, sharing, and reworking of knowledge and practices.

Global Scientific Practices in the Age of Revolutions focuses on a crucial period, 1750–1850, when the very parameters and objects of late-enlightenment, early-Victorian science were becoming established. It highlights the spread of the Linnaean system of ordering, classifying, and naming the natural world, and how, at its periphery, it reinterprets and often resists the center. Microscopic local case studies are the sine qua non of professional historiography of science, often suffering a showy virtuosity of detail. The contributors and editors of this volume are aware of this problem. Even though the contributions are centered on such case studies—from the transport of tarantulas, hummingbirds, plant specimens, and tropical sugar to various parts of the world to such matters as Linnaean evangelicals, lost go-betweens, and even postal maps in India—each of the chapters moves perceptively from the particular to the general, offering profitable insights into how a new global history of science can be written.

Manning’s introductory methodological survey is surely one of the best overviews of developments in the field, describing the current methodological conversations between economic historians, historians of labor, environmental historians, and even philosophers of science. Jessica Ratcliff’s penultimate chapter, which integrates these strands into a genuinely global phenomenon, asks the question that haunts these and other discussions in global history of science: What caused the “great divergence” between the development of science in the so-called West and the apparent absence of it in other places? In one sense, the volume already supplies an answer in its refusal to reify the “West” and its emphasis on local events and conditions. Follow the movements closely and a global vision naturally arises.

Ratcliff, however, wants to go further by looking at the period through the concept of “big data,” with all of its uneven development and
complicated managerial revolutions. This is a promising move, but does it depend too much on our received contemporary notions of “big data” and “the market,” which, in some ways, are relatively new on the ground? The British Museum, the main imperial hub of natural history in the post-Napoleonic world, made a concerted move from an acquisition policy based on aristocratic donation and patronage to a radical-infused turn to the market as source of the circulations in natural history. Moving from gift to commodity exchange had a remarkable effect on the notion of a natural object, the idea of type-specimen, and the philosophically uncertain notion of “duplicates.” The move represented a conscious effort to depart from centralized expeditions, expropriations, and collections in favor of regional, ideological, and national sources of material. But Rood, in his excellent final chapter, reminds us that the exchange of knowledge between the center and the periphery, while negotiating, appropriating, and engaging local information, rarely operated on a level playing field.

This fine volume demonstrates the promise of a nuanced and localized global history of science. It advances the notion that the integration of that history of science should be integral to any attempts to write a global history.

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*Theoretical Perspectives on Historians’ Autobiographies: From Documentation to Intervention.* By Jaume Aurell (New York, Routledge, 2016) 280 pp. $145.00

This book represents an ambitious and interesting project, seeking to interpret a wide range of historians’ autobiographies—European and American—from the 1920s to the present. The result is, as the author intends, a genuine, and distinctive, contribution to contemporary historiography, and—with slightly less certainty—a commentary on larger developments in modern intellectual history.

Aurell seeks to identify several generational clusters of autobiography, though this approach works better in some instances than in others. In the interwar decades, a number of European historians—including Benedetto Croce and Robin George Collingwood—employed a humanistic emphasis to highlight the role of their discipline in responding to the troubles of this time. In contrast, soon after World War II, several American practitioners, including Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., and William Langer, used autobiography to emphasize the growing professionalism of the field in the United States.

The 1980s saw the emergence of *ego-histoire,* primarily in France, highlighting the intellectual journeys of figures like Pierre Nora and Henri Braudel, in a deliberate departure from the scientific-objectivist
paradigm that was gaining ground in the field. Aurell encounters more difficulty here in venturing a decisive generational definition for another autobiographical strategy that developed soon thereafter around figures like Eric Hobsbawm. A more literary, postmodernist approach, with representatives like Hayden White and Carolyn Steedman, followed. A final substantive chapter addresses what Aurell calls an “interventional” school, defined by such historians as Geoff Eley, who used autobiography to participate directly in key historiographical debates, particularly concerning the issues involved in the “cultural turn.”

No summary of the groupings in the various chapters should ignore the many intriguing individual characterizations that the book offers. Several historians, Philippe Ariès among them, examined their own relationship with the past and their engagement with history to discover their own personal values. Although Aurell is not the first scholar to probe historians’ autobiographies (he acknowledges the influence of Popkins’ earlier work), he unquestionably adds some appealing and informative portraits.¹

Aurell leaves a few questions unanswered: For instance, why did certain eminent, and a few not-so-eminent, historians write autobiographies whereas others did not? Or how does the twentieth-century literature relate to any earlier patterns, or to efforts in other cultures? Nonetheless, many historians will find much of value in the book as an opportunity to gain further insights about many practitioners whose work remains significant and to ponder their own disciplinary values in relation to some of the broader currents of our time.

A final question emerges above the generational flux that Aurell discusses: Why did so many historians of the past century, as opposed to scholars in other disciplines, decide to explore aspects of their own lives? One answer might be that this profusion of historians’ autobiographies reflects an ongoing concern about justifying and explaining a discipline that, even before our current troubles, fits less readily in a science-dominated intellectual landscape than had once been the case.

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Fascism: The Career of a Concept. By Paul E. Gottfried (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2016) 256 pp. $46.00

In Fascism: The Career of a Concept, Gottfried has set himself not one task but two equally formidable tasks. The first is to focus on the history of the term fascism with its ever-changing meanings, expanding uses, and fierce contestations. The second task is to reveal the essence of the concept by stripping it of the distorting semantic layers that have accrued to it during the nine decades of its life. In pursuing both tasks, Gottfried

provides fascinating, if disjointed, insights into the changing historiographical landscape of fascism studies. This landscape qua Gottfried is indeed a strange, eclectic, and elliptical one: Gottfried points to Ernst Nolte and A. James Gregor as worthy pioneers of the conceptual history of fascism, also giving credit to Zeev Sternhell and Stanley G. Payne. But he banishes Roger Griffin’s seminal study of fascism to a bizarre appendix, almost as a hasty afterthought, and strangely omits the towering figure of George L Mosse altogether.

Gottfried is interested in rescuing a meaningful definition of fascism from the many abuses that it has suffered—the habit, he says, of turning fascism into a political football tossed across the entire political spectrum. His tone is acutely polemical, attuned to a contemporary audience. Nonetheless, he is able to distance himself from partisan political canopies in a way that Goldberg, obsessed with a misjudged procrustean revisionist canon, could never manage.1 This approach allows him to be more reflexive about different contexts of meaning. Yet, Gottfried’s fundamental methodological presuppositions—that generic fascism categorically excludes Nazism, that fascism was mostly Catholic and corporatist, that it was distinct from all other forms of the interwar right, and that it should not be stretched beyond 1945 and Europe—run counter to most of the recent scholarship. For all but the most dedicated followers of Gottfried’s singular intellectual journey, these and other ideas about the nature of the political left and right, which he takes for granted and barely subjects to analytical test, will require substantial and serial suspensions of disbelief.

By the end of this proudly thematic and nonsequential discussion, Gottfried may have expended too much intellectual energy to make the simple point that fascism has suffered more than its fair share of political injuries because of “presentist prejudice and partisan enthusiasms.” Nor does he appear to realize that his own understanding of the concept will make more sense to a particular contemporary partisan audience on a particular side of the Atlantic Ocean. In this roundabout way, Gottfried’s ambitious, challenging, and ultimately frustrating history of fascism underlines the undiminished methodological cogency, as well as ambiguity, of conceptual history itself.

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The very word Rome evokes power. The two terms are regularly conjoined in public perception. Imperial conquest, territorial expansion,

military coercion, administrative control, and the exercise of nearly unchal-
lenged authority convey the compelling images that make Rome and power
nearly synonymous. In this book, Harris, whose long and productive career
has provided a plethora of important, influential, and enduring books and
articles, has given us thoughtful reflections upon the character and meaning
of Roman power over the course of a thousand years. This admirably
ambitious endeavor is a most welcome contribution by one who has
already contributed so much to the field of ancient history.

How does one go about defining, tracing, and evaluating Roman
power? Harris’ reach is wide, not only chronologically but also concep-
tually. His treatment does not confine itself to conquest and control.
Harris’ notion of power encompasses political, economic, social, and
ideological power. He asks large questions: How did Rome extend its
power so widely and so swiftly? What accounts for its remarkable endur-
ance? Why did it ultimately come aground (2–3, 113–114, 151, 220,
239–240, 263, 313)? What is the relationship between the internal power
structures and the extension of power abroad (11, 113, 304)?

Answering questions of that scope presents a formidable challenge.
In each chapter, Harris combines a selective survey of principal historical
events with valuable observations about their meaning and implications.
The first substantive chapter treats the great burst of Roman expansion
from the Republic to the early part of the Emperor Tiberius’ reign, in
which Harris sets the initial slowdown of imperial spread. The next
chapter examines the internal power structure that helped to effect,
and was affected by, external growth. Harris then reverts to the alternate
extension and contraction of power abroad for the next three centuries
until the time of Constantine, followed by a companion chapter discussing
the reasons for the endurance of empire in a period marked by flux
and instability, especially in the third century. This alternating structure
continues in the next two chapters, covering the period from Constantine
to the Arab conquest. The first of these chapters provides a historical overview of Rome’s contests with outside forces, including interspersed analytical commentary, and the second supplies a deeper probe into the failure of internal power structures to combat the external challenges of Germanic invaders.

How does Harris answer the imposing questions that he has set for
himself? The picture that he paints is largely a dark one. The years of ex-
pansion were made possible by an aggressive and aggrandizing mentality
promoted by a relentless commitment to warfare, an appetite for savage
violence, the infliction of sheer terror, and a drive for material gain—
features deeply ingrained in Roman society (37, 53, 57, 66, 74, 146,
304). For a number of reasons, merciless conquest came to an end in sub-
sequent years: Most of the emperors were not interested in it; Roman
forces were insufficient; the increase in the governing class through in-
clusion of local elites slackened the passion for military glory; continued
expansion made little financial sense; and national consciousness dimin-
ished in the wake of extended citizenship (125, 134, 136, 149, 218, 307).
Matters went downhill in late antiquity. Harris repeatedly emphasizes the grimmer aspects of Roman experience in the three centuries that followed Constantine—failings of the elite, declining loyalty to the state, foreign invasions, difficulties in raising taxes, weakening of the army, a shortage of resources that had both economic and psychological consequences, and, not least, religious conflict engendered by the advent and spread of Christianity (218, 228–229, 236, 239–240, 263, 292, 296, 301, 302, 313). It is not easy to sort out the relative significance of each of these factors, and Harris wisely defers from providing any rank order (239, 301).

One element in accounting for the decline stands out as especially intriguing. Harris makes the arresting statement that “Rome had not gone far enough in converting itself from an empire into a nation” (239, 300). Exactly what he means is unclear. He resorts to a Weberian definition, but it offers little help (215). The issue connects with a process to which he alludes frequently in the book but does not adequately elaborate—the absorption first of Italians and later of provincials into the Roman citizen body, and the effects that such absorption might have had upon a Roman identity (88, 92, 137, 150, 159, 166, 215, 218, 257, 308). The topic is vital for gaining a grasp of Roman self-consciousness, its development, and its fragmentation. Harris tantalizes us with scattered references to it, but nowhere pursues the matter. He has too much else to examine. Ideology plays a smaller role in this work than does war, territorial expansion (and contraction), material gain (and losses), and internal political or social conflicts.

The book does not purport to cross disciplinary lines. Although Harris has a wide acquaintance with economics, demography, psychology, and other disciplines, he gives methodologies outside traditional history only a marginal position in this volume. He makes an occasional nod toward comparative history, but the principal comparisons that he wishes to provide are between different periods of Roman history (6). That approach does not diminish the value of this publication, directed as it is both to scholars and to a wider audience. The span of the work, the learning that it exhibits, and the multiple insights that it furnishes for this key thread that runs throughout Roman history make it a most admirable achievement.

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Gun Culture in Early Modern England. By Lois G. Schwoerer (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2016) 261 pp. $39.50

Schwoerer’s history of the introduction and use of firearms in Tudor and Stuart England mixes business, political, legal, constitutional, and social history. Readers interested in business history will find much of interest in the detailed account of the development of the gun industry and the
Crown’s role in promoting it. The book presents new information about firearms manufacture in England and adds to current information on the use of guns by various social classes.

Unfortunately, despite claims to the contrary, scholars of legal and constitutional history will find nothing new, and, worse, a skewed account in this book of the statutes and practice. Schwoerer presents basic safety measures prohibiting firing guns in crowded areas and laws that lapsed from lack of enforcement as proof of serious restrictions on the public’s use of firearms. Such measures would not have been necessary if only a few Englishmen owned and used those firearms. Schwoerer cites Henry VIII’s statute of 1541 limiting ownership of handguns and crossbows—concealable weapons popular with robbers—to those with an annual income from land of £100. She ignores, however, the law’s assurances to yeomen; servingmen; and the inhabitants of cities, boroughs, and market towns, as well as those living outside of towns, that they could “have and keep in every of their houses any such handgun or handguns, of the length of one whole yard.” Nevertheless, in the book’s conclusion, Schwoerer claims a “striking feature” of England’s early modern gun culture was that “subjects whose socioeconomic standing was below a certain level (usually an annual income of £100) were legally disallowed to possess or use a firearm” (171). Her estimate that this group comprised 98 percent of the population is a regrettable inaccuracy.

The religious and social limitations of the firearms article in the English Bill of Rights of 1689 that she presents are well understood. The problem with Schwoerer’s focus is her timeframe. She fails to track the evolution of the English right to bear arms through the critical eighteenth century to the drafting of the American constitution and bill of rights. During that period, the 1689 limitations on the English right fell away. In 1765, for instance, Blackstone wrote that “the subjects of England” are entitled to “the right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defence.” In 1820, an English judge ruled, “A man has a clear right to arms to protect himself in his house. A man has a clear right to protect himself when he is going singly or in a small party upon the road where he is travelling or going for the ordinary purposes of business.”

1 33 Henry VIII, c. 6. Schwoerer fails to provide the text of the statute.
2 The English article about the right to be armed reads, “That the Subjects which are Protestants may have Armes for their defence Suitable to their Condition and as allowed by Law.” Protestants at that time were estimated to be 90% of the population. Catholics, having been urged by the papacy to overthrow the Protestant monarchy, were under a variety of liabilities until late in the eighteenth century.
Schwoerer’s disappointing failure to trace the evolution of the right to have arms distorts the English legacy. Other authors have accurately followed that evolution, and the U.S. Supreme Court even took account of it in its two landmark opinions affirming the individual right of Americans to be armed as a pre-existing right from the English legacy. Schwoerer points out that she participated in writing *amicus curiae* to the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark cases *Heller v. District of Columbia* (2008) and *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010). She does not add that in both cases, her dismissal of the English legacy of the American right to be armed did not persuade the majority of justices.

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*Historical Style, Fashion and the New Mode of History, 1740–1830.* By Timothy Campbell (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) 440 pp. $65.00

The jacket of Campbell’s book displays two versions of the same man wearing a different set of clothes. The figure labeled “a beau 1700” is bedecked in a towering wig and high heels. He reappears on the reader’s right as “a beau 1791,” attired in his own cropped hair and flat shoes. The juxtaposed figures capture the narrative arc of the book, which examines how British conceptions of historical representation between 1740 and 1830 were shaped by pictures staging fashionable figures from one era confronting equally fashionable figures from another era. Clearly, ideas about “datedness,” periodicity, and novelty affecting human behavior are posed and incarnated in such printed images. Conceptualizing fashion’s “serial alterations” as history’s “building blocks” (27), Campbell claims that “after the eighteenth century, an unprecedentedly influential and conceptually sophisticated historiography was an effect (author’s emphasis) of commercial culture and of the audiences and outlooks that commerce shaped” (27). More and more attuned to the vagaries of fashion, Britons increasingly saw themselves as capricious social products changing over time, subject to the imperatives of material culture.

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5 For other authors who have accurately followed that evolution, see, for example, Malcolm, *To Keep and Bear Arms*, esp. 113–134; Leonard W. Levy, *Origins of the Bill of Rights* (New Haven, 1999), 136; David Kopel et al. (eds.), *Firearms Law and the Second Amendment: Regulation, Rights and Policy* (Frederick, Md., 2012), esp. 345–783; Stephen P. Halbrook, *The Founders Second Amendment* (Oakland, 2009).

1 According to the credits on the book jacket, the images are taken from a 1791 set of hinged novelty prints, courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. The jacket design is by John Hubbard.
As a literary historian, Campbell grounds his claim on an analysis of historical writing, especially novels. Chapter 1 examines Anna Letitia Barbauld’s poem “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” (London, 1812); her essay “A Comparison of Manners, Athenaeum, II (1807), 512–513 (1806); and Walter Scott’s Waverley novels (London, 1814–1832), in which “conflation of dress with the ‘spirit of the age,’ of surface with essence, becomes a central problematic” (55). Chapter 2 explores the problem of clothing in fine-art portraits, such as those by Anthony Van Dyke and Joshua Reynolds. David Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste,” in Four Dissertations (London, 1757), and the portrait-auction scene in Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s play The School for Scandal (1777) are contrasted with the aesthetic theories espoused by Reynolds in his Discourses on Art (Chicago, 1891). In Chapter 3, Campbell focuses upon other writings by Hume, in particular History of England (1754–1761), A Treatise of Human Nature (1738–1740), and “Of the Study of History,” in Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary (1741), highlighting their “commercialist qualities” and positing them as a context for Hume’s exchanges with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an exemplar of anti-commerciality (131).

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, Campbell analyzes the place of dress in a range of literary works, such as Sophia Lee’s novel The Recess: or, a Tale of Other Times (London, 1783–1785); Barbauld’s essay “On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing,” in The British Novelists (London, 1820); William Cowper’s poem The Task (London, 1785); Maria Edgeworth’s Tales of Fashionable Life (London, 1809, 1812); Scott’s Kenilworth (1821), Old Mortality (1816), and The Heart of Midlothian (1818); and William Godwin’s novel Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century (London, 1817). Campbell also cites substantial secondary sources, and he provides an extensive bibliography.

A weakness of Campbell’s book is that it presupposes a deep familiarity with obscure English novels. Its strength lies in the way that it points to the influence of the fashionable figure in print culture as a means of measuring and apprehending time past. Campbell’s use of visual texts is discriminating. For example, he reproduces a composition from Thomas Jefferys’ A Collection of the Dresses of Different Nations, Ancient and Modern (London, 1757), labeled “Habits of English Gentlemen in the Years 1735 (a) 1745 (b) 1755 (c).” But instead of lining up the figures in the chronological order of the inscription, the eighteenth-century artist twisted “history” by picturing the gentleman of 1755 gazing curiously at the back of the man from 1735, who is unexpectedly placed in the center of the triad and engaged in a face-to-face encounter with his counterpart from 1745. Commercial modernity is thereby figured as a jumbled, unpredictable sequence of past and present material objects—objects that nonetheless attract the inquiring scrutiny of others who attempt to ascertain their meaning. “Material Texts,” the series to which Campbell’s volume belongs, provides a particularly apt characterization of this rich, intriguing line of inquiry.

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Adolphe Quetelet, Social Physics and the Average Men of Science, 1796–1874. By Kevin Donnelly (New York, Routledge, 2016) 219 pp. $45.00

The inventor of the concept of “the average man” is a subject of more than average historical interest. Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874)—one acceptable answer to the pub-quiz question to “name six famous Belgians”—is among the more fascinating figures of nineteenth-century science. The last attempts at a focused biography of him, however, are more than a century old. The Belgian savant is known among modern historians of science through the notion of “l’homme moyen” and of the related program of “social physics” (la physique sociale). Yet Quetelet’s project to build a lawful, quantified social science on the model of the natural sciences has often been subsumed into the ambitions of such Enlightenment and early nineteenth-century predecessors as Nicolas de Condorcet and Pierre-Simon Laplace, and his successors, notably Emile Durkheim, were rude about what they took as his deterministic conception of moral behavior. That is to say, Quetelet has not been considered a towering genius. “The average man” apart, he has no original methods or concepts to his credit. Although Donnelly accepts that judgment, he offers an interpretation of Quetelet’s work that wholly justifies serious and systematic historical treatment.

Quetelet has occasionally been called “the father of statistics” and one of the founders of quantified social science, but Donnelly is closer to the mark in suggesting an apparently deflationary view of him as “the father of modern counting” (113). The ambition to build a social physics was not novel; Quetelet’s innovation was the establishment of concrete data practices. Quetelet reckoned that the age of individual genius in science had passed; what was needed instead were coordinated global networks of competent observers and data collectors—average men of science, so to speak.

Given his projects in astronomy, meteorology, and criminology, Quetelet might be called a polymath, but Donnelly intimates that what drove him more than any specific intellectual or practical goal was the collection of numerical data that could secure state patronage and insinuate itself into the practices of government. The practices of data collection and counting were paramount for Quetelet, and selling the outcomes to bureaucratic patrons would permit even more counting and tabulating, which would, in turn, require more administrators (this sequence should sound familiar enough to any present-day academic).

Quetelet was an enthusiastic and skilled scientific entrepreneur, institution builder, networker, and intermediary between the scientific community and state bureaucrats. The idea of rational government policy based on masses of expertly processed data about the population was one way of enfolding in the state a version of what later came to be called Big Science. Donnelly locates Quetelet’s scientific salesmanship in the politically volatile setting of the short-lived United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830) and the emergence of an independent Belgium following the 1830 revolution. State-building and science-building went together.
In Quetelet’s view, the statistical procedures that produced the idea of the “average man” would attract state support, since the state had an interest in keeping track of the population and the distribution of physical and moral traits. Donnelly briefly treats the differences between mapping the temporal and spatial distribution of deaths, births, and of human physical characteristics and doing the same for such mental and moral traits as courage or musical talent. He is at his best in documenting the intellectual hand waving with which Quetelet responded to critics who argued that some features of human behavior could not be quantified in the same way as could the facts of mortality, height, and weight. Quetelet’s tendency was to respond that doubters would not have to wait long to learn otherwise.

Wisely, Donnelly’s purpose is neither to praise Quetelet nor to bury his reputation but to situate his work in the history of nineteenth-century scientific institution-building and its relations to the practices of government. The biography is a timely achievement.

Steven Shapin
Harvard University

_Harmful and Undesirable: Book Censorship in Nazi Germany._ By Guenter Lewy (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 268 pp. $34.95

We have come to understand the Third Reich as a “polycratic” regime of rival bureaucratic fiefdoms endlessly battling over turf. The only arbiter was Adolf Hitler, who preserved his own authority by allowing his lieutenants to squabble among themselves, even if doing so resulted in grotesquely inefficient administration. Nowhere is that entropy better illustrated than in the realm of censorship, wherein literature collided with, and was wrecked by, politics. In what was supposed to be a dictatorship, who exactly was in charge was never clear, and chaos was normal. Consequently, Lewy’s new history of Nazi censorship inevitably reads like a collaboration between George Orwell and Lewis Carroll—oppressive, wildly inconsistent, and based on ludicrous or impenetrable logic.

Nazi censorship began with the notorious book burnings of 1933, which were carried out spontaneously by student vigilantes. Josef Goebbels had little involvement, perhaps because he realized the events would not play well abroad. As Propaganda Minister, Goebbels tried to keep censorship in his own hands, working through the _Reichsschrifttumskammer_ (National Chamber of Literature), which controlled all professional authors. But he also had to reckon with the _Parteiamtliche Prüfungskommission_ (Party Commission for the Protection of National Socialist Literature), and its rival, Alfred Rosenberg’s _Reichsstelle zur Förderung des deutschen Schrifttums_ (Reich Office for the Promotion of German Literature). Even after these institutions were ordered to follow the instructions of the Propaganda Ministry, the various local and länder police forces continued to conduct book raids.
on their own initiative, as did the Gestapo, while the central criminal police office in Berlin continued (as under the Weimar Republic) to crack down on pornography. The Sicherheitsdienst (the intelligence service of the SS) used its network of informers to spy on publishers, and the Wehrmacht had its own extensive facilities for publishing and censoring books for soldiers. Even more government machinery was created to remove ideologically unsound textbooks from schools, but that project stalled because the regime mostly failed to produce Nazi textbooks to replace them. Sometimes the Ministry of Economics intervened to lift bans on books that had a strong export market. After all, Germany needed foreign currency to fund re-armament.

With the creation of the Beratungsstelle für das astrologische und verwandte Schrifttum (the Advisory Office for Astrological and Related Literature), the Nazi bureaucracy descended to the depths of black comedy. This department drew sharp distinctions between “scientific” and “inferior” astrology, according to mysterious criteria (158). Goebbels, Rosenberg, Martin Bormann, and other Nazi satraps fought absurd battles over the publication of astrological calendars (they considered appealing to Hitler, but at the time, he was busy planning the invasion of the Soviet Union).

Until 1940, lists of forbidden books were official secrets; publishers were not allowed tell customers which books were banned for fear that prohibition would make them more alluring. When librarians and booksellers protested, Nazi officials sharply replied that ignorance was no excuse; they ought to have guessed that certain authors were unacceptable.

In fact, censorship was wildly unpredictable. Goebbels countermanded a blanket prohibition of homosexual writers, but a biography of Mrs. Wallis Simpson was deemed too “sensationalist” (perhaps the censors realized that she was married to a Nazi sympathizer) (88). A ban on nudist books was imposed in 1933, lifted in 1936, and re-imposed in 1941. The dark novels of Hans Fallada (such as Little Man, What Now? [Berlin, 1932]) were permitted (Goebbels liked them), but Erich Kästner’s innocuous children’s book Emil und die Detektive (Berlin, 1929) was blacklisted, even though the movie version was freely shown. Public libraries were purged, but because librarians often had no clear idea of which books to keep and which ones to discard, the losses varied enormously, anywhere from 10 to 80 percent of collections. The order to expunge Jewish authors imposed an impossible task of bibliographic control. The director of the Cologne university library protested that his staff could not possibly determine which of their 400,000 volumes were written by Jews.

Many readers of this volume will find Nazi censorship to be as confusing as German librarians and publishers did. Lewy brings as much clarity to the subject as he reasonably can, but the scattershot crossfire of bureaucratic memoranda can numb the mind and glaze the eyes. Harmful and Undesirable draws frequently on Jan-Pieter Barbian (trans. Kate Sturge), The Politics of Literature in Nazi Germany (New York, 2013), which remains the most engaging and thorough treatment of the subject. Watch out for Michele Troy’s Strange Bird: The Albatross Press and the Third Reich (New Haven, 2017)—an account of a publishing house that
managed to evade Nazi censors and bring Anglophone modernism to Continental readers.

Jonathan Rose
Drew University


In the early American South, a region without a regular mail system or print culture prior to the 1730s, information exchange was not easy. Yet its inhabitants—Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans—created powerful channels of communication across colonial space. In _Informed Power_, Dubcovsky demonstrates how these largely face-to-face networks both facilitated and complicated the dissemination of news and the redistribution of power within and across communities. This nuanced account weaves together analytically the factors of greed, starvation, disease, customs, technical infrastructures, spirituality, language, and landscape to disassemble the notion that either a dearth of information vexed the early colonial South or that the rise of European power there was inevitable.

Dubcovsky’s thematic questions—“what information did people in the early South want,” “who acquired and spread information,” and “how [did] Indians, Europeans, and Africans use networks to move information”—guide readers across the book’s three parts and chronological unfolding of the early North American southeast (6–7). An opening overview of the vast geographical space linked by indigenous networks before European colonization focuses on the emergence of La Florida, “the center of a tug of war between imperial rivalries and colonial developments,” where Timucuas, Guales, and Apalachees controlled what information the Spanish had and how they acquired it (7). _Informed Power_ then turns to the extensive list of individuals who acquired and spread information—“spies, diplomats, sentinels, messengers, scouts, [and] traders,” among others—against the backdrop of the devastating spread of the English–Indian slave trade, particularly the Westo slave raids from the 1660s to 1710s, to demonstrate the interdependencies of an increasingly volatile South (7). The book closes with an analysis of how Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans used communication networks to challenge existing connections and “reassess which connections to rely on and who to include” in the context of Spanish appeals to fugitive slaves and growing English-sponsored violence (8).

This treatment of the sociopolitical landscape of the colonial South invokes the spirit of Harold Innis’ _Empire and Communications_ (Toronto, 1972), in which the capacity for information transmission is itself a force in history, its infrastructures inseparable from the actions taken through them. In this context, “networking information was not simply about
having the latest news or the quickest informer,” but “was a way of establishing parameters, articulating priorities, and enforcing both” (8). Dubcovsky’s interdisciplinary approach embraces non-European sources and nonliterary materials, such as Timucua written accounts and analyses of indigenous languages, pottery, and maps. “Indian networks,” she insists, “offer the best way to reconstruct the interconnections of the colonial world without flattening its many complexities” (212). Hers is a non-Eurocentric approach that requires analysis both beyond disciplinary differences and the cultural ones that dominate early colonial American scholarship.

Nonetheless, the South’s grim lesson is that information access and networking are not enough to preserve autonomy in the face of violence. In this book, information networks are more a lens for exploring causality and agency in the early South’s conflicts than forces themselves or windows onto network theory. In Dubcovsky’s ambitious narrative, the early American South was a complex, confusing region in which information and power formed a powerful nexus and the dissemination of news and ideas could make or break relationships and alliances, express codes of behavior and desires, and construct hierarchies.

Elizabeth Sullivan and Matt Cohen
University of Texas, Austin


Impressment, the coercion of men into naval service—whether by a man-of-war stopping a merchantman at sea or a press-gang capturing men ashore—is an issue most often associated with the War of 1812. In _Poseidon’s Curse_, however, Magra makes a compelling case that “the press,” as the abduction of mariners was colloquially known, played a pivotal role in justifying the movement for American independence. In arguing as much, Magra is swimming against the historiographical current to some extent. The received wisdom is that impressment was not common enough in British North America to motivate revolutionaries. Moreover, even when press gangs were resisted, crowd actions tended to be conservative rather than radical. Communities targeted particularly odious naval officers but did not consider these violent reprisals as part of any systemic critique of the British Empire. But Magra asks, if anti-impressment was largely apolitical, why was the practice mentioned in the Declaration of Independence as a core colonial grievance? As he shows, a more thorough investigation reveals the ways in which the issue of the press affected a wider array of interests than previously understood. When appreciated as an expansive Atlantic problem that implicated not only common sailors but also elite merchants, impressment serves as firm ground upon which to build a case for independence.
The two communities of mariners and mercantile firms comprise the bulk of Magra’s analysis. His chapters detailing the struggles of ordinary seamen against Royal Navy press gangs cover well-worn historical terrain, but Magra’s account certainly manages to capture the anger and frustration of those who succumbed to military authority. His particular strength is in revealing how omnipresent the fear of forced service was within maritime communities across the colonies during the eighteenth century. It is almost impossible to find a manuscript account of life afloat that is not rife with anxiety about the possibility of capture. But, as Magra explains, impressment involved more than confinement aboard a warship or a fear of death in battle. Sailors’ complaints about the practice also had a material component. The pay for naval service was notoriously poor; in many instances, officers discharged men either without pay or with IOU certificates that were nearly worthless. Oftentimes, years of wage-earning potential and productive labor were erased by an unlucky run-in with the press gang.

This material critique of impressment allied seamen most closely with merchants. Magra’s innovative approach is to demonstrate that the commercial community frequently complained to Parliament, naval authorities, and royal governors that impressment threatened their bottom line. Mariners’ attempts to circumvent it made labor scarce and drove up wages. Coasting vessels avoided areas where the press was active, thus increasing prices of foodstuffs and goods as they became scarce. The Royal Navy, which also exercised its right to commandeer civilian craft of all shapes and sizes, was often slow to compensate for its interventions. Merchants regularly resorted to William Blackstone’s legal treatises and John Locke’s writings on rights in protest; impressment started to look like the state-sanctioned theft of property and a ruinous economic imposition, both hallmarks of what good Britons considered tyranny.

Activists in mainland North America began to feel particularly abused after the powerful West Indian sugar lobby managed to secure certain legal protections from impressment in 1746. In Magra’s clever formulation, an anti-impressment “spirit of 1746” quickly emerged before a more general “spirit of 1776,” eventually joining up with other sources of agitation against Parliament, such as tax law and frontier policy. Scholars have suggested that colonial cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York were the real hotbeds of dissent during the post-1763 imperial crisis. If so, impressment was probably their longest-standing grievance. Hence, according to Magra, we cannot disentangle the press from revolutionary agitation. After a new 1775 edict stripped away even the slim protections against impressment that colonists enjoyed, closed New England’s access to the Newfoundland fishery, and ordered naval vessels to enforce those laws (patrol boats also required impressment to staff), the revolutionary die was cast. A new United States now proclaimed its citizens beyond the reach of press gangs.

In an otherwise entirely convincing argument, however, Magra commits a single sin—omission, or, perhaps better stated, gendered omission. His narrative focuses exclusively on men wrestling with impressment,
though women were just as thoroughly implicated. His silence about the plight of women is all the more curious given the book’s devotion to demonstrating how capacious a concern the press was throughout the Atlantic. No less an authority than Mary Wollstonecraft argued that impressment—due to the destitution and dire straits that it often brought to seamen’s mothers, sisters, wives, and children—was a women’s rights issue. Magra might have enlisted the words and actions of women in port cities in opposition to impressment as a contribution to the burgeoning literature about female engagement with revolutionary activity and politics. This is not so much to chide Magra for a missed opportunity as to note the research opportunities that he has created for future scholars by demonstrating the importance of impressment to the movement for American independence. All manner of histories regarding the revolution will now need to make room for this book, even as they work to elaborate upon, and refine, its conclusions.

Brian Rouleau
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The Great Yazoo Lands Sale: The Case of Fletcher v. Peck. By Charles F. Hobson (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2016) 230 pp. $45.00 cloth $19.95 paper

Hobson tells us that his decision to write about Fletcher v. Peck (1810) reflects its “landmark status as the first case to expound the contract clause and as the first application of judicial review to a state law” (xii). He is correct on both counts. The Georgia legislature’s 1795 sale of its western lands to four private land companies initially seemed unremarkable. Georgia had significant financial problems, and the sales secured needed revenue. Land speculation, in turn, was rampant and opportunities for investment and profit fit nicely within the entrepreneurial spirit of a rapidly developing nation. But after pervasive corruption was uncovered, the state passed a measure in 1796 to rescind the sales, memorialized by “a public burning of the notorious act and accompanying records,” a graphic and “singular act of purgation” (54).

The individuals who purchased the land in good faith were neither impressed nor amused. They initiated a series of legal actions culminating in Fletcher, in which the Court applied Article I, § 10, cl.1, which declared that “No State shall . . . pass any . . . law impairing the obligation of contracts,” thus rendering the rescinding act null and void. Hobson draws from his deep knowledge of the period to provide a detailed and highly readable account of the individuals, events, and contexts within which these disputes unfolded. In particular, he places the Supreme Court and Chief Justice John Marshall, its leader, at the heart of a process through which the Court assumed its rightful place at the constitutional table. As Hobson notes, Marshall arrived at the Court only in
the wake of John Jay’s refusal to undertake a second stint as its Chief. Hobson does not acknowledge Jay’s condemnation of the Court as an institution that lacked “the public confidence and respect . . . it should possess,” but he does correctly identify Fletcher and the contract clause as major elements in the Marshall Court’s quest to “protect . . . the people from the acts of their state governments” and “become the means by which the Constitution could operate effectively as a ‘bill of rights for the people of each state’” (178).

Hobson is also right when he describes the diminishing importance of the contract clause over time, especially evident in a decision that he notes but does not name, Home Building & Loan Association v. Blaisdell (1934) (198). His history is accurate and articulate. It is also potentially misleading. The due-process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, for example, may have provided a potentially important weapon against local abuses (198), though today it lacks the power of a robust contract clause, given the Court’s use of “rational basis review” to assess such claims (a standard that sustains virtually all economic and social legislation if the enacting body has a “reason” for its actions, no matter how implausible or silly that “rational” basis might be). Another factor in the diminished role of the contract clause that Hobson does not mention came in the wake of Cooley v. Board of Wardens of the Port of Philadelphia (1852)—the emergence of the “dormant” or “negative implications” of the commerce clause, which can be invoked as a limit on state authority when state actions discriminate against, or unduly burden, interstate commerce.

The notion that the Commerce Clause can be used in this manner has its critics—the late Justice Antonin Scalia and Justice Clarence Thomas, his fellow “originalist,” among them. They believe that the Constitution must be given the meaning and effect intended by the individuals who wrote or ratified, a notion that is especially telling for the contract clause. The departure from what Marshall described as the “great principle, that contracts should be inviolable” came in Blaisdell. Writing for the Court, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes took a lenient view, believing that the framers could not have intended to deny states the ability to deal with unanticipated, severe problems (“emergencies”) by placing such matters behind the artificial barrier of “contract.” Justice George Sutherland disagreed, arguing forcefully in dissent that history showed the opposite to be true.

Many historians and constitutional law scholars believe that Sutherland’s interpretation is the better one, which may well mean that the recent election, and the potential for President Trump to reshape the Court in Justice Scalia’s image, may give added importance to Hobson’s work. His account of the political, economic, and social dimensions of the Yazoo sales illustrates precisely the sorts of impulses and problems that the clause was designed to address. It is, for example, no accident that the clause has resurfaced in a series of cases challenging state and local actions taken in response to the recent recession and their own imprudence. Litigants now claim, with considerable justification, that a response to government
budget problems that cuts pension payments owed to their former employees impairs the obligation of contracts in precisely the manner that the framers contemplated. Hobson’s work shows that the clause is alive and, depending on the composition of the Court, may yet again become “well.”

Mark R. Killenbeck
University of Arkansas Law School

Prelude to the Dust Bowl: Drought in the Nineteenth-Century Southern Plains. By Kevin Z. Sweeney (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2016) 304 pp. $34.95

American histories of drought often begin with the 1930s. Scholars have long profiled farmers, ranchers, scientists, and rural communities that endured the ecological disasters of that decade. First-hand accounts, such as the one by F. A. Wagner—superintendent of the Branch Extension Station in Garden City, Kansas—capture the region’s plight: “The Drought of 1934 . . . coupled with unwise land use and tillage practices, gave rise in the Spring of 1935 to the most severe and widespread dust storms this country has ever witnessed. Occasionally a ‘Black Blizzard’ in the form of a rapidly moving billowy cloud of dust would move in from the north, at which times visibility was reduced to zero . . . . During such storms, midday was plunged into jet black darkness and it was impossible to see one’s own hand when extended in front at arm’s length.”

But, how did deadly fluctuations of rainfall shape the region before the 1930s? Sweeney expands this work by looking at numerous droughts a century before the “dirty thirties.” He argues in Prelude to the Dust Bowl that arid landscapes, dust storms, and prolonged drought has a much longer regional history. Although “the cyclical nature of climate was narrowly perceived and often severely misunderstood, . . . these repetitive climatic patterns and the misperceptions of them were not the only factors affecting the development of the region, but they helped shape the economic, social and political forces that evolved there” (xiii). Sweeney begins with Stephen H. Long’s expedition report “The Great American Desert.” Well-known to his contemporaries, Long’s designation of drought and desert described the region as “obviously unfit for any people attempting to establish an agricultural society” (27). Through a variety climatic, cultural, and environmental sources, Sweeney confirms that Long selected this designation for the region because his expedition happened to encounter one of the region’s lethal droughts. Although future accounts, such as Josiah Gregg’s Commerce of the Prairies (Carlisle, Mass.,

1 F. A. Wagner, “Annual Report of the Garden City Branch” (Garden City, 1932–1937), in the Branch Reports Collection, Richard L. D. and Marjorie J. Morse Department of Special Collections, Agricultural Experiment Station, Kansas State University.
revealed a region of fertile grasses as much as futile climates, the desert moniker stuck. Additional chapters trace how cultural views and environmental episodes of drought intersected to encourage resettlements of peoples and animals. From the bison migrations and the plight of Native peoples during severe droughts of the 1850s to crime, violence, and “boomer bust,” the nineteenth-century southern plains were plagued by drought. Strong harvests, healthy cattle, and successful military strategies succeeded or failed because of these conditions. Even so, Great Plains residents (and federal policies) abounded in a faith that agricultural thinking and federal economic subsidies could conquer intractable climates and destructive environments (224).

_Prelude to the Dust Bowl_ considers numerous interdisciplinary sources—scientific experiments, diary accounts, expedition records, and government reports—to offer crucial insight into how climatic shifts, ecological relationships, and cultural visions made and remade the southern Great Plains. One of the most powerful narratives in Sweeny’s telling is the drought-related plight of Native Americans—their technological and cultural innovations in response to drought as well as its influence on their disposssession. Further research about the region’s drought-ridden past are needed to prepare for the climatic uncertainties that lie ahead.

David D. Vail
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*This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy.* By Matthew Karp (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2016) 368 pp. $29.95

This landmark book is one of the freshest, most provocative, and most significant monographs to appear in the past decade. Ostensibly focused on southern elites’ control of antebellum foreign policy, Karp offers an almost iconoclastic telling of the relationship between southern elites and the federal government from the 1830s through the start of the Civil War, along with an institutional and ideological history of the southern elites who directed U.S. foreign policy.

Methodologically, the book is not particularly innovative, but Karp’s work situates antebellum southern elites more fully within broader Atlantic, hemispheric, and even global worlds than have prior works. What a difference a change in perspective makes. In Karp’s skillful hands, the received wisdom of a generation’s worth of antebellum southern historiography is no longer sacrosanct. For the better part of forty years, antebellum southern historiography has been dominated by an emphasis on differences and diversity within the South; the personalities of hotheads, eccentrics, and hothead eccentrics; and the supposed romanticism of archaic slaveholders. Embedded in these historiographical emphases is an assumption that the
South was backward and agrarian, out-of-step with economic and political developments in the larger Atlantic world, including natural-rights ideologies, political democracy, and industrial capitalism.

For a long time, historians accepted that southern elites’ actions, beliefs, and institutions stemmed from their defiant fight to maintain their anachronistic world in the face of modernity, industrial capitalism, and democracy. For the past decade, however, historians have begun to challenge the prevailing ideas about how southern slaveholders understood their place in the mid-century world; the national politics of slavery; the political economy of slavery; and the size, scope, and uses of state power by the pre-Civil War nation-state. Karp draws on these newer works to produce a strikingly original institutional and ideological history of the cabal of southern elites who directed U.S. foreign policy for the better part of thirty years.

British abolition in the early 1830s put southern slaveholders on the defensive. Fearing that the contagion of abolitionism would spread from the British Caribbean, southern slaveholders quickly gained control over U.S. foreign policy. Firmly in control of the State Department, southern elites adopted a policy of protecting and upholding slaveholder regimes wherever they remained in the Americas. This proslavery foreign-policy cabal also gained control of the War and Naval Departments, along with key congressional committees. Belying their reputation as advocates of small government and states’ rights, they sought an aggressive and expensive military build-up and program of modernization and claimed an expansive list of powers for the executive branch. Much like Andrew Jackson, they were sectional nationalists, not secessionists or separatists. They identified southern interests as national interests and worked to protect them by and through the Union. In the 1840s, the defenders of slavery increasingly became emboldened proslavery imperialists. Treating the Tyler and Polk administrations as more-or-less a single administration, Karp offers a novel but convincing analysis of Texas annexation and the U.S.–Mexico War, along with important U.S. overtures to slaveholding regimes in Brazil, Spain, and Cuba.

In the 1850s, southerners’ ability to force the U.S. Navy to move from sail and wood to iron and steam increased their confidence that they would be able to meet foreign challenges to slavery. Although they lost influence and numbers in Congress, they maintained control of the executive branch, including the key departments of War, Navy, and State. Seemingly secure from foreign threats, southern elites began to analyze the South’s place in the emerging global order, producing their own vision of modern political economy with slavery as its foundation. They might have been on the defensive at home, but they saw a bright future for themselves in the emerging global political-economic order.

The engine of industrial capitalism in Europe and the Northern United States was slave-produced cotton, while sugar, coffee, and tobacco fueled the new consumer classes. The emergence of free trade policies during the late 1840s in Western Europe furthered demand for slave-produced cash crops. European imperialism in Africa and Asia confirmed southern
elite beliefs, potentially producing new allies in the struggle for white supremacy across the globe. Leading British and French industrialists, merchants, and economists seemed to concede that Caribbean abolition was a stark failure. In the 1850s, Britain’s and France’s substitution of bound labor for slavery in the Caribbean confirmed southern claims that only bound, non-white labor could produce the cash crops needed to supply the demands of the mid-century economic order. After mid-century, southern elites convinced themselves, if not the rest of the world, that the civilized world needed the South and its system of plantation slave labor. Southern independence was not an act of desperation to save an archaic institution. It was a bold, offensive move.

Ranging far beyond foreign policy, this work is of immense value to historians in numerous historical fields, as well as to political scientists and scholars of international relations and foreign policy. Like any valuable monograph, this one raises more questions than it asks, inviting its fair share of minor quibbles and challenges. Karp frequently assumes points that could be subjected to monograph-length inquiries. But these traits are strengths, not weaknesses.

John Craig Hammond
Penn State University,
New Kensington

University, Court, and Slave: Pro-Slavery Thought in Southern Colleges and Courts and the Coming of Civil War. By Alfred L. Brophy (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 408 pp. $39.95

Brophy expands the literature about pro-slavery thought by analyzing the “ideas in circulation” at southern colleges and literary societies before turning to the pro-slavery thought of several well-known southern jurists. These popular ideas are more fugitive, less formal, but probably more widely available in the aggregate and thus more influential than systematic treatises. Brophy’s theme is that as the years passed, slavery’s defenders were increasingly attracted to a utilitarian defense of the institution as beneficial for masters and slaves alike. Important to the utilitarian defense was an emphasis on the importance of attending to the specific circumstances of society, in contrast to what Brophy’s subjects described as the sterile abstractions of Enlightenment thought.

Much of the pro-slavery thought that Brophy describes will be familiar to specialists, but his work’s strength lies in bringing to historians’ attention a set of previously neglected materials. Brophy’s discussion of cases dealing with the legal limits to masters’ power to free their slaves supplements the attention typically given to Thomas Ruffin’s opinion in State v. Mann. Two of his chapters—one about Brown University’s president Francis Wayland and one about the travails of Frederick A. P. Bernard at the University of Mississippi—may be of greater interest to historians of
education than to historians of pro-slavery thought. The discussion of Wayland brings to the surface concerns about how to evaluate past actions known today to be evil that are only implicit elsewhere the book.

Brophy’s discussion of Thomas R. R. Cobb of Georgia, author of a major pro-slavery legal treatise, counterposes “cold legal reasoning” in slavery’s defense to the “passionate . . . sympathy” expressed in anti-slavery arguments (227). These “cold calculations of utility . . . derived from a perception of hierarchy . . . evidenced by nature” (231). That juxtaposition also appears in Brophy’s discussion of Ruffin, William Gaston of North Carolina, and Joseph Henry Lumpkin, the first justice of Georgia’s Supreme Court. Again, the formulation is familiar in previous work about the law of slavery, but Brophy valuably brings it to a new set of readers.

Brophy notes in passing that slavery’s defenders sometimes also relied on sympathy, especially in their arguments that slave owners treated the human beings that they owned better than capitalist employers treated the human beings who worked for them. A more complete discussion of pro-slavery thought, even in its watered-down form in faculty lectures and literary addresses, might lead to some tempering of Brophy’s characterization of such arguments as utilitarian. His stress on the importance of taking local conditions into account is one area in which he might have deepened his analysis. Yet, even as it stands, Brophy’s book is a well-crafted introduction to pro-slavery thought as expressed in venues that historians have not visited often enough.

Mark Tushnet
Harvard Law School

Black Christian Women’s Activism: Seeking Social Justice in a Northern Suburb.
By Betty Livingston Adams (New York, New York University Press, 2016) 245 pp. $55.00

Adams’ monograph places two black Christian women at the center of religion and politics in Summit, New Jersey. Through the stories of Violet Johnson and Florence Spearing Randolph, Adams describes a white suburban community in terms of race and gender activism. Ordinary black women not only were leaders in their faith communities, but they also played a significant role in American religion and suburbanization.

Johnson and Randolph initially galvanized support for missionary and temperance work, aiming for small improvements in their community. They shifted their focus toward suffrage, which black women significantly aided, endorsing politicians whose policies would promote civic righteousness and urging Christians to understand voting as a spiritual practice. Rising religious and social conservativism in addition to the Great Depression exacerbated racial tensions, resulting in white marginalization of black citizens, and black men’s marginalization of black women. Though Jim Crow settled into the North, Adams argues that Johnson
and Randolph’s contribution to black women’s consciousness and activism laid the foundation for the civil-rights movement and womanism.

Adams’ work reveals a number of themes. First, women’s religious clubs, such as the Women’s Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention and the Women’s Temperance Union, heavily influenced women’s organizing. Black churches launched women into discursive and public leadership amid patriarchal, classist, and racist structures. Second, racial tension took different forms in the North and South. Black women in the North were able to form alliances with white women in ways that southern black women could not, but as Jim Crow spread, these divides became ubiquitous, particularly concerning anti-lynching and civil-rights laws. Third, white racism fueled support of black churches as management sites, which ultimately encouraged black communities to become politically engaged against white supremacy. The white-topped hierarchy that the New Deal favored, however, left many black citizens under the control of white economic power. Fourth, black women held diverse opinions about the relationship between religion, politics, race, gender, and class; they were not unanimous in support of causes or strategies.

*Black Christian Women’s Activism* explores the mixed motivations behind white people’s support of black church women’s activism, and the complications surrounding the alliance of black church women with white women’s organizations. Adams also explores how these relationships evolved over time. She examines the tenuous relationships between black men and women, particularly in the context of racial and class negotiations locally and nationally. Black women were constantly negotiating women’s work in the church and race work in the women’s movement.

Adams’ book will aid research that explores the relationships between politics and religion, gender and class, community organizing, and history. Her detailed, grassroots account of a lay woman and ordained minister subverts the typical top-down narrative in its analysis of how the themes of race, gender, class, and history interact with, and influence, each other. Adams’ demonstration of diversity within groups, as well as the variety of organizations devoted to particular issues, strengthens her work and enriches the narrative. She also manages to weave a superb historiography seamlessly throughout the book.

Courtney Pace
Memphis Theological Seminary

*Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century.* By Benjamin Allen Coates (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 284 pp. $35.00

After 9/11, lawyers for President George W. Bush’s administration argued that international law should not constrain American actions because international law ran contrary to the expansion of American
Yet, as Legalist Empire shows, international law and American empire are not antithetical. In fact, between the War of 1898 and World War I, international lawyers helped to justify, and even orchestrate, the United States’ expansionist policies. Working at the intersection of legal history and American foreign relations, Coates offers an original interpretation of the first two decades of the twentieth century—the period when the United States asserted itself as a world power—contending that lawyers played a central role in making U.S. foreign policy. Not coincidentally, every secretary of state during this period held a law degree.

But in an era before the United Nations or the Geneva Conventions, what exactly was international law? This is a tricky question that Coates spends considerable time parsing. No unified school of American international law existed in the early twentieth century; in fact, the idea that international law itself even existed was debatable. Coates, however, finds a critical mass of influential lawyers who shared what he calls a “judicialist” sensibility—a belief that legal techniques and institutions could solve international conflicts in the present and prevent them in the future (3). Not surprisingly, the international institutions that they proposed reflected American principles, practices, and interests. They often held up the U.S. Supreme Court as a model for an international court and insisted that matters like the Monroe Doctrine and the Chinese Exclusion Act not be subject to international scrutiny.

Many of the events covered in Legalist Empire are well known to students of early twentieth-century U.S. foreign relations: the annexation of the Philippines; the securing of the Panama Canal; the seizure of Dominican customs houses; armed interventions in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean; and the neutrality debates before America’s entry into World War I. Yet, from Coates’ perspective, what is otherwise familiar becomes new; he views these incidents through the eyes of the lawyers. Alongside Elihu Root and William Howard Taft, he introduces lesser-known yet critical figures such as John Bassett Moore and James Brown Scott, two of the most prominent international-law authorities of their day. He focuses not on the military or economic side of empire but on the ways in which lawyers legitimized foreign actions and protected American capital abroad.

Coates spends a good deal of the book deciphering the mentalities of American international lawyers such as Moore and Scott. He looks to their professional networks and organizations—such as the American Society of International Law (founded in 1906) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (founded in 1910)—to understand how they made sense of international law. He also examines the broader discursive context to explain why these lawyers frequently utilized the language of “civilization.” Thus, this book is not simply a diplomatic history but also an intellectual, cultural, and institutional one.

Yet World War I showed that law did not prevent atrocities. Interestingly, whereas President Theodore Roosevelt looked to State Department
lawyers to justify his military aggression in legal terms, President Woodrow Wilson—often portrayed as a champion of international law—expressly rejected the participation of lawyers in drafting the Versailles Treaty. By 1920, the judicialist project was in decline and the international legal community had split. Nevertheless, lawyers with diverse agendas continued to invoke the authority of “international law.”

Legalist Empire helps to expand the historiography of U.S. foreign relations by placing international law alongside military, economic, and cultural hegemony. It also complicates our understanding of international law, often treated solely as a post–1945 phenomenon, by chronicling its development and deployment in an earlier period. Ultimately, however, Coates wavers about whether law is merely a rhetorical cover for the application of other forms of power or is itself an instrument of American dominance. Nevertheless, this book belies the claim that law is neutral and justice universal. Law can favor the powerful, justify aggression, and carry an imperialist agenda.

Katherine Unterman
Texas A&M University


As anyone who has ever taught the U.S. survey knows, the New Deal is wedged awkwardly between the Great Depression and World War II. On the one side, it is preceded by a global economic crisis that highlights the growing financial and trade interdependencies of nations, and on the other, it led into a global war that lastingly altered the role of the United States in the world. Yet, the intervening time is a period of utterly domestic economic policy reform. Historians have been able to bridge this gap in their writings and teachings, but only sporadically rather than systematically. Patel’s The New Deal: A Global History, which deals with this notoriously introspective period, deftly combines 1930s foreign affairs with a comparison of domestic policies in the United States, in other industrial nations, and in Latin America, intertwining political, economic, and cultural themes into a narrative in which the New Deal era becomes ripe with transnational connections.

Patel certainly does not challenge that the New Deal described a domestic policy. Instead, he shows how the global context of imploding economies and crumbling democracies were clear motivations for President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s focus on domestic stability. The New Deal was a refutation not only of domestic predecessors but also a deliberate alternative to developments abroad that “seemed to be harbingers of a global Ides of March” (48). While the New Deal self-consciously pursued a model of insulationism—which Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg described as “all the isolationism which modern circumstances
will permit”—it also had much in common with political trends abroad. For example, the Civilian Conservation Corps was decidedly civilian in a deliberate contrast to the Freiwillige Arbeitsdienst in Adolf Hitler’s Germany, though both institutions illustrated the surge of the state and the global rise of the power of planning. New Deal public-works programs were meant to support faith in the nation’s democracy rather than erode it, but big infrastructure was the measure of “civilizational achievements” in the United States as well as overseas (103). As New Dealers drew on international trends, studied European welfare states, monitored the rise of fascism overseas, and formulated ideas in opposition to Nazi and communist alternatives, they gradually expanded the meaning of the term security, laying the groundwork for a “a pluralist and diverse notion of national identity” that defined the United States after World War II.

As compelling as this global contextualization of the New Deal is, Patel’s greatest achievement lies in his masterful integration of narrative strings that most of us have long found difficult to tie together. The many transnational connections that Patel makes are likely to surprise even the most attentive students of the subject. Whether tracing the links between the New Deal and Philippine independence and between Roosevelt’s silver policy and China’s civil war or explicating Roosevelt’s aspirations for cultural exchange as a tool in international diplomacy, Patel delivers the details that enrich his main argument. This book will help historians to rethink the way in which they understand the New Deal.

Volker Janssen
California State University, Fullerton


Most scholars of U.S. poverty policy cite the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law as the engine driving a dramatic expansion in the rights of America’s poorest families to receive federally funded aid. Founded in 1965 by Ed Sparer, a Communist Party activist and garment union lawyer turned “welfare law guru,” the Center crafted a litigation strategy that assisted poverty lawyers across the United States in mounting cases intended to overturn state laws limiting poor people’s rights to public assistance. Between 1965 and 1970 they went a long way, though definitely not all the way, toward achieving that goal.

In three short years, Sparer and his legion of poverty lawyers won three famous U.S. Supreme Court victories—King v. Smith (1968), Shapiro v. Thompson (1969), and Goldberg v. Kelly (1970)—that established poor people’s right to welfare as an entitlement of American citizenship. King v. Smith overturned “substitute father” rules that allowed states to refuse aid to any woman found with evidence of a “man in the house,”
even if he was not her children’s father. In *Shapiro v. Thompson*, the Court overturned residency requirements mandating that a mother live in a state for a certain length of time before she could apply for government aid. Finally, in *Goldberg v. Kelly*, the Court ruled that welfare benefits were to be seen more as “property” than as a “gratuity” and that those benefits could not be terminated without due process, via a fair hearing. These decisions, coming in rapid succession, seemed radically to reframe American welfare law and popular understandings of public assistance, transforming poor mothers and children from wards of the state to rights-bearing citizens.

In *States of Dependency*, a profound and richly detailed reflection on the evolution of the right to government aid in the mid-twentieth-century United States, Tani, acknowledges the importance of Sparer and the Center. She argues, however, that, procedurally as well as intellectually, the idea of welfare as a right can be traced back to the New Deal and to the social workers, lawyers, politicians, and intellectuals who shaped the powerful central state to which it gave rise. The argument is persuasive, but she does not stop there—far from it. Tani shows that the elaboration and cementing of welfare rights began in the 1930s and continued into the 1970s, propelled not only through activism like Sparer’s but also through myriad interactions between federal, state, and local administrators; social workers and recipients; and what she calls the “legalization of American poor relief” (8). With this phrase she is referring to the lawyers who represented aid recipients making claims through the courts, as well as to the legal battles in which state administrators challenged federal welfare regulations that they did not wish to honor.

Through these exchanges, Tani argues, the original titles of the Social Security Act, on which our national system of aid to the poor is based, were repeatedly interpreted and re-interpreted. In her words, federal laws spawned “hundreds of state public assistance laws, and thousands of federal and state administrative regulations” (20). Only by paying close attention to these incremental changes—and to the ever-shifting power struggles that they sparked between local, state, and federal welfare officials; between lawyers, politicians, and social workers; and between the poor and everyone who wielded power over them—can we understand the long history of welfare rights.

Tani’s approach teaches about more than welfare rights. It offers new insights into the history of the national government and its relationships to state, city, and local governments. The concept of “dependency” is pertinent on many levels—not just the much-vilified dependency of poor mothers receiving aid in the form of cash and food but also the increasing dependency of state administrators on federal monies and of local governments on assistance from state and federal coffers.

A short review can hardly do justice to Tani’s approach or what it has enabled her to achieve in this book. She has certainly built on the scholarship of Quadagno, Gordon, Kessler-Harris, and other legal
The scholarship revealed the gender and race biases that created a two-tiered and unequal system of government aid—programs aimed at white men that were true entitlements and others geared toward single mothers that stripped recipients of constitutional rights and subjected them to invasive forms of surveillance. But she also steadily and incisively reads the meanings in all of the myriad parts that contributed to the American system of poor relief, finding in their constant whirring the forces that impelled change at every level. As Tani writes in the book’s last line, “States of Dependency offers few lessons for launching a revolution, but it does help identify the everyday opportunities that produce change itself” (282).²

Annelise Orleck
Dartmouth College

Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s Native Archive and the Circulation of Knowledge in Colonial Mexico. By Amber Brian (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 2016) 196 pp. $55.00

As Europeans fanned out to conquer the world, they quickly learned that the most effective way to establish and maintain sovereignty was to work through native rulers, but determining just who comprised this category proved unexpectedly problematical. Colonizing powers had several alternatives. In India, for example, the British suppressed some existing entities and brought them under direct rule, establishing new states for services rendered and promulgating sanads (charters) as necessary to maintain a semblance of continuity.

Throughout this process, native informants proffered formal declarations about the past, especially concerning affairs immediately prior to the imposition of colonial rule. Colonial officials relied heavily on those data whenever they suited their own changing political aims. Struggles over legitimacy could persist for decades, generations, even centuries. The alacrity with which the conquered people absorbed and enthusiastically advanced the arguments that appeared to be most appealing to the colonizers is telling. Such occasions became reciprocal and repeated opportunities for cost/benefit analysis, in which the indigenous parties sought advantage by whatever means available.

² This review was not written by a distanced critic. I have known Tani since she was an undergraduate and have been a scholar of welfare history and policy for much longer. Any good teacher must be open to learning from her students. But to learn as much about my field as I have in reading this book is a rare and gratifying experience.
When the Spanish arrived in central Mexico, Tetzoco (né Texcoco), who was in subsidiary alliance with the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, was allowed to maintain quasi-independence under Spanish rule. Inevitably, disputes quickly surfaced regarding “legitimacy” there, enduring for at least 150 years. Near the end of this period, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a scion of the Tetzocan royal family, produced and/or acquired several works purporting to describe the pre-contact history of Tetzoco, which in his hands—surprise!—fared rather better than other sources would suggest.

As her title indicates, Brian’s work is concerned with the ways in which local historical claims were developed, shared, rehashed, and reconfigured by various interest groups, even as late as the end of the seventeenth century. Brian provides a detailed and useful account of Ixtlilxochitl’s manifold contribution to the revision of prehispanic Mexican history. As a member of the Tetzocan ruling dynasty and a Hispanized member of the civil service, Ixtlilxochitl was able to supply a composite account of Tetzoco. He had the gravitas to launch it as the accepted canonical version for another three centuries. Like other indigenous historians in scores of other times and places, he learned how to tell the colonizers what they wanted to hear, in a discursive style that aped their own.

The undoubted cynosure of Ixtlilxochitl’s oeuvre was Nezahualcoyotl, who reigned during the fifteenth century. To take him at his word, Nezahualcoyotl was the quintessential philosopher-king/warrior (like Alfonso X?) whose mythic credentials were based on a return from childhood exile to reclaim the throne and a long succession of triumphant military campaigns. In Brian’s work, which contributes to a spate of recent studies about Ixtlilxochitl and his ilk, use of the term circulation is extraordinarily apropos. It encapsulates the fatuity of treating this genre on an as-read basis, reminding scholars to tread gingerly when they deploy this category to reconstruct the history of pre-contact central Mexico.

David Henige
University of Wisconsin, Madison


In the preconquest period, the Nahuas, the indigenous peoples of central Mexico, spoke of family in terms of larger kinship units that shared a common space—cemithualtin, “those of one patio.”¹ Mangan’s beautifully

written and exhaustively researched book inspires the question of whether colonial families should be described as *cemallkalltin*, those of one ocean. Mangan’s book reconsiders the concept of family within the sixteenth-century Spanish empire through a transatlantic approach that illustrates the customary, emotional, and economic ties between Spain (primarily Seville) and Lima and Arequipa, which even an ocean could not dissolve. In analyzing the evolution of family within an Iberian context, Mangan’s study offers an excellent model of a history that is both global and local, while in the process examining whether the Atlantic served to unite or divide imperial peoples, a theme that she first explored in her co-edited volume, *Women of the Iberian Atlantic*.²

Mangan does a masterful job of tempering prescriptive literature with the local practices and lived experiences of men, women, and children that emerge from mundane documents, particularly wills (more than 500) and judicial records. Family, Mangan acknowledges, was an institution of empire, but in the colonial context, despite royal laws, decrees, and expectations, it evolved into a protean social unit and not a reproducer of an idealized social order. Family became a flexible body, accommodating both Incaic and Iberian traditions, as well as new members, including fathers (local and long-distance), surrogates, *hijos naturales* (illegitimate children), estranged indigenous mothers, and family members in Iberia. These arguments challenge previous scholarly interpretations, which viewed family in this period as configuring rigid binaries of indigenous/Spanish, legitimate/illegitimate, and Iberian/American. By introducing heretofore unconsidered protagonists into the narrative, Mangan convincingly illustrates how empire building placed strains on kinship on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet, in kind with other colonial institutions, the family underwent a form of *mestizaje*, creating the conditions by which America became a place to “sustain” family as it generated “new branches on the family tree” (112).

*Transatlantic Obligations* adds another layer to the growing genre of Atlantic family studies, as it contributes to the literature about gender and ethnohistory.³ In it, family serves as an entry to broader discussions about indigenous resilience, societal norms, and cultural change. Among the book’s novel contributions are Spanish fathers who emerge as men who regarded their American children with care and a sense of responsibility and their mestizo children who are integral (if not always favored) members of familial units. Navigating the delicate balance between indigenous agency and exploitation, Mangan illustrates that

notwithstanding conquest and violence, survival, innovation, and accommodation led to new family patterns and practices that were the fulcrum of everyday life.

Mangan’s discussion of change over time within family configurations furthers our understanding of sixteenth-century Peru and the dynamics of transatlantic migrations and interactions. Cogent and readable, Transatlantic Obligations will appeal to students of all ranks and professional scholars. Ultimately, it challenges us to reconsider whether the heterogeneous “modern family” of our period is such a recent creation.

Dana Velasco Murillo
University of California, San Diego


Securing Sex is a major contribution to our understanding of the Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964 to 1985, using balanced, rigorous interdisciplinary methodology to offer new perspectives on a dark period in Brazilian history. The book explores the evolution and adaptation of a highly flexible and sometimes inchoate political right wing to cultural change, and the subsequent articulation of understandings of sexuality, decency, and citizenship in response to those adaptations. Cowan analyzes in detail the connection between Brazil’s right wing and a broader fear of modernization to show how right-wing thinkers and policymakers conflated changing social mores with communist subversion. In some cases, right-wing leaders did so disingenuously, to attract support for their own repressive goals. But Cowan reveals a more prevalent sense on the right that the increasing prominence of premarital sex, homosexuality, birth control, marijuana use, and a host of other cultural transformations in Brazilian society were manifestations of communist conspiracy.

Cowan is primarily a cultural historian, analyzing shifting sensibilities through careful readings of a diverse array of evidence ranging from right-wing pamphlets and political cartoons to theatrical productions and films. But he is also a serious intellectual historian, giving right-wing thinkers their due, carefully considering their participation in the contentious debate that characterized the period. The panicked reactions of conservative moralists to an apparent loosening of social restrictions offer many opportunities for amusement, which, to his credit, Cowan does not miss, reproducing outlandish cartoons and bizarre quotations that show how easily moral outrage turned into paranoid delusion with a rightward turn of the screw. But he by no means dismisses the complexity and sophistication of subtler right-wing thinkers, such as the prominent Catholic conservative Gustavo Corção. One of the strengths
of Cowan’s interdisciplinary work is to show how Corção’s ideas became intensified and distorted in the echo chamber of new think tanks and military circles. Cowan grounds this analysis firmly in a social-historical inquiry that is well attuned to the changing material circumstances and characteristics of Brazil’s largely conservative middle class.

Cowan conducted research in a dozen archives, including several restricted-access military archives, uncovering rich and previously unexplored textual evidence, such as internal military communiqués. He balances this evidence with a judicious use of the popular press from cities as widespread as Porto Alegre in the far south to Recife in the northeast, moving beyond the focus on Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo that characterizes many studies. He also draws effectively from oral histories, few in number but rich in detail and reflection. This varied approach gives the book a satisfying evidentiary breadth and depth.

In the final chapters, Cowan demonstrates the contradictions that emerged during the later stages of the dictatorship. As the regime sought to stoke consumption in the middle-class leisure sector, to protect a domestic film industry that specialized in slapstick sex comedies, and to appease a restive student population, it began to sponsor some of the cultural manifestations that early hardliners vociferously had condemned. Unable to resolve these contradictions, the regime became increasingly incoherent. In the meantime, the same cultural forces of change that had initially frightened the right wing coalesced into identity-based movements, pushing for re-democratization. Cowan thus emerges with a new understanding of both the logic behind the dictatorship and the forces impelling it toward a gradual relaxation of standards from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s.

Bryan McCann
Georgetown University

Creating Charismatic Bonds in Argentina: Letters to Juan and Eva Perón. By Donna Guy (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2016) 173 pp. $95.00 cloth $29.95 paper

Although other historians of Argentina have examined letter writing to the Peróns, Creating Charismatic Bonds is the first book-length study of the subject. Guy places charisma—a slippery concept that the most recent analyses of Peronism have eluded—at the center of her examination by asking what role letters played in forming and maintaining the relationships with the people and shaping the leaders’ charismatic personalities. Broadly defined, charisma alludes to a set of qualities that enables leaders to establish strong personal and emotional bonds with their followers. Early studies of Peronism have defined President Juan Domingo Perón as a classic example of a populist leader whose charisma attracted people, built relationships with them, and created one of the most powerful and
enduring political parties in the region. Biographies of first lady Eva Perón have also emphasized her charismatic appeal as well as her pioneering involvement in governmental matters. Whereas early studies generally approached charisma as a top-to-bottom strategy to manipulate the uneducated masses, Guy argues that letter writing shows the rationality and self-interest of Peronist followers as well as the reciprocal relationship between the ruler and the ruled that legitimized a political system—two important conclusions reached by the latest scholarship of Peronism.

The book is divided into six chapters reflecting the contents of the letters. Four chapters deal with letters fundamentally addressed to Evita in which the writers asked for a spot in the temporary shelters for women and children run by her foundation and other charitable institutions and pensions for the elderly and the infirm. These letters provide a window onto women, the nonunionized working class, the poor, and inhabitants of the interior. Guy affirms that these letters reveal a historical pattern of citizens approaching governmental authorities in search of help, but her introduction of President Hipólito Yrigoyen and the Radical Party as a precedent is brief. The other two chapters examine letters written to Perón by both individuals and organizations to express needs and make policy recommendations for the government. The content of these letters is novel; Perón was the first president to invite citizens to make suggestions for economic and social policies, fundamentally as part of his second five-year plan for governing.

Guy does not read the letters as texts or cultural artifacts; nor does she interrogate communicational discursive strategies or perform a textual analysis of patterns, structures, and scripts. Methodologically, she organizes and examines the letters in terms of their content, with extensive quotations that vividly reflect the suffering as well as the endurance and determination of the unprivileged sectors. In many cases, she offers rich descriptions of the petitioners’ situations—especially among those requesting assistance for children or charitable help—since the archived files provide not only the letters but also documents from social workers or government officials, responses from the state or the foundation, and, in some instances, reports about how situations were resolved.

Guy stresses the letters as tools to bypass the bureaucracies and secure direct communication with the leaders, but, overall, her emphasis on the requests and the stories behind them moves the analysis away from the role of correspondence in creating a charismatic bond. As a result, the book reads more effectively as a social history of the struggles, demands, and suggestions that the unorganized poor voiced to the political leadership and their inadvertent assumptions about rights, the relationship between citizens and the state, and patronage than as a resignification of charisma and its role in constructing Peronist leadership.

Natalia Milanesio
University of Houston

The subject of this book is broader—and more interdisciplinary—than its title suggests. For the precolonial era, Kane is largely concerned with intellectual history in the narrow sense of the written ideas of West African Muslim scholars in Timbuktu and elsewhere (especially the Western Sahara and Senegal), since such texts are the main evidence available for this period. However, even in this section, he provides considerable information about the economic base and market for such learning, its institutional form as well as, from the late seventeenth century onward, the involvement of some clerics in jihadist politics—that is, efforts to take over local states and make them conform to Islamic legal norms. Kane’s treatment of such topics as slavery and warfare is largely focused upon their discussion by Muslim scholars rather than what happened on the ground, but he is, after all, only claiming to write an intellectual history. This half of the book is based primarily upon secondary sources, a literature that Kane knows well and is able to synthesize in a clear fashion. Moreover, he is learned enough in Arabic and Islamic sciences to present and comment authoritatively upon some of the key primary texts.

Once he enters the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Kane engages more in what he calls “the political sociology of Islam in West Africa” (178), making considerable use of his own research about Nigerian Islamic movements and Muslim institutions of higher education throughout tropical and southern Africa. This material is informative and insightful, as is his discussion of current conflicts between established Sufi Islam and various fundamentalist movements, including Boko Haram in Nigeria and the 2012 occupation of Timbuktu and northern Mali by North African jihadists.

Kane’s account of African Islamic universities is particularly original, informed by sensitivity to the tensions between the use of Arabic and European languages. He also shows an exceptional understanding of the efforts to combine closed traditions of Islamic learning with the more open, inclusive, and cosmopolitan Western university systems that he perceives as setting the standard for modern academic life.1 The analysis of this subject (as well as in his chapter on “Islam in the Post-colonial Public Sphere”) considerably broadens the scope of intellectual history to include the ideologies emerging from disillusionment with the failures of secular modernization. The methodology, however, remains restricted to the study of institutions and politics rather than embracing a genuine sociology or ethnography of students and faculty at the new universities or participants in various West African Islamic movements

1 For a valuable series of case studies about this topic, see Mbaye Lo and Muhammed Haron (eds.), Muslim Institutions of Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa (Basingstoke, 2016).
or media networks. However, Kane cites a number of scholars who have undertaken such work.

The book begins with an account of Kane’s own education in Senegal and France through a combination of secular institutions and the Muslim schools maintained by his mother, a daughter of Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé, a key figure in twentieth-century West African Sufi history. This autobiography, to which he returns periodically in later chapters, adds an appealing personal dimension to this work and helps to define Kane’s own position as both a practitioner of the tradition that he studies and a sophisticated external observer of its development. Without being in any way polemical, his book is an attempt to promote respect among what Kane calls “Europhone intellectuals” for the long history of Islamic thought in Africa and to bring the “Arabophones” who carry on this heritage into the fold of modern learning. Regardless of whether his effort to overcome contemporary African conflicts succeeds, Kane has produced a valuable survey that should remain the classic reference in its field for some time to come.

Ralph A. Austen
University of Chicago

Beyond the State: The Colonial Medical Service in British Africa. Edited by Anna Greenwood (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016) 208 pp. $105.00

The goal of this edited collection is to bring “new eyes and new perspectives” to the study of the Colonial Medical Services (CMS) in British Africa (1). In doing so, the book broadens the conversation between colonial medical historians and scholars in religious studies, anthropology, and other fields, expanding our view of how colonial systems are shaped over time and inspiring us to think beyond traditional sources and categories. In her introduction, Greenwood argues that the CMS sought to portray itself as a white, male, and all-British institution; official archives reflect as much. Though acknowledging its often racist and self-serving policies “ultimately coloured by colonial self-interest” (14), Greenwood seeks to complicate the picture of a homogenous medical service, noting that the physicians were a mixed and “eclectic bunch” whose interactions with a diverse set of stakeholders in specific contexts gave shape to, and limited, specific policy ideas and interventions (9).

The seven chapters that follow, focusing mainly on the first half of the twentieth century, test this idea in various ways through case studies, primarily but not exclusively centered on eastern Africa. Greenwood contributes to two of these chapters. Her single-authored work about the Zanzibar Maternity Association demonstrates the direct and indirect ways by which British authorities sought to undermine the considerable influence of Arab and Indian community funders of the organization.
The second, co-authored with Harshad Topiwala, tells the important story of the large contingent of Indian doctors in the Kenyan medical services whose marginalization after 1923 reflected an “unambiguously exclusionist line” that ultimately resulted in the erasing of their contributions from official records (74).

The sometimes-uneasy cooperation between mission and state-sponsored physicians is the subject of three contributions. Yolana Pringle explores the Mengo Hospital as well as other stations in Uganda where CMS officials relied on missionaries to provide health care between the 1890s and 1920s. Her argument that missionary contributions were far-reaching are consistent with Markku Hokkanen’s findings about the Malawi health services, in which the “entwined” mission and state doctors, although not always in ideological agreement, cooperated on vaccination, leprosy, and various programs (40). Michael Jennings’ study of colonial Tanganyika points to a new and lasting model for health care that took shape from the 1930s when previously isolated mission stations banded together to challenge the government’s medical policy making, creating a “mission sector” that ultimately “rivalled that of the state in its reach” (163).

The two other chapters, drawing from the social sciences and business history, examine lesser-known partners who helped to shape imperial medical policies. Matthew Heaton mines corporate and official correspondence to reveal the collaboration between the shipping company Elder Dempster and the British government to repatriate mentally ill Nigerian patients—a practice that was relatively common in the 1950s. In facilitating these transfers, Elder Dempster assisted in implementing a racist medical policy that more broadly helped to define “particular bounded spaces as natural cultural milieus for colonial subjects of different races” (113). Finally, Shane Doyle presents two tightly woven case studies—campaigns against sexually transmitted infections in Tanganyika and against malnutrition in Uganda—to argue that nonmedical experts from fields such as anthropology and psychology sometimes influenced officials to undertake misguided medical interventions by crafting narratives about African communities that fit existing colonial paradigms.

Overall, the volume is concerned primarily with British stakeholders, conferring less attention to African physicians or the illness experience of African patients. That said, Pringle’s brief and welcome discussion about patients and their families—in her words, a “vast and as yet inadequately explored” area of colonial medicine—finds echoes in other contributions (33). The book’s larger goal is successfully achieved: Contributors

challenge us to think more broadly about the complex networks that created colonial medical and other systems, the legacies of which are still active. The thorough and up-to-date bibliography of sources is a valuable aid for scholars who accept this challenge.

Deborah Neill
York University

Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order. By Jeffrey James Byrne (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016) 408 pp. $65.00

The study of decolonization has boomed in recent decades, even if scholars have often struggled to identify the importance of the term itself. Was decolonization the moment at which official sovereignty was handed over to a formerly colonized population, or a process by which economic, political, and social structures were reoriented to reflect the desires of the autochthone population? Is the term merely a veneer that obscures the establishment of neocolonial relationships? These issues are related to a second tendency in the field, which is a prevailing concern with the relationship between colony and metropole, or between the global south and the global north more broadly. Byrne’s work addresses both of these lacunae successfully, documenting not only how Algeria’s experience of decolonization reconstituted the global political order but also interrogating the very meaning of the term “Third World.”

Byrne’s argument that the modes of international collaboration ultimately “legitimized and zealously defended the authority of the post-colonial state” is convincing (10). His use of post-independence Algerian archives (specifically those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) allows him to reorient the discussion of the “Cold War in the Third World” to a study of “the Third World’s Cold War” (8). His firm grounding in international and diplomatic history helps to uncover the ideological and pragmatic choices made by the National Liberation Front (FLN). His conclusion that the Algerian revolutionaries preferred actions to ideas is compelling, though it posits a dichotomy between theory and praxis that would have benefited from an engagement with other disciplinary methods such as anthropology and sociology. Indeed, despite this argument, the multiple ideological discussions of the FLN is one of the most fascinating aspects of this book. Students of revolutionary movements will hardly be surprised by the fact that these nuances were often sacrificed for the ultimate goal of achieving national sovereignty.

The first chapter of the book details how Algerian nationalists channeled the revolutionary methods of Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Min, and even the Irish war of independence. The second chapter, about Algeria’s Cuban inspiration and role in the Belgian Congo, shows how the Third World project was shaped as much by the dynamics
among countries in the global south as by these countries’ individual relationships with the global north. Byrne does an admirable job of elucidating how Algerians pitted the Soviets against the American and Chinese superpowers, but the real success of the chapter is in documenting how Algeria found itself at the crossroads of various diplomatic crises in the Third World. For example, a wonderful anecdote recounts how Houari Boumediene’s army went to meetings wearing combat fatigues, smoking cigars, and even carrying revolvers, highlighting the Third World as a rich terrain of experimentation and cultural exchange (77).

The economic doctrines of non-alignment discussed in the third chapter show that the FLN borrowed from French modes of analysis, suggesting that Charles de Gaulle may have supported Ahmed Ben Bella in the fratricidal tensions that followed independence. Ben Bella’s notion of an Algerian socialism that was sprinkled with Islamic principles ultimately sat uneasily with the Soviet’s industrialized socialism, helping to push the FLN toward China as well as smaller countries such as Yugoslavia. The second half of the book turns its attention to Africa and the Middle East. Byrne argues that no enduring, stable political links were possible between Algeria and either the Maghreb or Mashreq precisely because of the depth of the connections that bound Algeria to these two regions. At the same time, the FLN continued to be a “gateway” between Africa and Latin America and had a nuanced strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The question of race is also fascinating, in regard not only to black Africa but also Chinese attempts to portray itself as a “colored” race (213). Byrne largely takes these racial categories as given; an engagement with critical race theory might have altered his analysis by foregrounding the ways in which racial identities were altered during the Cold War. Nonetheless, his book offers a fascinating glimpse of how North–South questions often came into conflict with East–West logics, foregrounding the multilateral nature of non-alignment. In a field that has often studied Algeria’s policies through the prism of France, this book is a ground-breaking intervention.

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Lightfoot aims to use the particular case of Antigua to provide a fresh analysis of the nature of post-slavery black experience around the Americas. The book succeeds in this task, often with eloquence, and with engaging detail. Lightfoot argues for an understanding of emancipation as a multi-decade, contested, and never-complete experience, rather than as a status change fixed to a particular date or legal action. Versions of this argument
have appeared in previous studies, but as Lightfoot emphasizes, overly clear-cut ways of imagining emancipation persist.

Chapter 1 introduces readers to the world of early nineteenth-century Antigua, a small British slave society in the eastern Caribbean. The chapter mostly employs an analysis of the geography of the island—rural and urban spaces accessed, experienced, and utilized differently by free whites and mostly enslaved blacks. Even a reader with little background in Caribbean history will be able to visualize the specific setting of the book, as well as the racialized politics and economics of British West Indian slavery.

Although Lightfoot’s use of the methods of social geography dominate the first chapter, the remainder of the book revolves more around intersections between social history and political science, or at least the study of black popular politics, broadly defined. The book also incorporates a robust engagement with the ways in which ordinary people understood and experienced the law, and the manner in which gender differentiated so many aspects of post-slavery life.

Considering recent scholarship on post-emancipation societies, Troubling Freedom is intellectually closest to the work of Mimi Sheller in Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica (Gainesville, 2001). Whereas Sheller focuses more acutely on political questions, Lightfoot attempts in theory to cover multiple spheres of black life equally—labor negotiations and the establishment of independent villages; the development of new leisure practices and material culture after slavery; marital, sexual, and religious life; white perceptions of the black population; and two public uprisings. This range perhaps inevitably leads to some lack of cohesion in the book’s analysis.

Chapter 2 explores an 1831 rebellion, three years before emancipation, which occurred after colonial reforms prohibited the long-standing use of the Christian Sunday Sabbath as a market day for the enslaved. Chapter 3 examines the negotiations around post-emancipation labor contracts. Chapter 4 focuses on material culture, entertainments, and living arrangements among the recently emancipated. Chapter 5 mostly uses Moravian church records to illuminate the inner workings of marital and sexual relationships among black heterosexual couples after slavery. Chapter 6 traces the effects of economic decline after the ending of preferential sugar tariffs for British West Indian colonies. Finally, Chapter 7 examines an 1858 uprising in the town of St. John’s, which began with black working people from Antigua attacking fellow black workers from the neighboring island of Barbuda. Lightfoot analyzes how even violence among emancipated people themselves reflected the multiple constraints on their attempts to craft lives after slavery on their own terms. She gives special attention to the prominent role of women in the uprising.

Exploration of gender inequities in the experience of emancipation and the study of conflict among freed people are two of the strengths of Lightfoot’s work. Indeed, these themes—most often explored through close textual analysis of various documents—might have been used to shape the whole book more cohesively, rather than strongly shaping
only some chapters. But a certain unevenness may have been Lightfoot’s intent—an argument that any explanation of the lived experience of emancipation should be almost intractably difficult to cohere or to complete, like the very freedom that her black subjects sought.

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Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China. By Megan Bryson (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016) 246 pp. $60.00

The Bai people, some 3.5 million of them, currently inhabit the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, which lies toward the northwest in China’s Yunnan province.

Their language, in as many as nine dialects, defies categorization as a type. Is it Sino–Tibetan? Tibeto–Burman? Or sui generis? Who knows? And is Bai religion mainly autochthonous? Or a variant of Buddhism? Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhism all have a place in it, but some elements seem purely local.

The Bai enter history in the form of the Dian Kingdom of the last centuries B.C.E. Better known is the Nanzhao Kingdom, coincident in time with China’s Tang Dynasty (618–907). The Dali Kingdom, founded later, was annexed by Khubilai Khan and his Mongols in 1253. There was never again an independent Bai state, nor any serious attempt to resurrect one. Yet from that day to this one, the Bai have managed to survive, indeed even prosper.

Bryson’s is a study in identity and taxonomy. Just who are the Bai? She places their Yunnan home in a region that some scholars call Zomia, or “highlander” country, a frontier where “India, Burma, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand,” along with Tibet, converge (12). China itself is ringed by other frontier peoples who, like the Bai, mingle with Han Chinese and other ethnicities in a cultural palimpsest that simply cannot be easily unscrambled.

Bryson thinks that one way to explore, but never to solve, the Bai identity is to offer a kind of biography of their leading deity, a goddess, or perhaps several of them, who share similar names. Whether these deities are one entity with different faces, or imperfectly merged but separate figures is impossible to tell. The goddess, or goddesses, can be traced in Chinese-language sources to the Nanzhao and Dali eras. She or they survive to the present day. As a single “goddess,” she is a figure to whom lower-class women pray for the blessings that she is believed to be able to bestow. But for upper-class men, with an educated understanding of Chinese culture, and an idea of where the Bai stand in relation to the Chinese state, she is no goddess but an emblem of ethical values that override all connotations of barbarism and help to label the
Bai as acceptably civilized. The chapters of Bryson’s book are devoted to recounting all of the maddeningly complicated roles assumed throughout a long span of time by the benzhu Baijie, Baijie Shengfei, Baijie Amei, and Baijie Furen.

Bryson has seen firsthand some of the Bai’s present-day observances. She has interviewed some of the women, and read widely about what the men have written about Baijie, singular or plural. There are apparently are no Bai intellectuals active as scholars or nationalists with as much interest in Baijie as Bryson. In their absence, she supplies the concepts and the language, only occasionally slipping into academic jargon, through which to understand the matter. She appears to place a Western way of thinking alongside the Confucian, as well as the Indian and Chinese Buddhist ideas, that entered the precincts of Bai religion long ago. Indeed, her book could even influence how the people of Yunnan themselves view Baijie, if they were to read it.

Bryson hits her target well, even if the word goddess is not apt in every context. The scholarship is excellent, the sources well researched, and the ancillary references useful. The only disappointment are her interviews, which seem minimal in number and shallow in depth. More interviews and greater detail would have been welcome. But Bryson has given us grounds for thinking that hers is a good way to approach a topic, in this case a religion, and/or a mode of worshipful respect, with a long, intricate, and, in many ways, obscure history behind it.

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