Philipp Blom has written a paean to the atheistic materialism he identifies as a central strain of Enlightenment thought, one he sees as a precursor to the modern natural sciences. Blom seeks to recover for his readers the radical Enlightenment, which he believes has been buried under the weight of books published about the more easily domesticated Enlightenment represented by such lions as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant. In generally lively prose, he introduces the reader to the thinkers who gathered at the generous table of Paul-Henri Thiery, Baron d’Holbach, focusing on Denis Diderot, but also giving us insight into the work of Claude-Adrien Helvetius and Holbach himself, as well as a host of lesser-known figures. Blom’s admiration for his subjects and his enthusiasm are contagious, making this an enjoyable book to read. Though not without flaws, this is a valuable book, useful for students and instructors alike. Nevertheless, one ought to assign this to undergraduates with caution, as Blom is less than generous in his assessment of the more moderate figures he clearly despises.

Blom has crafted an admiring intellectual biography of Diderot and, to a lesser extent, Holbach. He poses the two as the central contributors to a materialistic and radical Enlightenment, situating their ideas in a “lean tradition of Western freethinking, from Epicurus and Lucretius to Spinoza and Bayle” (p. 316). In doing so, Blom participates in the current discussion of radical Enlightenment thought pioneered by Jonathan Israel in The Radical Enlightenment (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), The Enlightenment Contested (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), and A Revolution of the Mind (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Blom guides the reader through the work of Diderot at great length, discussing the Encyclopédie project and its content as well as those works that Diderot wrote “for the drawer,” for discussion with his friends, and for posterity. Diderot is praised for his wit, his imagination, and his daring. Blom argues convincingly that Diderot was a materialist and atheist and poses Diderot as the master type of a humane atheism that sought a better world through the rejection of religion and the oppressive governing structures that organized religion supported. The book is also a study of the betrayal, compromise, and hypocrisy Blom sees as inherent in the moderate and romantic strains of Enlightenment thought. But as charming and amusing as the tales of emotional attachment, friendship, competition, and betrayal are, it is Blom’s thoughtful and concise discussion of the ideas of the Enlightenment’s great thinkers that serves as the most useful part of this book.
The author’s admiration of materialism worms its way into his evaluation of the events he discusses in unexpected ways. For example, Blom claims that Rousseau rejected Louis XV’s offer of a pension not because of his ideals, but because Rousseau suffered from a urinary disorder (p. 80). Likewise, differences between Rousseau’s and Diderot’s worldviews are attributed to their early sexual experiences, which had a determining effect on their capacity for happiness as adults (p. 213). Blom asserts that otherwise laudable philosophers in the Enlightenment rejected materialism and atheism because they feared the ramifications of their ideas. One may justly question this assertion in the case of David Hume. Did Hume really turn to writing histories and to government service because he was afraid to delve further into his own ideas, as Blom claims? (pp. 140-141) One might better argue that Hume was unable to follow an academic path because of his materialism, rather than that he rejected academia in order to avoid it. One may also quibble with Blom’s portrayal of Voltaire as a bitter and jealous hypocrite. In his early career, Voltaire was certainly motivated by vanity. But, as Ian Davidson has shown in his Voltaire in Exile (New York: Grove Press, 2005), Voltaire increasingly pursued the public good in the latter half of his life. While Diderot wrote for the drawer, Voltaire used his connections at Court to pursue practical reforms in his own lifetime.

Blom provides a very accessible version of Jonathan Israel’s interpretation of the Enlightenment as an intellectual struggle between followers of Baruch Spinoza’s materialistic philosophy and those who would preserve some variant of religion, or at least theological principles, as a necessary part of their worldview. As such, this work would be of use when trying to explore the radical Enlightenment in courses on French history or the history of science, though the work may be a bit too basic for use in courses on intellectual history per se.

Hampden-Sydney College

Robert H. Blackman

At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis, by Shearer Davis Bowman. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. 379 pages. $30.00, cloth.

The late Shearer Davis Bowman has written a very up-to-date interpretive history of America’s secession crisis of 1860-1861 that had its root causes at the birth of the nation. By examining both northern and southern views of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, Bowman reveals how people and their leaders on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line cherished both documents, but interpreted their meanings in different ways. He demonstrates how southern leaders back to John Tyler perceived disunion as the only means of preserving America’s beloved institutions delineated in those documents. By 1860, southerners viewed President-Elect Lincoln as the national leader who promised to destroy many of those liberties, protections, and guarantees. Southern leaders like Confederate President Jefferson Davis are shown to have been deeply wedded to those American institutions and values.

Bowman ably visits the intriguing presidency of Martin Van Buren, who made it his basic mission to solidify the two-party political system in order to ensure that the question of the abolition of slavery would never again reach the level of national politics. Pitting congressional issues that would have both northern and southern support within the Democrat party, and both northern and southern objections within the Whig party, Van Buren sought to diffuse the abolition issue by spreading defenders and opponents
of abolition evenly within each party. In this fashion, Van Buren believed abolitionism would never be an issue that defined either party and thus would never become a campaign issue for future presidential candidates. Only with the creation of the new Republican Party, and the Whigs all but dead politically, did American politics divide over the slavery issue between parties. Van Buren diffused the issue until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 doubled the size of the nation, and the question of slavery became a reignited topic.

Like Steven E. Woodworth’s *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2010), *At the Precipice* illuminates the importance of the American West and the California gold rush as flashpoints for the Civil War. But Bowman’s major contribution is that his work puts to rest the old issue of states’ rights as the major cause of disunion. He shows how both southerners and northerners alike were so dedicated to American institutions that only something as potent as slavery could have caused disunion in 1860, and there were no other issues remotely that potent. Thus, Bowman joins other scholars in the recognition during this sesquicentennial year that slavery was the true cause of the Civil War and that the war would not have happened without it. But this recognition also illuminates the fact that arguing the issues of the Civil War today is to argue the secondary and comparatively minor issues of 1860, namely, the concept of small government represented in the old states’ rights or anti-federalism myth versus large and powerful dominance of the federal government.

Bowman’s book is an important study, but traditional secondary school students will find it to be a difficult read, laden with scholarly language. The book is most appropriate for upper-division college students and graduate students. High school teachers will find its themes illuminating and important, and they may certainly find Bowman’s views useful in discussions over slavery and states’ rights, and their enduring legacies for American politics today.

*Metropolitan State College of Denver*  
John H. Monnett


Most students encounter Babylonian civilization through either The Code of Hammurabi or The Epic of Gilgamesh. Both are regarded as remarkable products of a sophisticated culture that existed for over three millennia, but both are often read by generalists and students without proper appreciation of the functions they played within Babylonian society. Dominique Charpin does much to remedy this deficiency with regard to the The Code of Hammurabi. Aimed at a general readership interested in “the ancient Near East, as well as rhetoric, legal history, and classical studies,” *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* presents the Code as a product of Babylonian civilization during a period when its dynamism is most visible to the modern scholar due to the extensive penetration and utilization of cuneiform writing within society.

The book’s eight chapters are in actuality a collection of essays published previously in French between 1982 and 2006 that have been revised to reflect current Assyriological scholarship. The book’s organization traces the place of writing through ascending societal levels, from individual literacy (chs. 1-2), to the place of writing in communal legal practice (chs. 3-4), to its utilization by the palace for the application of law throughout the kingdom.
Throughout, Charpin emphasizes the paradoxical ways in which Babylonians used writing in sophisticated and almost modern ways while retaining archaic and magical practices, stressing that writing often presents one face of a multifaceted society. Charpin argues persuasively that functional literacy was common amongst the cultural elite by the Old Babylonian period and was not the preserve of a caste of professional scribes. Its use was primarily for the communication of information, much of it ephemera that would not have been preserved had it not been for the durability of clay tablets. Amongst the ephemera are thousands of legal records that reveal Old Babylonian legal practice as a combination of archaic rituals, such as oaths and symbolic gestures, and written documentation. Writing was often reserved for peculiar and therefore vulnerable situations, but diachronic analyses reveal that the importance of written documentation relative to that of symbolic acts grew between the twentieth and seventeenth centuries BCE, resulting in the generation of thousands of records that permit Assyriologists to distinguish local traditions of case law and trace the legal activities of families over several generations.

Case law was the basis for the royal codes assembled during this period, Hammurabi’s being the most famous and complete example. These codes were not comprehensive, but were an attempt at a systematization of laws that allowed for variation, raising the question, was Hammurabi’s Code a commemorative monument or an object meant to be consulted and applied? Charpin acknowledges the validity of the former position while offering two arguments for an applied Code. The Code was not specifically referenced in legal decisions, but neither were omen series—a genre Charpin points to as comparable to law codes—mentioned in omen queries. Charpin also considers the Restoration Edicts as an example of the palace’s ability to affect broad application. Both the Code and the Edicts project the king’s role as the rectifier of intolerable legal and economic situations.

The final two chapters devoted to international law are a useful contribution to the concept of state in antiquity. Just as the Code and the Edicts represented the use of writing to maintain internal social order, so too did writing serve to impose order in the relations between the great kings of the Old Babylonian period and to manage transitory populations such as nomads, merchants, and messengers. Charpin argues that there was a strong sense of imperial borders, territory, and extraterritoriality among the Old Babylonian states, and this position is an especially useful contribution to studies of state and empire in Mesopotamia.

Charpin’s book is at its strongest when it incorporates comparative evidence from other periods of Mesopotamian history, offering the non-specialist a broader view of Mesopotamian civilization through the window of the Old Babylonian period. It is therefore unfortunate that Charpin did not utilize the many studies of first-millennium family archives or his own conclusions from his forthcoming article comparing Old Babylonian treaties with the evidence from the latter half of the second millennium. Charpin also periodically calls attention to topics that demand greater or even preliminary study. Such asides are intended for his colleagues within the discipline and have the potential to be a distraction to the non-specialist. Their benefit is that they communicate to the reader the vitality of a field that studies the very oldest literate societies and yet is comparatively young as a discipline with much primary work to be done. Charpin’s work serves as an introduction, a signpost for future work, and an invitation to specialists from other disciplines to engage in comparative study.

One challenge in writing about the history of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy in the Early Republic is to capture the serious difficulties they faced—to their landholdings, to their sovereignty, and to their economies—without falling into the trap of constructing a tragedy where the victims are mourned and then forgotten. Another challenge is to explain their persistence and continuation as cultural and political entities without being overly romantic or denying the real impediments put in their way by New York State, white settlers, and land speculators. Matthew Dennis takes on these challenges in Seneca Possessed and largely succeeds in explaining the spiritual and economic adaptations made by the Seneca, the western-most nation in the Iroquois Confederacy.

As a narrative device, Dennis uses the events surrounding a murder trial in 1821. A Seneca man, Tommy Jemmy, executed a Seneca woman named Kauquatau in May. Jemmy was eventually set free because the New York State Supreme Court recognized it did not have jurisdiction in Seneca territory, where the killing occurred. However, the state quickly passed a law extending their jurisdiction in criminal cases over New York tribes. Dennis then works backwards to explain changes in Seneca beliefs about witchcraft and the related attack on Seneca sovereignty and acquisition of their lands by whites, both of which culminated in the 1821 ordeal.

Seneca Possessed self-consciously mimics the title of Paul Boyer and Stephen Nussenbaum’s 1974 classic work in social history, Salem Possessed. Picking up on their theme that witch-hunts occur during periods of social uncertainty, Dennis argues that the Seneca homeland also saw periods of uncertainty in the years after the American Revolution through the 1820s. Handsome Lake’s visions, beginning in 1799 and continuing until his death in 1815, were a response to the poverty, alcoholism, and despair after the war. Dennis places this religious revival in the broader context of the second Great Awakening, the origins of which started to percolate in places like Kentucky and western New York around the same time. Much of this is well-known to historians. Dennis devotes a considerable amount of time arguing that the prophet’s visions had strong patriarchal if not outright misogynistic elements. While casting of spells and use of spiritual power to inflict harm had always been a fear in Seneca communities, Handsome Lake assumed that those engaged in such practices would be witches and almost exclusively women. In his view of punishment, they were entirely unredeemable, thus leading to Jemmy’s brutal act of execution. Dennis’s assertions of Handsome Lake’s paternalism may be seen as controversial. Often, Haudenosaunee people who participate in the Longhouse tradition emphasize the power sharing that occurs among men and women in the conventional Haudenosaunee way of life.

After the prophet’s death, the rush to dispossess the Seneca of their lands accelerated. Dennis’s coverage of the period from 1815 to 1825 and the legal intrigues between land companies and the legislature and courts of New York is laudable, as is his in-depth discussion of the diversity among missionaries to the Senecas. Dennis is careful to differentiate between the devout, but patient Quakers and the more aggressive evangelical Protestant missionaries. The Quakers nonetheless acted as agents of acculturation, teaching Seneca men Euro-American methods of farming and instructing women in Euro-American domestic roles.

Unfortunately, the book concludes just before some of the most egregious and ultimately divisive events occurred in western New York. The controversial Buffalo Creek Treaty
in 1838 initially divested the Seneca of all their land. Dennis mentions the treaty, but its full impact is not discussed; to be fair, it occurred outside of his era of focus. While the Seneca eventually got back the Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Oil Springs Reservations, they lost the large Buffalo Creek Territory. Furthermore, the Senecas were only granted these concessions upon agreeing to an American, municipal-style elected government. The faction of Senecas who hoped to hold onto their traditional system of chiefs appointed by clan mothers broke off from the progressive wing of the Senecas, forming the politically distinct Tonawanda Band of Senecas. One wishes Dennis expanded this crucial part of the Seneca story.

In the classroom, this work would be useful in a college-level course on Native Americans or on religious movements in the United States. Quakers, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Senecas interact and influence one another and all have an impact on American history. If used, I would suggest coupling the work with some other reading that presents the perspective of more recent participants in the Longhouse tradition.

Nazareth College of Rochester

Thomas J. Lappas


Harvard’s Jill Lepore is surely the most gifted academic historian today writing for a popular audience. She has co-authored a novel about the American colonial era, Blindspot (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2008), and she is a regular essayist for The New Yorker. Lepore has expanded one such New Yorker article from May 2010 into a short book that moves between past and present, weaving together an offbeat but academically rigorous narrative of the American Revolution, interviews with and comments about present-day Tea Party activists, and an analysis of efforts by both right and left in the 1970s to appropriate the legacy of the American Revolution. Linking these threads is a thoughtful meditation about the difficulties in trying to use “history” for current purposes, as well as problems more specific to the Tea Party and related movements.

Lepore’s analysis of the Revolutionary Era leads to several overall conclusions. First, the visions of the “founders” were so varied that no single lesson or ideology can be drawn from them. After seeing the scathing denunciation of Thomas Paine by John Adams, for example, the reader can only regard as ridiculous Sarah Palin’s 2010 comment that she cannot choose a “favorite Founder” because she likes “all of them” (p. 97). (Meanwhile, Paine’s criticisms of organized religion and Adams’s denial of any “Christian” character to the American government make Tea Party claims to the contrary about the founders seem downright dishonest.) Second, the shortcomings of the American Revolution with regard to race and slavery prevent any fair-minded observer today from believing that this generation had provided a perfect blueprint for the nation. Lepore discusses the unsuccessful efforts of the American Revolution with regard to race and slavery prevent any fair-minded observer today from believing that this generation had provided a perfect blueprint for the nation. Lepore discusses the unsuccessful efforts to abolish slavery in Massachusetts in 1770, describes the flight of thousands of slaves to British lines during the Revolution, and refers repeatedly to the slave-poet Phillis Wheatley to personalize the issue. Third, the circumstances of the Revolutionary Era were so different from today that comparisons by the right-wing Tea Party (or the earlier left-wing People’s Bicentennial Commission) are simply inappropriate. Lepore contrasts the real historical analysis that she provides with the “fundamentalism” (p. 125) or “antihistory” (p. 15) that she sees in the Tea Party.
Lepore’s narrative of the past is powerful not simply because she presents the findings of two generations of historians, but because of her sparkling prose and her wonderful story telling. Most of the events she writes about occurred in or around Boston, and Lepore delightfully reinforces this sense of place by describing her own visits to these sites, including a family outing to Lexington and the annual reenactment by schoolchildren of the Boston Massacre. What appear at first to be merely interesting digressions almost invariably back up one of her major points, as in Lepore’s discussion of the travails of Benjamin Franklin’s sister.

Lepore attended numerous Tea Party meetings and rallies in the Boston area and interviewed individual activists. She gives them voice, but also pounces on contradictions: one of the more thoughtful Tea Partiers, despite railing against big government, turns out to be a researcher paid by the Department of Defense. Lepore is more dismissive of the Texas School Board’s 2010 rewriting of history standards to fit Christian Right preconceptions. The author is at her most searing in introducing the phrase which becomes the book’s title. “The whites of their eyes” refers here not to the famous phrase from the Battle of Bunker Hill, but to Lepore’s judgment that today’s Tea Partiers see only white people in the era of the American Revolution, with a blind spot to the complications that race and slavery introduced.

*The Whites of Their Eyes* could successfully be assigned to college-level U.S. history survey courses and to historical methods classes. The “history” is scholarly, pertinent, and fascinating, while the unusual format and focus address key questions about how people interpret and “use” history. Lepore’s puncturing of inappropriate lessons the Tea Party has drawn from history leads to an apparent rejection of drawing any contemporary lessons, but that implication adds to the potential for class discussion. History teachers at all levels should read this book, even if not planning to assign it, because of its insights into how many of our students, their parents, and the popular media think about American history and its current applications. One caveat: since the book was published just before the 2010 elections, in which many Tea Party-backed candidates won House and Senate seats, some of Lepore’s specific commentary on 2009 and 2010 may soon become dated.

Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

Robert Shaffer

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The vision of America as a historically isolationist nation has proven resilient in the face of the contradictory findings of decades of scholarship. Despite the evidence provided by the likes of William Appleman Williams, Americans continue to view instances of U.S.-sponsored regime change, imperialism, and intervention as aberrations—exceptions to the rule. *No Higher Law* is an attempt to overturn this idealistic view by providing a history of the evolution of American foreign policy from independence to the Obama Administration. Taking such a long view highlights the essential continuity in U.S. beliefs and practices, despite “ongoing changes in the international system” and domestic political developments (p. 2). For Loveman, U.S. policy has been defined not by isolationism, but rather by unilateralism impelled by a sense of exceptionalism and divine mandate. Rhetoric aside, America has recognized “no law … higher than decisions made by its own government—no matter the international norms or the sovereignties interests and rights of other nations” (p. 4).
That this work is presentist in character is immediately apparent. In the same way that much of the New Left scholarship was shaped by concerns over Vietnam and the Cold War, Loveman’s study is heavily influenced by the current events in Iraq and Afghanistan. The central contention is that America’s “pretensions to global primacy” and willingness to put its own national interests before international law and cooperation has resulted in the corruption of democracy and American ideals (p. 402). “The idea of America—freedom, liberty, tolerance, opportunity, and the championing of human rights around the world—remains an inspiration for many of the world’s peoples. Yet American foreign policy has demeaned and besmirched the idea and dream of America” (p. 403). For Loveman, this travesty is not a partisan matter—in addition to the customary denunciation of the Reagan Administration, President Obama receives his share of disapproval for his failure to break from the practices of the Cold War.

Many of the work’s supplementary arguments will be familiar to scholars of inter-American relations and U.S. imperialism. For example, Loveman consistently highlights the role of domestic politics in shaping foreign policy. Thus, President Monroe’s famous 1823 speech is placed within the framework of domestic concerns: an upcoming election, fear of slave insurrections should Cuba be gripped by a race war, as well as the ongoing sectional tensions between North and South (p. 45). Loveman is also on familiar ground when arguing that “American domestic politics and the country’s underlying political culture of exceptionalism ‘naturally’ produced a foreign policy of aggressive unilateralism in the Western Hemisphere” (p. 119). He observes that Latin America would serve as a “laboratory for foreign policies” that would later be applied to the rest of the world as the U.S. became a global power (p. 5). Still, if many of these themes are familiar, Loveman is able to draw on decades of research to refashion them into a narrative that will hold the attention of students and seasoned scholars alike.

Overall, this volume succeeds admirably both in debunking the myth of American isolationism and arguing the need for the U.S. to rethink its foreign policy. Yet, given Loveman’s status as a preeminent Latin Americanist, it is surprising that Latin American responses to U.S. policies and their opinions of inter-American relations are not given more space. The author rightly argues that, as Latin American governments increasingly found their interests threatened by U.S. and European policies, they reciprocated by playing rival powers against one another (p. 99). At times, Latin American countries were surprisingly successful in frustrating U.S. objectives. Further examples of successful Latin American resistance might have provided a more nuanced picture of U.S. successes and failures in the foreign policy “laboratory.”

No Higher Law could be used effectively in upper-level courses and would be invaluable in the effort to introduce students to ongoing historiographical debates. At the same time, the critical tone which makes the work an intriguing choice for classroom use also presents some difficulties. Students used to a more congratulatory vision of America’s place in the world may be put off by some of Loveman’s more strident statements—such as, “If the United States were not so powerful, who could doubt that Bush, Cheney … and other Americans would have faced the same sort of international sanctions, even trials for war crimes, as former … Rwandan and Serbian dictators?” (p. 383) Yet, if used judiciously, No Higher Law should inspire classroom debate and force students to confront the limits of American exceptionalism.

Texas A&M University

Micah Wright
Elaine Tyler May’s *America and the Pill* was published on the fiftieth anniversary of the birth control pill. In this past half century, the availability of the pill and other forms of modern contraception has served as a powerful agent of change in the lives of American women—to enter the work force, professions, and politics in unprecedented numbers, to balance family and work life, and to enjoy sexual relations without fear of unwanted pregnancies. Today, nearly 12 million women take the pill; more than 45 million women of childbearing age have taken the pill at some point in their lives. As I write this review, after fifty years of women taking contraception and some degree of reproductive rights for granted, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to defund Planned Parenthood, and to place greater restrictions on women’s access to reproductive technology.

May has written an engaging, well-researched, and fascinating account of the development of the birth control pill. This book would be an excellent companion piece to any college or high school 12th grade course on twentieth-century or post-World War II U.S. history, or a history of the women’s movement. She situates this history in the context of the ideologies of the 1950s: the Cold War, fear of over-population, the misogynistic “feminine mystique,” as well as the emerging feminist movement and sexual revolution of the 1960s. Scientists, social policy professionals, as well as doctors believed this new form of contraception was going to become the miracle drug that would solve global concerns of overpopulation, poverty, the spread of communism, as well as promote a domestic agenda of marital harmony through family planning. May argues that the pill did not live up to those experts’ hopes. Instead, the greatest achievement of the development of oral contraception was in the lives of women, who used this technology as a means of taking greater control of their own lives.

In May’s comprehensive history of this tremendous breakthrough for women, she does not shy away from problems associated with Margaret Sanger, eugenics, racism, testing the pill in Puerto Rico, and population control. She traces Sanger’s evolution from a radical, feminist, birth control advocate to a eugenicist, anti-communist, family-planning elitist. May writes that many population control proponents were primarily interested in racist social engineering and eugenics, even though, in the end, the pill had basically no impact on controlling population. While May addresses this troubling history of birth control, I am concerned about May’s somewhat cavalier dismissal of the ethical issues raised in the testing of the pill first on Puertoriqueños and other women of color. One cannot justify this racist practice with the excuse that “testing of the pill largely conformed to the standards of the day, and often exceeded them.” The pill was harmful to Puerto Rican women, further traumatizing an already-colonized poor community.

The book’s strength is how May places women front and center, integrating feminism and the realities of women’s lives into this complex history intersecting the Cold War, sexual revolution, medicine, technology, science, and religion. Birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger and suffragist and philanthropist Katherine McCormick were the driving forces behind the long and difficult road of researching, developing, and promoting the birth control pill. May credits the feminist movement, in particular the women’s health movement, in understanding, supporting, and questioning the safety and efficacy of the pill and other forms of contraceptives. She includes the voices of women of color who supported birth control and abortion, often challenging the male leadership of the black freedom struggle. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress,
pushed for increased access to contraception. In the book’s final chapter, she quotes from a multigenerational survey of women whose opinions of the pill reflect its complicated fifty-year history. The first generation of women saw the pill as a godsend. For “Martha L.,” the pill was the “single most empowering option that women have been given in all of history.” Younger women expressed ambivalence or outright dislike. “Barbara E.” wrote that she “hated the pill. It wrecked my body, gave me headaches and eradicated my libido.” May correctly claims that without the women’s movement and feminism, the pill would have just been just one more contraceptive and not “the flash point for major social transformation.”

*Brooklyn College of the City University of New York*

*Barbara Winslow*


People have a tendency to remember what they would prefer to be true. After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, a full sixty-five percent of the American public claimed to have voted for the man who barely beat Richard Nixon in the 1960 popular vote. Stephen G. Rabe argues that scholars’ tendency to join the public in glorifying the slain president distorts his record in foreign policy—the arena in which he hoped to make his mark—as much as it does his domestic record. So Rabe’s book, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, attempts to balance the scales by offering a sober assessment of Kennedy’s entire foreign policy record, not simply the flashpoints of Berlin and Cuba, by portraying a Cold Warrior whose belligerence often trumped his idealism, recklessly spoiling opportunities for improved relations in many parts of the world. The book, part of the Issues in the History of American Foreign Relations series, provides a succinct, thoughtful survey of Kennedy’s foreign policy in an accessible style in fewer than 200 pages of text.

The book opens with a brief overview of the historiography on Kennedy’s foreign policy. Rabe argues that historians and biographers have generally been very generous in their assessment of Kennedy’s record, relying heavily on inferences about the direction his policy would have taken had he lived and been elected to another term. While acknowledging the inescapability of some speculation about future decisions, Rabe’s conclusions tend to be more cautious and less adulatory than those of his colleagues. The second chapter provides context for Kennedy’s foreign policy decisions. This chapter, while helpful, focuses entirely on biographical details rather than providing a larger framework of the Cold War and decolonization movements that shaped the post-World War II period.

The remaining chapters of the book provide region-by-region assessments of Kennedy’s policies, beginning with the Soviet Union and proceeding to Cuba, Latin America, Vietnam, Asia, and ending with the Middle East and Africa. While probably offering the most logical organizational scheme, the regional approach leads to occasional disjointedness as, for example, the chapter on the Soviet Union deals almost exclusively with the arms race and the Berlin crisis; the effects of the two Cuban crises on U.S.-Soviet relations are left to the following chapter.

Rabe canvasses the entire range of Kennedy’s foreign policy. This includes more well-known initiatives, like those in Latin America—where Rabe harshly criticizes Kennedy for allowing his anti-communist monomania to destroy the Alliance for Progress’s potential to
rectify social inequities in the region—and Vietnam, where the author convincingly argues against other scholars who confidently project Kennedy’s future military withdrawal from the region. In fact, Rabe points out, Kennedy offered many contradictory assessments of the future of the American role in Vietnam. The speech Kennedy planned to deliver the day he was assassinated warned his audience that, while U.S. commitment to Vietnam was “painful, risky, and costly … we dare not weary of the task.”

The book also surveys Kennedy’s less well-known policies. For example, it explores how Kennedy broke through the former aloofness of non-aligned India’s Nehru to provide millions in food and development assistance. After the outbreak of a border war with China in 1962, the U.S. rushed military equipment to the country. In the Middle East, Kennedy sought to ease Arab-Israeli tensions through a negotiated settlement to the Arab refugee crisis. He provided Hawk anti-aircraft missiles for Israel’s defense, and allowed himself to be deceived that Israel’s nuclear reactors were for peaceful purposes. With regard to Africa, while candidate Kennedy spoke frequently and hopefully about the continent in which dozens of states were emerging, President Kennedy did little to support independence movements. Though he denounced South African apartheid in harsh language, he continued to engage in joint military exercises with the nation.

Overall, then, Kennedy’s foreign policy record was a very mixed one. The virtue of this book is that it provides a broad enough survey of Kennedy’s initiatives overseas to make that assessment convincing. Lucidly written and refreshingly jargon-free, this book would work well with lower-division undergraduates or advanced high school students. It models key elements of the historical discipline: historiography, the nature of argumentation, and the appeal to evidence. It does not reach the series editor’s promise of revealing international perspectives on U.S. behavior. Indeed, the book seems strikingly U.S.-centric and is often lacking global context. The seventeen documents included in the appendix are fascinating and would provide useful teaching tools, but without exception, they represent the views of American leaders, mostly Kennedy himself. On the whole, John F. Kennedy: World Leader offers an outstanding introduction to Kennedy’s foreign policy.

California State University, Long Beach  
David Neumann


The murder of 250 Minneconjou Lakotas at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, is one of the most famous stories of Indian history. The incompetence of Colonel James Forsyth’s attempt to disarm Big Foot’s peaceful people, as well as the unbelievable brutality of the men of the Seventh Cavalry under his command as they rode down and slaughtered fleeing women and children, is the subject of countless books, articles, movies, and documentaries. Heather Cox Richardson, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has written a book that goes well beyond a retelling of this horrific event. She has put the massacre into its context and thus shown how events of Indian history can be central to the telling of general U.S. history. Historians of Native American history have too-often neglected this approach and Richardson has provided an important contribution to our understanding of both U.S. and Indian history.

Richardson’s thesis is that, while Forsyth made poor decisions and the men of the Seventh Cavalry actually did the shooting, the blame for the Wounded Knee Massacre
should be spread also to U.S. politicians and bureaucrats who continually put politics above all else, especially, in this case, the survival of Native Americans. She recounts the familiar story of economic progress and how most Americans felt that Native Americans in the West were obstacles to growth. She uses brothers General William Tecumseh Sherman and Senator John Sherman, as well as their brother-in-law General Nelson Miles, to show how Americans worked to develop the U.S. economy after the Civil War. Richardson focuses very specifically, though, on the disastrous administration of President Benjamin Harrison, especially on the twelve months preceding the massacre. She shows how the administration tried to ensure the Republican Party would maintain control of Congress after the elections of 1890 by manipulating census numbers, promising public works projects and irrigation of the Great Plains, proposing a new tariff, and other methods. Most disastrous to Lakotas, though, was the admitting of new western states that would vote Republican—including South Dakota, which was still largely divided into reservations—and the institution of “home rule,” allowing local politicians, instead of the officials of the Indian Office in Washington, D.C., to select agents for Indian reservations. Once the administration had decided South Dakota becoming a state was crucial to maintaining its hold on politics, its agencies put pressure on Lakotas to give up their land and stay confined to a reservation, while at the same time cutting food rations. Many demoralized and actually starving Lakotas turned to the Ghost Dance, leaving the reservations in order to practice its rituals, thus being labeled hostile by the government and the U.S. army. “Home rule” resulted in corrupt and incompetent agents who were unable to handle the situation and begged for the military to save them and white settlers. The presence of the military during an otherwise peaceful religious movement could have been avoided.

Richardson has made a major contribution to the scholarship; however, her book is of limited value to teachers. Lecturers could pull out interesting stories about the Sherman brothers, the disastrous effects of partisan politics, or the power struggle over Indian affairs among the army, Congress, and the Indian Office. Wounded Knee would probably not, however, work well as a reading assignment. The main story Richardson tells is very complex and revolves around the McKinley Tariff. We all know that tariffs are important in U.S. history, but they are a tough sell to students looking for a more exciting story. Wounded Knee would possibly be useful in a graduate class on Native American history, on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, or on U.S. party politics, but I would be reluctant to assign the book because Richardson does not engage the secondary literature and cites primary sources almost exclusively, relying on biased observers, such as those who insisted that the murder of Crazy Horse was an accident. This is not a good methodology to present to apprenticing scholars. Though the book is an interesting example of bringing Indian history into mainstream history through primary sources, Richardson has produced a work most useful to other scholars and of limited use in the classroom.

Cottey College

Angela Firkus

“ I Sweat the Flavor of Tin ”: Labor Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Bolivia, by Robert L. Smale. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. 243 pages. $60.00, cloth. $25.95, paper.

In 2005, the voters of Bolivia elected Evo Morales as President. An indigenous Aymara speaker, Morales grew up herding llamas and working as a migrant laborer. He became a leader of Bolivia’s coca growers, who opposed destruction of coca farms in U.S.-funded
drug eradication programs. As President, Morales handily survived a recall attempt and went on to win a second term with sixty-four percent of the vote. His effort to fuse socialism with indigenous Andean traditions is regarded with great hope by his followers and admirers, and with horror by many others, but all agree that he represents a fascinating and unexpected phenomenon in twenty-first-century Latin American politics. Robert Smale’s book on the early history of labor activism in Bolivia provides a useful foundation for understanding how Bolivians came to elect Morales to lead their nation.

Smale’s original research is centered on “a regional study of the urban popular classes of Oruro and northern Potosí”—then Bolivia’s most dynamic industrial and mining center—during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The chief protagonists are the miners who worked ores that provided up to one-third of the tin for the world. Smale shows how the miners went from tactical and very limited maneuvering within a system of repressive paternalism to autonomous and often radical labor organizing within a remarkably short period of time—roughly twenty years. We are somewhat less surprised than we might otherwise be after Smale’s account—which was based largely on secondary sources—of the multiple ways in which Andean silver miners in earlier centuries had managed to maintain some degree of independence from mine owners through a variety of legal, quasi-legal, and outright illegal methods to access ore. This was done mostly through variations on the system of kajcheo that allowed miners to glean ore from previously worked veins through contracting, piece-work, and piracy. Though kajcheo could also serve as a means of hyper-exploitation of miners’ labor, it, along with other practices, demonstrated that Bolivian miners were never reduced to merely passive objects of repression.

As typical of labor history in the nineteenth century, workers began to develop a greater measure of independence through mutual aid societies. In Bolivia, they seemed to focus particularly on providing education to their members. By the post-World War I era, however, they had moved on to direct confrontation with mine owners over wages, hours, health, safety, and collective bargaining rights. For a time, they tried to work within political parties dominated largely by urban elites, but by the mid-1920s, they would realize the importance of independent labor organizations and, soon, worker-controlled political parties. As they took more aggressive stances, conflicts led to mobilization of the police and military, leading to “the Uncía massacre” in which striking workers were mowed down by machine gun fire. Though other and more violent conflicts were to follow in the next two decades, Smale sees the Uncía massacre as a key turning point in the increasing radicalization of Bolivian industrial workers and miners. Labor organizations became more determined and powerful, but they were also repeatedly torn apart by their own internal divisions among socialists, communists, and anarcho-syndicalists. These splits would lead somewhat surprisingly to the prevalence of Trotskyite perspectives in Bolivian leftist parties and labor organizations. Smale concludes quite reasonably that the history of Bolivian labor is remarkable not for its late and faltering beginnings, but rather for the fact that it led so quickly to the relatively radical revolution of 1952 and to the resilience of popular movements in the face of subsequent brutal repression.

Smale makes no comment on the Morales government, though his story frequently touches on the intersections of social class and ethnic identity and the complex dynamic of urban and rural social movements that make Bolivia so interesting. His worker-like and closely defined history might have benefited from deeper exploration of these themes. However, history teachers will find his book a valuable source as they teach modern Latin American or world history, and advanced high school students and college students will find it a useful monograph for research projects.

California State University, Sacramento

Angus Wright

Love of Freedom is an interesting historical analysis of a topic more historians and scholars are focusing on: African American women in the American colonial period. This book sets out to tell the story of their search and struggle for freedom and equality specifically in New England. It should be beneficial for students studying women’s history and African American history.

The book “chronicles the assumptions about family, masculinity, and femininity embedded in the love of freedom, the meaning of freedom for both black women and men and the significance of gender” in efforts to build a free black community. While the publication is not without its faults, it makes every effort to construct a narrative of the challenging and sometimes futile struggles of black women to achieve freedom in New England. It is in that geographic region that the slave was seen both as property and as a person before the law. The authors contend that, as a result of being defined as “persons before the law,” enslaved women as well as men in Puritan New England were provided more opportunities “to become free through the courts” than elsewhere in the North American colonies.

This thesis becomes in large part the main thrust of the succeeding chapters. The authors present examples of African Americans who petitioned the courts for their freedom based on a multitude of legal reasons written by local lawyers who were either outright opponents of slavery or sympathetic to an individual slave’s circumstances. Hagar Blackmore, for example, believed to be the first New England African American woman to seek freedom through the channel of the courts, had been captured and brought to America from Angola. In her testimony in a fornication suit in 1669, she explained her understanding of slavery and freedom. In her mind, slavery was a “form of theft” in which she had been “robbed of her husband and child” left behind in Africa. Stealing and robbery were capital offenses as well as sins in Puritan New England. According to the authors, Puritans justified their tolerance of slavery because they “thought it was not a crime for third parties to purchase African captives taken by others in just wars.” Blackmore, as she was about to give birth, admitted that the father of her child was a black slave. Her admission of the identity of the real father enabled release of her master’s son, whom she accused of being the father. After her admission, Hagar Blackmore “disappears from the historical record.” Although she disappeared, her concept of freedom made sense in terms of the Angolan world where she had been a wife and mother. Slavery from the Angolan perspective meant being torn from “one’s lineage, to be a non-person who has lost ties to the living and to one’s ancestors.”

Another premise is that African Americans in New England did “not understand freedom as equality between men and women but insisted ... the opposite,” where women are subordinate to men. In effect, achieving “patriarchy in the household and in the large collective black life” was the embodiment of freedom. Thus, the black man’s authority was as master of his own household, while a woman was subject to the “rules of coverture.” Therefore, an enslaved married woman was denied the right to sue for her freedom. Only a “single enslaved woman, a spinster” was allowed to undertake a freedom suit in the courts. Engaging stories of various New England black women who sought emancipation through “freedom suits” fill the pages of this fascinating book. Extensive research was undertaken to link the individual women to the overall narrative of this work. In some places, the authors explain more about African American males than females. As noted previously, while many African American women “disappear” from the pages of history, it is important to know what was occurring outside New England so that the author’s
conclusions would be on firmer ground. The New England colonies were unique in the sheer number of freedom suits in colonial courts as compared to other regions. Why? Was it the strong Puritan dominance in those settlements? Or was it the strong presence of white abolitionists and lawyers of the same persuasion who were crucial in bringing these law suits to the courts? While the reader is left to ponder these questions, they could certainly serve as opening questions for engaging students in classroom discussions.

The narratives of the black women are at the heart of this book. As we learn, women often sued their masters, believing they robbed them of their freedom. Others sought freedom from abusive husbands, adulterous situations, or because they were abandoned by men who fathered their children. The women’s stories need to be shared with the reader and they are told well. One remarkable woman, for whom the records are available, is Elizabeth Freeman. She is given lengthy treatment here, and well she should. Elizabeth fought in court and gained freedom, became a midwife, acquired property in western Massachusetts, and was one of the few women of any race who was a taxpayer. Freeman’s story, along with a noteworthy section on Phillis Wheatley, are must-reading for everyone.

The superb annotated bibliography is worthy of every plaudit one can offer. It comprises sixty-two pages and provides clear evidence of the authors breadth and depth of research. This book adds measurably to our understanding of African American women in colonial New England.

Southern Connecticut State University
Jon E. Purmont


Timothy Snyder’s _Bloodlands_ accomplishes a monumental task in showing how and why the killing policies of Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin occurred predominantly within a strip of land across present-day Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, and the western-most section of Russia. In this space alone—the “Bloodlands”—14 million people were deliberately killed from 1933 to 1945 via starvation, a bullet to the head, or gas. While not all of these individuals were civilians, none of them were killed during conventional combat operations. Snyder incorporates analysis of the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-1933, the Stalinist Terror of 1936-1938, the enforced starvation of Soviet POWs in 1941, Nazi reprisals for Polish and Belarusian partisan activity during 1942 to 1943, the Wehrmacht’s Siege of Leningrad of 1942-1944, and the Nazi “Final Solution” implemented during 1941 to 1944. While there are extensive historiographies on these individual Nazi and Stalinist policies, which led to, and constituted, state-sponsored mass murder, _Bloodlands_ is the first to document the development, implementation, and results of those policies alongside each other, at the same time and within this same key space.

Nonetheless, Snyder does not rehash the “totalitarian” framework for comparing Nazism and Stalinism, a perspective hearkening back to Hannah Arendt’s _The Origins of Totalitarianism_ (New York: Schocken, 1951) that provided important intellectual supports for U.S. Cold War policy. Rather, by looking at this particular space, where the violence of the war became most evident, Snyder argues that Nazi and Stalinist killing policies emerged from the interaction between these two regimes. Stalin had to pursue the collectivization of agriculture with such zeal because the Soviet Union had to prepare for the inevitable war against fascism. In Stalin’s view, Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian Jews had to be shot because they were “useless eaters” within the context of total
war. Before Operation Barbarossa began in June 1941, Hermann Göring planned to kill 30 million Ukrainian peasants by starvation to allow for German colonization of the East, but the elusiveness of easy victory against the Soviet Union allowed Heinrich Himmler to articulate his alternative plan for the extermination of Europe’s Jewry. The unforeseen difficulties of rapidly collectivizing agriculture in the early 1930s and the obstinacy among peasants generated by this policy allowed Stalin to see the emaciated bodies of Ukrainians as a form of counter-revolution. Ideological considerations about race and class uneasily coexisted with the shifting realities on the ground.

Hence, while the author continually highlights differences between Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin, Bloodlands demands that such killing policies not be seen in isolation from each other. Most of the time, Snyder shows, the violent objectives emanating from Berlin and Moscow transformed during their implementation in the Bloodlands. Thus, “useless eaters” became necessary laborers, and anti-German partisans became anti-communists. Captured Red Army soldiers who survived the starvation policies of 1941 were employed to build the Nazi death factories at Bełżec and Chelmno in 1942, which were then dismantled in 1943 when Jews and Poles were needed to make rubber for German soldiers’ boots at Auschwitz. Stalin encouraged widespread revolt in Poland during 1943 to 1944, but then failed to help during the fatal Warsaw Uprising. Later, communist partisans arrested non-communist partisans, who were labeled “fascists.” And despite the ideological nature of the conflict, people in the Bloodlands selectively shifted sides in order to survive. A German policeman in Belarus easily became a Soviet partisan as the war progressed.

Bloodlands will be immensely important for teachers of high school students as well as undergraduates in the United States, and should be assigned reading for college courses on World War II. Snyder offers a needed corrective to popular understandings of the Second World War, a conflict that many of us identify more easily with the bloody but heroic Normandy Invasion than the merely tragic Siege of Leningrad. And our understandings of the Holocaust are more often peppered with grim images of the liberated concentration camps at Belsen, Dachau, and Auschwitz, places from which survivors nonetheless lived to tell their stories, rather than the death factories at Bełżec and the killing fields at Babi Yar near Kiev. As Snyder ably demonstrates, Hitler’s and Stalin’s utopian designs for racial and social excision came closest to fruition in the borderlands between Germany and Russia, and not within their respective political centers. Consequently, the author convincingly shows that “the killing in the Bloodlands is the central event of the twentieth century” (Rorotoko interview with the author, available at <http://www.rorotoko.com/index.php/article/timothy_snyder_book_interview_bloodlands_europe_between_hitler_stalin/>).

University of Mississippi

Joshua First


In Medicine and Politics in Colonial Peru: Population Growth and the Bourbon Reforms, Adam Warren constructs an intellectual history that traces the emergence of the Spanish Bourbon Imperial ideology of order and rationalism in late colonial Peru. Warren argues that the development of this imperial ideology served as a critical catalyst in the connection between useful knowledge and the Bourbon Reforms. In doing so, he demonstrates that the Bourbon Reforms were not, as they are often depicted, a set of trans-Atlantic battles between
the Bourbon Crown and backward colonial subjects. Instead, he characterizes the reforms as a dialogue in which both the Bourbon Crown and local creole elites (Spanish born in America) formulated their own versions of the reforms. In Peru, creole physicians modified these reforms to establish their autonomy, expertise, and relevance in late colonial Peru, while the Bourbon Crown implemented these reforms to revitalize the economy of Peru. Warren provides qualitative evidence pertaining to the social, cultural, and political experiences of both the creole physicians and Bourbon colonial representatives in late colonial Peru.

*Medicine and Politics* seeks to demonstrate how the idea of a demographic crisis played a determining part in the creation of the creole version of colonial reform. The creole physicians viewed the demographic crisis as the cause for the division of the viceroyalty of Peru in 1776 and the indigenous rebellions of the 1780s. These physicians recognized the significance of population growth to the success of the colony, arguing the regeneration of the colony was possible only by applying useful medicinal knowledge. However, the threat of competing versions of colonial reforms from the Bourbon Crown ultimately led to the clash between creole and Bourbon colonial representatives. Over the course of this clash, creole physicians saw the emergence of a patriotic ideology. The resulting patriotic movement reached deep into the profession of medicine. Warren demonstrates the development of this patriotic movement via a close reading of a contemporary periodical, *Mercurio Peruano*. He shows how the paper became a vehicle in the formation of creole medical authority and the dissemination of useful medical knowledge. For example, creole physicians published analysis of health problems of the colony, and they debated ways of using medicine to bring about the regeneration of colonial society. Many creole physicians thus came to interpret their experiences in large part through medicine. In addition, as they grappled with issues of the demographic crisis and identity, many creole physicians began to look inward. In short, they began to pay attention to a Spanish identity located within late colonial Peru.

A striking example of this phenomenon is present in Warren’s discussion of the Bourbon smallpox vaccination campaign of 1802-1810. The Bourbon Crown sent a vaccination expedition to create networks of knowledgeable practitioners trained to administer vaccines in the metropolis and the periphery. In doing so, they came into conflict with creole physicians, who, according to Warren, had already engaged in debates about the nature, treatment, and prevention of smallpox. While this vaccination campaign was successful, it also served to solidify creole physicians’ claims to expertise and self-reliance. For example, creole physicians reshaped the vaccination campaign not as a triumph of the Bourbon Crown, but as the triumph of the creole physicians who had rescued the colony from smallpox. The Bourbon vaccination expedition thus offered creole physicians attractive opportunities to think not only about foreign medicinal knowledge, but also about where they stood in a rapidly changing world.

Warren, in essence, seeks to demonstrate how local medical reforms created during this period were not, in fact, so local after all. Although creole physicians did indeed create local medical reforms based on local circumstances, they did so in large part out of awareness of the broader Bourbon Reforms. For the culture of localism in which creole physicians participated was to a great degree a transnational one, they were eager to put their own medical reforms on the level of the Bourbon Reforms and utilize useful knowledge to increase their authority. *Medicine and Politics*, therefore, is essential reading for faculty and graduate students engaged in the history of medicine and of empire. In the classroom, the history teacher could use this book productively to introduce the Bourbon Reforms to students. Although this book is more appropriate for the specialist, it would broaden any history teacher’s knowledge of colonialism, for this book demonstrates the interconnections between politics and medicine in colonial Peru.

*California State University, Long Beach*

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