

Reviews

The Water Kingdom: A Secret History of China, by Philip Ball. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2020. 320 pages. \$27.50, cloth. \$19.00, paper. \$18.99, electronic.

A study of water and its importance in traditional and modern Chinese history is potentially innovative and valuable. Rivers, especially the Yangzi and the Yellow (Huang He), have played vital roles in the development of Chinese civilization. The waters of these rivers have nurtured sedentary agricultural societies, but their capriciousness, on the other hand, has afflicted China with floods or droughts that devastated nearby regions. They needed to be tamed through the construction of irrigation works and dams if a society were to persist. If the government was declining and was unable to maintain the rivers, it could face disasters and considerable unrest and even rebellion. Likewise, the Grand Canal was the main thoroughfare for the dispatch of rice and grain from the fertile lands of South China to the more arid environs of North China, and lack of maintenance of the various canals that comprised the Grand Canal could be similarly devastating.

Philip Ball, who is not a specialist on China, could have quite a story to tell about water in China. However, he jumps from one era of Chinese history to another, which can confuse the reader, though this is perhaps because he is a science writer rather than a professional historian. Ten chapters address a variety of themes, including “Water as a Source of Metaphor in Daoism and Confucianism,” “How China’s Waterways Shaped its Political Landscape,” “How China Explored the World,” “Rise and Fall of the Hydraulic State,” and “How Water Infuses Chinese Painting and Literature.” Attesting to his casting of a wide net, within a couple of pages, he refers to the city of Hangzhou in Khubilai Khan’s time, to the sixteenth-century Jesuit Matteo Ricci, to the notorious Green Gang, which dominated narcotics and houses of prostitution in 1920s Shanghai (pp. 124-130). In another section, he describes the floods that changed the course of the Yellow River and led to the defeat of the first-century rebel Wang Mang and then shifts his attention to Karl Wittfogel’s theory of “Oriental Despotism” from the 1950s (pp. 99-101). Parenthetically, he refers to Wittfogel as a Marxist, but, in fact, this German historian became a fervent anti-Communist when he

lived in the United States. Ball seems to have read a variety of English-language books on China, culled them for material on water, and then incorporated them into his book. For example, he recounts the story of the fifteenth-century voyager Zheng He, though he does not expand on the existing scholarship (pp. 143-158).

Like others who pursue one specific theme, Ball tends to amplify its significance. For example, he attributes the victory of Liu Bang, the founder of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), over his rival Xiang Yu to Liu's control of waterways (pp. 112-113, 214). At another point, he writes that China's "philosophy, history, politics, administration, economics and art...are likely to remain strange, opaque or alien *unless* their connection with water is understood" (p. 5). Although he makes the Chinese language and philosophy seem exotic, a kind of "mysterious East" focus, he provides sketches about Chinese water myths and describes contemporary China's water dilemmas in a clear and accurate manner.

In sum, this is not a secret history of China, as the subtitle would have us believe, but sections of it could be used in classrooms to illustrate features of water's significance in Chinese history.

City University of New York

Morris Rossabi

Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance, by Mia Bay. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021. 400 pages. \$35.00, cloth. \$19.95, electronic.

The simple decision to purchase a ticket for travel—be it by train, streetcar, steamship, bus, or airplane—has always been fraught with complications for African Americans. Would they be able to reach their destination safely? Where would they eat, sleep, or relieve themselves during long journeys? What unique risks lurked on the road for Black folks, especially women, and how would those dangers differ regionally? Mia Bay sets out to answer these very questions when detailing African Americans' centuries-old quest for dignity and fair treatment when on the move in their own country. *Traveling Black* is a masterful study that makes a compelling argument for using transportation as a lens for seeing how African Americans challenged segregation throughout what has come to be known as "The Long Civil Rights" era.

The case of Homer A. Plessy, who 130 years ago tried to board a first-class railcar in New Orleans, is well known. Less familiar is how rock-ribbed Black women like Harriet Jacobs and Pauli Murray pressured the courts to end Jim Crow travel. Travel-related civil rights legal contests reached beyond simple vehicles for movement, including accommodations, airports, and gas stations. One of the things that so enriches Bay's book is that she tells the story of civil rights through the actions of everyday people who refused to be moved. This is an every (wo)man story of protest, not a civil rights history told through the lives of "great men" or "great organizations."

Educators from middle school upward will find so much to mine in *Traveling Black*. Each chapter explores how discrimination operates in a given transportation sector, making it easy to focus on civil rights strategies in any number of industries. Bay's analysis is so muscular that high school students and teachers alike will find ample food for thought in this book. They will learn important lessons about how regional and national racial policies shaped African Americans' transportation options. Bay's particular attention to gender, class, and nationality make for a fresh way of understanding the strategies employed by Black travelers who tired of having their rights tread upon. This book will also help educators explain how "white only" signs sidelined Latinx and other BIPOC passengers as well. Bay's accounts of diplomats of color who became entangled in American transportation companies' Jim Crow policies will likely surprise many readers, while also giving them a chance to consider segregation's broader Cold War implications.

Traveling Black makes compelling arguments about leisure, mobility, and technology, contending that African Americans were often early adopters of new transportation technologies like automobiles and airplanes, in large part because they could bypass slower forms of travel that isolated Black folks in unwelcoming parts of the country. At the same time, entrée to these new technologies—and the greater mobility they afforded—required access to wealth. Accordingly, when African American passengers sat next to white travelers on sleeping cars or airplanes, those spaces became charged sites of class as well as racial conflict. In other words, the daughter of a wealthy Black businessman who insisted on receiving the first-class service to which she was entitled upset—by her very presence—racial divisions that Jim Crow was supposed to ensure. When a Black family vacationing across the Midwest tried to check into any hotel, their car, presence, and embrace of leisurely pursuits rubbed raw those who imagined African Americans rooted solely in the South. Among Bay's many points is that African Americans headed for any part of their country understood that their wanderlust rejected the limits set on their citizenship and their belonging. When those passengers wore kitten heels, skirts, and pearls, that challenge took on even more dimensions. That is the multi-tiered beauty of *Traveling Black*.

Bay's book makes the reader wonder why it has taken so long for there to be such a cogent analysis of one of the most ubiquitous experiences in American life: movement. Bay reminds us that "Black resistance to segregation could be described as a constant civil rights movement" (p. 17), which proves just as true when we look at the history of transportation. Bay helps the reader understand that the full integration of travel extends to more than just the vehicles, including the fight to make taxis, hotels, roadside eateries, state parks, national monuments, gas stations, and airport lounges places where all people of color also belonged. Weeding out Jim Crow from transportation-related businesses makes the civil rights work of desegregating a rest station in Missouri or a motel in California an equally vital part of detangling the Gordian knot that is the business of racism in American transportation history.

Reckoning with History: Unfinished Stories of American Freedom, edited by Jim Downs, Erica Armstrong Dunbar, T. K. Hunter, and Timothy Patrick McCarthy. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 240 pages. \$120.00, cloth. \$30.00, paper. \$29.99, electronic.

Reckoning with History: Unfinished Stories of American Freedom transports the reader from the mundane names, dates, and events often associated with history class and into the world of the professional historian, opening students' eyes to a world of research, interpretation, discussion, argumentation, and revision. By doing so, the authors of its well-written essays connect their thought-provoking work to contemporary social, cultural, and political events.

This volume focuses on historical analysis, "offer[ing] diverse insight into how historians work—how they develop their research projects; why and how they develop new interpretations; and how they make historical analysis available to the broadest audiences" (p. 3). Part I, "Archives," begins with Erica Armstrong Dunbar's "Looking for Ona Judge," which takes readers on a journey of partaking in social history, discussing the dedication that historians must have during microfilm research, the hours spent on interpretation, the numerous associated discussions, and the arguments formed using such research. Next, Jim Downs' "Like People in History" discusses the importance of social history for the LGBT community, arguing that traditional archives have severe limitations, especially before the 1970s. In response, "LGBT people have been the leading and often exclusive archivists of their own history" (p. 31).

Part II, "Revisions," includes Ashli White's "American Founders Reconsidered," which compares the architecture at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and Haitian revolutionary leader Henry Christophe's Sans Souci Palace. White dutifully argues, "Christophe and Jefferson were acutely aware that architecture was a powerful means through which to communicate their ideals to the broader world" (p. 51). Elizabeth A. Herbian-Triant's "In Search of the Costs of Segregation" brings to light the economic hardships caused by segregation, which are often concealed by political or social narratives. Uncovering these financial costs will continue to demonstrate America's inequality "and the myriad of ways that white supremacy has plundered African Americans over the generations" (p. 123).

Many authors likewise connect their work to contemporary social, political, or cultural events. April E. Holm's "The Civil War, Slavery, and the Problem of Neutrality" contends that "neutrality itself cannot be neutral" (p. 78) because by remaining neutral, individuals conform to a negative peace that opposes a positive peace. For example, Civil War-era clergy remained neutral on slavery to promote order rather than combat the evils of slavery, while today, "All Lives Matter" remains neutral to systematic racism to maintain a negative peace. Matthew Taylor Raffety's "Historians, Lincoln, and 'The Ruining of America,'" analyzes a triad of approaches to Lincoln studies: the good, the bad, and the absurd.

Part III, "History Matters," begins with Kellie Carter Jackson's "Why Historical Film Matters," which argues, "History matters. Film matters. Together, these disciplines can both inform and empower and even entertain" (p. 114). Carter Jackson uses numerous contemporary and historical films that shape a viewer's

perception of history, explaining that “perceptions of history have an impact on every aspect of our lives: from statues, to rallies, to voting, to policy, to interpersonal relationships” (p. 136). Michael Green’s “A Mob Museum Matters” analyzes the complex nature of the Mob Museum in Las Vegas while relating his work to the history wars, discussing the debate concerning the museum’s opening, what “truth” means, the relationship between truth and memory, and how truth influences people. Timothy Patrick McCarthy’s “On Living History and Stories Unfinished” discusses how and why McCarthy fell in love with history, connecting personal experience with academic discipline and offering three lessons: First, to slow down and listen to other people’s stories. Second, to “realiz[e] that our lives are shaped by the historical circumstances that swirl around us” (p. 173). Third, to value “the *shifting gaze* . . . to see things differently, not simply to accept a view of history and the world distorted by myths of exceptionalism and textbooks of exclusion” (p. 174). Taken together, these essays can demonstrate to students that history relates to contemporary cultural, political, and social events in important ways.

The volume also includes T. K. Hunter’s unfinished and posthumously published work, “In the Matter of Worth,” which demonstrates the lifelong effort it takes to provide dutiful historical analysis. Through analysis of the New World Slave Trade, Hunter shows a continuous dedication to research, interpretation, discussion, argumentation, and revision each scholar must have to create an effective historical examination.

Eric Foner once wrote, “the study of the past is a constantly evolving, never-ending journey of discovery” (quoted on p. 164). *Reckoning with History* should reinvigorate the inquisitive fire of any historian, and perhaps inspire students, in two major ways. First, it reminds us of the lovely labor that historians use in their scholarship. Second, it connects historical work to larger social, political, and cultural events. Hopefully, your historical quest will be as meaningful and fruitful as this volume’s essays and the ceaseless work of its authors.

Mammoth-San Manuel Unified School District (AZ)

Richard J. Stocking

Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium, by Anthony Kaldellis. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. 392 pages. \$49.00, cloth. \$49.00, electronic.

Modern scholars distinguish the old Roman Empire from the medieval Greek-speaking Christian state, which they call Byzantium, because they believe that—culturally, ethnically, and religiously—the Byzantines were not Romans. Anthony Kaldellis raises a dissenting voice to argue that they were real Romans and that their state was Romanland. His argument requires reinterpreting the Byzantines’ Greek culture, multiethnic composition, and Orthodox religion as conforming with their Roman identity, or Romanness.

Kaldellis divides his book into two parts—simply titled “Romans” and “Others”—and insists that by inventing the idea of “Byzantium,” the West denied Romanness to the Byzantines and kept Roman imperial heritage to itself (Chapter 1).

The book expectedly gravitates toward later centuries that saw a direct confrontation between Byzantium and the West. However, as early as the sixth century, the Goths addressed Byzantines as “Romans” during formal negotiations (Procopius, *Bell.* 6.6.14-15), but referred to them as “Greeks” when communicating with Roman senators (5.18.40, 7.9.12), claiming that, as Latin-speakers, the Goths had more rights to the city of Rome than the Greeks. Likewise, three centuries later, Pope Nicholas I questioned the validity of the official title of Byzantine rulers as “emperors of the Romans” first and foremost because they were ignorant of the language of ancient Romans (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae* 6 (1925), 454-487, no. 88). The Greek-speaking Byzantines could self-identify as Romans, but this was not a valid argument for Latin-speaking westerners, who claimed Roman imperial inheritance for themselves based on their cultural identity, nor for modern scholars.

According to Kaldellis, Orthodoxy did not make up a part of Byzantine identity, because other peoples (Bulgarians, Vlachs, Russians) were also Orthodox (p. 273). Yet Orthodoxy established the legal and political rights of the Byzantines as Romans—when a prospective bride of Theodosius II appeared to be a pagan, she had to convert to Christianity to contract a legal marriage and become a Roman empress (Malalas, 14.4; *Chr. Pasch.* s.a. 420). Byzantine legislation granted Christians the legal status of “free Romans” (*Nov.* 144.2.4); only Christians could have a legal marriage that established inheritance and property rights (*Ecl. Auct. Priv.* 2.1). Elsewhere, Kaldellis acknowledges that Orthodox Slavs and Armenians had the same legal status as other Byzantines (p. 231).

Kaldellis speaks of the “Romans of Byzantium” as forming “an ethnic (or national) community” (pp. 42, 225, 273) or a “Roman ethnic group” (p. 102), but Byzantine texts frequently identify ethnic/cultural minorities, and the book does not expressly discuss the concepts of “nation” and “ethnicity.” Kaldellis argues that members of minorities “could rise to the top, so long as they learned Greek and were Orthodox, but this brought them on the verge of becoming Romans themselves” (p. 231), yet does not specify in what sense. He talks about Byzantine absorption of the Persians in the reign of Theophilus (829-842), making an argument for Byzantine polity being based on a “strong ethnicity” (pp. 128-129). One must consider two highly positioned Byzantine officials who had to communicate in their native Persian in the confusion following the murder of Theophilus’s son, Michael III (*Sym. Log.* 131.25), thus revealing their cultural identity—just like today, U.S. citizens retain their Jewish, Polish, Greek and other identities. Other Byzantine texts likewise show the difference between political and cultural identities: as planning for the marriage between Constantine VI and Charlemagne’s daughter Rotrude was underway, the Byzantines sent envoys to teach Rotrude the “literature and language of the Greeks” and to educate her in the “customs of the Roman empire” (Theophanes, *Chr.* 1: 455), whereas Basil I made Slavic nations culturally “Greek” and used the “Roman model” to establish their political organization (Leo, *Tact.* 18.95).

Not everyone will accept all of Kaldellis’s conclusions: for example, the Byzantines certainly referred to their state as “empire” (*basileia*; cf. pp. ix-x) and they actually defined their language as “Roman” (cf. p. 99). But, regardless, history students, and teachers, will profit from learning about how the Byzantines painstakingly built and preserved their political Roman identity over centuries.

Defining and defending identity in today's world is a similarly difficult task facing methodological, terminological, ideological, and cultural challenges. In that vein, Kaldellis quotes at length "a scene in Tom Holt's comic historical novel *Meadowland*," in which a character proclaims: "Being Roman is more a state of mind than a simple accident of birth" (p. 37). Hence, anyone who wishes to can count themselves Roman and live in Romanland.

Ball State University

Sviatoslav Dmitriev

Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom, by Spencer W. McBride. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 296 pages. \$29.95, cloth. \$19.99, electronic.

In 2014, many Americans would not have believed that a radical outsider to the American political mainstream would capture the leadership of his political party and eventually the presidency. He was not the first such outsider to try. In the mid-nineteenth century, Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, led a campaign that ranks among one of the more quixotic bids in American history.

Spencer McBride, an Associate Managing Historian at the Joseph Smith Papers Project, sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, argues that Smith's 1844 campaign was "an act of desperation" to bring attention to the Mormons' violent expulsion from their Missouri homes in the 1830s (p. 2) and a "call to empower the federal government to protect the religious freedom of all Americans" (p. 4). Smith's frustration with politicians and political bodies' inaction and even hostility to the Mormons' repeated petitions, pleas, and court cases for redress—"the imbecility of American statesmen," as he put it—spurred him to action.

Because Americans were unwilling to establish universal religious freedom and widely tolerated religious persecution, Smith proffered an idealistic, if not naïve, campaign that McBride views as Smith's best attempt to repair the nation's religious tensions. Smith hoped to use the city he founded at Nauvoo, Illinois as a model for national healing since it pushed "the boundaries of inclusivity in American society" (p. 48) by allowing women and people of color to own property and by openly recognizing religious freedom. To McBride, Smith organized a campaign against religious prejudice and bigotry and challenged the governmental systems that empowered and protected those prejudices.

McBride excels in explaining the genesis and features of Smith's populist campaign. Smith envisioned a strong executive who, above the fray of political partisans, would "send an army to suppress mobs" in various states (p. 93). He advocated the reduction of Congress's size by half, the total abolition of slavery (by reimbursing slaveholders from the sale of public lands), and further westward expansion with consent of the Native American people who lived there. He called to re-establish a national bank, to abolish prison terms for most crimes other than murder, and to turn penitentiaries into "seminaries of learning" (p. 104).

McBride recognizes that Smith's campaign had no chance of succeeding. Smith's audacious proposals were widely mocked and, given a nomination from fellow Mormons, a Mormon running mate, and Mormon missionaries stumping for their prophet-candidate, the bid could never realistically gain traction.

McBride does not neglect Smith's more problematic excesses, such as his consolidation of political, religious, and military power in Nauvoo. He notes that Smith was "either unaware or unconcerned" that other Americans might see a city with the "powers of a veritable city-state" as a threat to American democracy (p. 45). And McBride handles the most extreme aspects of Smith's Nauvoo leadership: his secretive polygamous marriages, his quashing of Missouri warrants, and his formation of a secretive "theodemocracy"—a prototype for a new separatist system of government—where its Council of Fifty anointed him a prophet, priest, and king. While McBride discusses Smith's destruction of a Mormon dissenting press and his unheard-of mayoral declaration of martial law, his thesis neglects a clear incongruity: Smith asked the public to grant Mormons religious freedom while he simultaneously denied some of that freedom to critics inside his own church.

McBride does not fully explain why Smith would both run for the presidency and seek to form his own theocracy. Benjamin Park has more convincingly explained that governmental inaction radicalized Smith to try a range of increasingly desperate tactics, including bloc-voting, petitioning Congress to make Nauvoo a federal territory and make him head of a force of 100,000 troops, while simultaneously plotting the Mormons' exit. As Park framed it, if Smith could not redeem the American political system from the inside, he increasingly looked for a future on the outside.

While McBride notes the oppression of Native American tribes and enslaved people, his focus on Americans' religious intolerance neglects the more significant power antebellum Americans' all-too-frequent use of violence had in shaping and enforcing majoritarian values. Perhaps Smith chaotically responded because the ever-looming threat of majority-initiated violence left him plagued with fear. Smith's jumbled approaches seem better explained by a very tangible and, in his case, lived anxiety that resistance to the status quo meant harm and even death. Smith was right. His fears soon became reality. McBride's compelling account of the religious motivations for Smith's campaign, like Smith, leaves us wondering just why Smith thought it would be a good idea to run.

University of Idaho

Samuel P. Newton

The Coffin Ship: Life and Death at Sea during the Great Irish Famine, by Cian T. McMahon. New York: New York University Press, 2022. 328 pages. \$35.00, cloth. \$23.00, paper. \$35.00, electronic.

One of the most enduring tropes in the history of the Irish diaspora is that of the "coffin ship." According to this interpretation, those who emigrated from Ireland to escape the Great Famine were subjected to an almost equally terrible experience

on board the ships that carried them across the Atlantic. The sea journey was a kind of maritime extension, and even expansion, of the horrors of the Famine, during which tens of thousands died of disease and malnutrition while apathetic authority figures stood by and did nothing.

In this impressive study, Cian T. McMahon upends this legend, arguing not only that the experience of emigration by sea was often less awful than the “coffin ship” memory suggests, but also that this journey played a key role in strengthening connections across the Irish diaspora. Rather than seeing these voyages as the literal or metaphorical end of the lives of Irish people, McMahon argues, we should view them as new beginnings.

To make his case, McMahon relies primarily on firsthand accounts by emigrants, some of them published, but most located in archives or personal collections in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. Each chapter of the book focuses on a portion of the journey. Chapter 1, “Preparation,” explores the various mechanisms involved in assembling the resources necessary to emigrate. Chapter 2, “Embarkation,” examines the process of packing, getting to port, boarding, and settling into shipboard life. Chapters 3 and 4, “Life” and “Death,” are the most directly relevant to McMahon’s effort to dismantle the “coffin ship” trope. Life at sea was hardly the nightmare that proponents of the “coffin ship” concept would have us believe. Boredom was probably more common than terror, and charity as prevalent as cruelty. Rather than passively submitting themselves to their fate, emigrants built communities that made these ships not so much like a coffin, but as “a city afloat” (p. 145). Through an analysis of mortality records, McMahon suggests that one of the most important props of the “coffin ship” metaphor—the idea that 20% of emigrants perished either during the journey or shortly after arrival—is a vast oversimplification, and one that only holds true in limited (if tragic) cases. Finally, Chapter 5, “Arrival,” describes the experiences of people arriving at their destination and leaving the ship to begin their new lives; the journey by sea played a key role in their making the transformation from emigrant to immigrant.

While this book has much to contribute to scholarly debates in Irish history, the history of the Irish Diaspora, and transnational and world history, it wears its learning lightly, and as a result would work well in undergraduate as well as graduate history courses. It could be usefully integrated into classes in world history, the history of immigration and emigration, U.S. history, and historiography.

Instructors thinking about using this book in their courses might consider incorporating some supplementary readings or activities. McMahon reasonably assumes that many of the readers of this book will be familiar with the “coffin ship” trope, but this concept may require some additional contextualization in areas without large Irish American populations (McMahon’s excellent notes and bibliography, as well as his “Essay on Sources and Methodology,” include some key readings on this topic). In addition, McMahon’s skill in interpreting and integrating his sources can, quite unintentionally, obscure some of the difficulties involved in working with this type of material; he almost makes it look too easy. Student readers of *The Coffin Ship* might benefit from being able to see emigrant letters in their “raw” form as well. Again, McMahon points the way towards

resources, mentioning the Documenting Ireland project at Queen's University, Belfast; in addition, the personal collection of emigrant letters compiled by Kerby Miller, which provided a significant portion of the sources for McMahon's book, is currently being digitized by the National University of Ireland, Galway and should be available to students soon.

The Coffin Ship represents an important contribution to an existing scholarly tradition, and a pathbreaking contribution to a new one. It deserves a home on the reading lists of any courses that deal with this important topic in world history.

The University of New Mexico

Caleb Richardson

The Jews of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: A Testamentary History of a Diaspora in Transition, by Stanley Mirvis. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020. 304 pages. \$72.00, cloth. \$65.00, electronic.

A scholarly volume focusing on the historical trajectory of any of the Jewish communities established in Britain's Caribbean colonies is a project that has long proved elusive. In that respect, Stanley Mirvis' work makes a welcome contribution to the field of Jewish Studies. In this volume, Mirvis undertakes to examine the Jewish community of Jamaica by means of analyzing a collection of 450 wills, representing "all the available Jewish wills" from Jamaica's Island Record Office, plus seven additional wills of Jewish testators from Jamaica found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (pp. viii, ix, xii). The book's title stakes the temporal claim to the eighteenth century as its period of focus, but the table of contents expresses the coverage to extend from 1655 (the year of the English conquest of Jamaica) through 1815. The reasoning offered for the selected end date is because "by 1815, the economic and social profile of the island's Jews had changed significantly" (p. 10) and "by 1815, while their majority persisted, the Portuguese-dominated period of Jamaican Jewish history had begun its decline" (p. 11).

Mirvis here eschews what he calls "the heavily quantitative and statistical analyses found in similar social historical studies," aiming instead for a narrative approach that, as he argues, will preserve "the human voices of the testators" and "offer a more intimate story of the Jews of eighteenth-century Jamaica" (p. xii). That is a worthy objective, surely, but a number of structural choices sharply limit the potential of the book as a teaching tool. The arrangement of Chapters 1 to 4 speaks to broad chronological divisions (1655-1692, 1670-1740, 1740-1770, 1770-1815), while Chapters 5, 6 and 7 take on a more sociological tone, addressing communal life, ethnic identity, and creolization, respectively. The introduction does not articulate the reasons for breaking out the chapters in this particular way, focusing instead on the will-making process, the Portuguese Jewish Atlantic, and the contradictions of Jewish creolization in Jamaica. While those discussions are useful, they don't do much to orient the reader to the overall scheme of the book. Instead, the reader experiences a series of anecdotes—some

quite interesting—but without a defined narrative arc, the book as a whole has no effective core story with which to engage the reader. Expense is another factor that limits its prospects for classroom use: priced at \$72, the cost of the volume would be prohibitive for many undergraduates. These aspects narrow the range of its potential for teaching to the graduate level.

The book is most effective in compiling information about individual Jamaican Jews, some of which has appeared in other historiographical discussions, but has not been previously collated together in one place. The author's decision to structure some chapters chronologically and others thematically repeatedly hinders the volume's stated goals. In the Preface, for example, Mirvis draws attention to the key role played by Portuguese Jews from Bayonne, suggesting that his analysis will invert our understanding of the Portuguese Jewish Diaspora (p. viii). Rather than devote a chapter to presenting this rather significant analysis of what he calls the Bayonne Cohort, he inserts separate sections with limited discussion of the role of Bayonne Jews into Chapters 1 (pp. 43-45), 4 (pp. 118-123), and 5 (pp. 131-132), such that the discussion never builds to an epiphany for the reader. Mirvis is also not well served by the approach to the legerdemain behind historiographical writing. In lieu of exposing some of his techniques to the reader's gaze—which would better guide the reader to an understanding of his methodology and give voice to his subjects—he limits his sources to talking points, and in lieu of synthesizing the established historiography, he reiterates it. The reader, however, can experience the testamentary subjects through their own words by consulting the Appendix, which presents excerpts from six of the wills that Mirvis has analyzed. Despite any drawbacks, the volume will likely be of interest to graduate students in the field, or perhaps to instructors for a graduate-level course on historiography. Specialists and genealogists will also find it to be of some interest. Accordingly, I would recommend it for library purchase, for which unlimited use e-copies are available in addition to the print version. However, given the price and the unavailability of an inexpensive paperback or e-reader version, it is not recommended as required reading for students.

Brown University

Holly Snyder

South Central Is Home: Race and the Power of Community Investment in Los Angeles, by Abigail Rosas. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019. 272 pages. \$85.00, cloth. \$25.00, paper. \$25.00, electronic.

Challenging sensationalist narratives that overemphasize tension, conflict, and violence in Black-Brown relations, Abigail Rosas' *South Central Is Home* adds to important recent scholarship examining relational race making and community formation within majority-minority neighborhoods and cities (including Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez's *Relational Formations of Race*, George J. Sánchez's *Boyle Heights*, and Pierrette

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Manuel Pastor's *South Central Dreams*). Focusing on South Central Los Angeles from the beginning of the War on Poverty in 1964 to the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, Rosas illuminates the complexity of Black and Latina/o interactions by highlighting the daily encounters and personal relationships cultivating interracial community building amidst the institutional neglect that marked South Central as undeserving of public and private investment. By examining the establishment of community-focused institutions like early childhood education centers, health clinics, and Black-owned businesses, Rosas argues that African Americans and Latina/os developed a sense of shared fate that provided the common ground for interracial community identity, activism, and investment (pp. 6, 12).

Rosas begins by contextualizing the history of African American placemaking and community investment in South Central prior to the arrival of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans during the late 1960s. Like Detroit, Chicago, and Oakland, Los Angeles' urban core suffered from local, state, and federal policies that overdeveloped the suburbs at the expense of inner cities. Reeling from segregation, disinvestment, and out-migration of middle-class Blacks, South Central transitioned from "land of milk and honey" to impoverished ghetto by the mid-1960s. Nevertheless, African Americans "staked a claim...and established a sense of ownership" by supporting Black-owned businesses, like Broadway Federal Savings and Loan, and forming grassroots organizations to lobby for anti-poverty funds through the Office of Economic Opportunity (p. 24).

As War on Poverty funds poured into South Central, tensions emerged between long-time African American residents and recent Mexican newcomers. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the unique challenges and innovative solutions of Black and Latina/o leaders as they established Head Start programs and community health clinics. Faced with a rapidly diversifying population of over 252,000 sprawled across sixteen square miles, neighbors worked across racial lines to form groups like the Parents' Improvement Council (pp. 63-67), one of several delegate agencies tailoring Head Start programs to the community's multilingual population. To address health disparities, community advocates partnered with health practitioners and elected officials to open the South Central Multipurpose Health Services Center (pp. 80-83), San Pedro Family Health Center (pp. 86-90), and Charles Drew University and Martin Luther King Jr. General Hospital (pp. 91-94). Women of color, like Ernestine Fitzhugh and Lilian Harkless Mobley, were essential leaders in building community-centered institutions catering to the needs of South Central.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Rosas masterfully interweaves personal histories of Latina/o and Black neighbors to provide an intimate look into the community's changing demographics during the 1970s and 1980s, as South Central experienced the "fastest turnaround in a city from Black to Latin[o]" (p. 102). Chapters 6 and 7 critically examine the limitations of multicultural boosterism and race enterprises amidst the aftermath of the 1992 uprising and rise of anti-immigrant politics in California. Rosas demonstrates how relational community formation developed from the ground up as neighbors set aside cultural differences and mobilized

around shared interests. For women participating in Head Start, “Motherhood became a larger organizing principle” for “their civil rights struggle,” which “require[d] nurturing efforts beyond one’s kinship group” (pp. 123, 143). For Black and Brown community activists working on the Rebuild LA project, “economic racism [was] the root of the problem” facing South Central, not recent immigrants (p. 176). For co-workers and patrons at Broadway Federal, preservation of the neighborhood and minority-owned businesses depended upon a “new vision” that embraced “continued interaction between and among African Americans and Mexican immigrants” (p. 198).

South Central Is Home provides a much-needed window into the socio-economic developments transforming majority-minority communities throughout the United States. Indeed, South Central’s transition from a historically black neighborhood into one that is both multiracial and predominantly Latina/o is illustrative of demographic trends in Oakland, Dallas, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Boston, and New York. While Rosas did not set out to make such comparisons, her arguments would have been strengthened by more directly engaging with the existing historiography on the urban crisis or more recent literature on Latina/o urbanism. Still, Rosas is exceptional in the care she takes to research and write so respectfully, and beautifully, about a community that has been stereotyped, overlooked, and misunderstood. By being both accessible yet scholarly, thorough yet concise, it succeeds where many others fail, and should be used in a variety of classroom settings. As a model of public-facing scholarship, the book is appropriate for use in undergraduate and graduate courses and should be required reading in teacher education programs.

Brigham Young University

David-James Gonzales

Cataclysms: An Environmental History of Humanity, by Laurent Testot, translated by Katharine Throssell. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021. 480 pages. \$35.00, cloth. \$34.99, electronic.

The University of Chicago Press has published an English translation of Laurent Testot’s *Cataclysms: An Environmental History of Humanity* (2017), originally in French, which in 2018 won the Académie Française’s Prix Léon de Rosen. Testot, according to the book’s the dust jacket, is a “journalist and lecturer who specializes in global history.” By his own admission, Testot’s prior work in world history led him to recognize “the importance of the natural environment in human history” (p. xiv). Thus, it might be more appropriate to evaluate this book alongside other works of world history, which foregrounds changes in human societies, institutions, and ideas, rather than works of environmental history, which foregrounds changes in the material and meteorological conditions of a particular place over a particular time. More than anything else, however, this book is a polemic, hoping to shake its audience from their stupor of willful ignorance regarding how close humans have come to successfully destroying the

environment that might otherwise be understood to sustain our lives. It is meant to be a thought-provoking book, in the long tradition of the public philosopher in France, and it is remarkably successful in that regard.

This book is well suited for courses in environmental philosophy rather than world history or environmental history. While Testot reasonably concedes that one cannot write the history of everyone (and everything) everywhere over the past three million years, the rationales for his choices are puzzling. His limited reference to Africa, he claims, is “because the environmental historiography provides us with few sources on it,” while Europe, China, and India receive regular attention because they are “the decisive spaces of global history” (p. xvi). While China, India, and Europe are undoubtedly rich in written textual evidence that has been well preserved over the past few millennia, material and oral sources have allowed regional and environmental historians to construct fairly detailed and sophisticated narratives of the past in places that Testot omits. An investigation of the pre-conquest histories of the Americas would require revisions to Testot’s chronology, if not the overall narrative. Testot’s narrative style should not be held up as a model for student historical writing: references are exceedingly rare, and the structure of chapters or even sections is prone to thematic or illustrative digressions, though usually with an intellectual payoff. Although the book is broadly organized chronologically, individual chapters (especially in the second half of the book) happily look ahead or backwards in time. The book is aimed at as broad an adult audience as possible; thus, its language would be accessible to undergraduate students. Some instructors might find the book a useful resource for mapping out the scope or themes of a world history course, particularly if the instructor wished to have students think about humans as a species (among many) in ways that world history textbooks typically overlook; however, such courses would benefit measurably from using many of the available monographs, textbooks, and other resources of that field. Instructors of environmental history courses will be best served by teaching the several environmental history books Testot includes in his bibliography, and the many more that he overlooks.

To be clear, these apparent failings of the book to serve as a course text or a resource for teachers of history must be understood in the context of the book’s intended purpose. Testot’s examination of the long past attempts to explain the processes by which humans built the structures—economic, cultural, and political—that led to the twentieth century’s human transformations of the planet and the twenty-first century’s faltering efforts to halt or even slow those transformations. The book aims not to be exclusively in history classrooms, but to be in every room, counting on readers’ nauseated shock at humanity’s willingness to destroy all, and hoping that shock transforms into actions, at individual and geographically local scales, that can subvert or dissolve the apparent inertia of historical structures. The book deserves to be read, yet perhaps not to be taught.

A Modern History of European Cities: 1815 to the Present, by Rosemary Wakeman. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 392 pages. \$110.00, cloth. \$34.95, paper. \$31.45, electronic.

An ambitious survey of Europe's urban history over the past two centuries, Wakeman's book both relates to and differs from other recent histories of European cities in two notable respects. On the first count, instead of focusing mostly on British, French, and German urban developments between 1750 and 1914, as Andrew Lees and Lynn Hollen Lees have done in *Cities and the Making of Modern Europe*, their 2007 treatment of Europe's urban history, Wakeman's approach is closer to that of Friedrich Lenger (a German social and urban historian, whose *European Cities in the Modern Era, 1850-1914* is also available in English) in that she takes her examination of the topic beyond Europe's urban core to offer a balanced discussion not just of developments in Western and Central Europe, but also Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean region. Such an extensive coverage, which, except for Switzerland, includes every urban region in Europe, however, comes with some pitfalls. A specialist of twentieth-century France, Wakeman is clearly on less familiar ground in discussions of developments in the nineteenth century and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Because of this, errors are more common in the book's chapters covering these topics, such as the glaring one on p. 95 where discussion of Prussian Breslau in the 1840s mistakenly credits the city with ethnic and transportation features that are clearly not those of Breslau but of Habsburg Pressburg (today's Bratislava).

On the second count, instead of engaging in theoretically informed social history analyses of the reasons that led to urban change and political, social, economic, and cultural reconfigurations in Europe's cities, as the other previously mentioned authors have done, Wakeman's study is more impressionistic. Her discussion of pre-industrial towns in the Baltic area, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, together with the industrialization of Western and Central Europe in the nineteenth century and the economic role of urban markets, metropolitan rebuilding projects, municipal reforms, the garden city movement, electrification, popular culture, and nightlife all over Europe up to the 1920s, is mostly descriptive and based on summaries of recent literature. Although the narrative is spiked with excerpts from nineteenth-century travelogues to create a sense of instantaneity, the geographically panoramic approach makes these chapters diffuse and kaleidoscopic rather than centered on a clearly identifiable argument. The narrative, however, gathers pace and considerably improves in the second half of the book, where discussion of modern urban planning, post-World War II urban reconstruction, automobility, housing projects, immigration, and tourism and their impact on twentieth-century European city life becomes more analytically engaged with the material.

The book is commendable for being the first to tackle European urban history in rich minutiae and from the perspective of the whole continent, yet the outcome projects a sense of troubling European insularity. Although the impact of colonial

migration to Europe's cities is occasionally examined in the text in reference to the interwar, postwar, and post-Cold War periods, there is little analysis of how European urban developments related to the rise of the skyscraper and the boom towns of nineteenth-century North America or how early twentieth-century architectural and urban planning experiments in the British, French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, and Italian colonies came to play an important role in Europe's post-WWII urban development. Because of this, there is very little about how global flows of mobility, migration, cultural transfers, and economic, political, and military power differentials between different continents impacted developments in Europe.

Richly illustrated, the book offers a good visual aid to the topics that it covers, but it is often frustrating that references to the images in the book are misplaced in the text, which also includes a much larger number of glaring typos (such as Bilboa used consistently on pp. 317-318 for Bilbao, and in the case of many other place names) that one would not expect in a book that aims to introduce students to the history of Europe's cities. Regarding the latter, undergraduates could have difficulty following such a rich and detailed narrative without being first acquainted with the topic through a more analytically minded and shorter text. Despite these concerns, Wakeman's work is a valuable addition to the half a dozen or so books in English on modern European urban history, and it could be productively used as a textbook in a graduate course to provide overall context along with several monographs and articles focusing on specific European cities.

Marywood University

Alexander Vari

George Washington's Final Battle: The Epic Struggle to Build a Capital City and a Nation, by Robert P. Watson. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021. 400 pages. \$32.95, cloth. \$32.95, electronic.

In *George Washington's Final Battle: The Epic Struggle to Build a Capital City and a Nation*, Robert P. Watson offers a history of the creation of the national capital that places George Washington at the center of every aspect of the city's early development. Finding parallels in the histories and interconnected fates of the new American nation, its first president, and the capital city, Watson endeavors to tell the stories of all three in this volume. The book includes biographical details of Washington's life, starting with his earliest years and continuing through his time as president and his retirement. Along the way, the vital moments in the history of the nation and the history of the national capital are woven into the story as well, many of which are presented as dependent almost entirely on the actions or influence of Washington. Watson's conclusion, in fact, offers the assertion that "Without Washington there would have been no capital city" (p. 279).

George Washington's Final Battle builds upon a solid foundation of the established scholarship on the national capital and the early American republic. Across thirty-two brief, lightly footnoted chapters, Watson pairs clear prose with a compelling national and personal story. The volume also includes an attractive set of glossy color plates with portraits, landscapes, and architectural designs related to the subject matter—a rare inclusion in modern monographs. However, the book would have benefited teachers and students alike by engaging with the current historiographical debates about the founding of the national capital beyond Watson's primary goal of asserting the importance of the capital and of Washington's centrality to all aspects of its development. In his discussion of the famous bargain between Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, which allowed for the Potomac location of the capital in exchange for the assumption of state debts, for example, Watson credits each of those men for their efforts, but concludes, "mostly it was Washington's far-reaching vision, considerable gravitas, and subtle lobbying that produced a capital city" (p. 156).

Unfortunately, *George Washington's Final Battle* offers limited utility for teachers of history. Watson's decision to combine biography of Washington with histories of the nation and the capital places the work in competition with books that separately engage more deeply and directly with each of those three topics. At times, the connections between the three subjects are not entirely clear to the reader. In the middle of an explanation of Washington's election by the first Electoral College in 1789, for example, Watson offers a nearly page-long description of the soon-to-be president's dentures (p. 112). While a skillful teacher may be able to use this passage to stir interest or introduce students to the emerging field of disability history, the inclusion of biographical trivia here does little to advance our understanding of the development of the nation or the capital city.

Likewise, some of the choices Watson makes when framing national debates may cause confusion among students or other readers not already familiar with the politics of the Revolutionary and early republic periods. In particular, his use of the lowercase terms "federalist" and "anti-federalist" to stand as shorthand for supporters of stronger or weaker central government starting during the Revolutionary period and continuing all the way through the 1790s tends to obscure rather than make clear the dynamic political divisions of the time. However, Watson explains his logic that "the terms 'federalist' and 'anti-federalist' are written in lowercase when referring to political factions. When political parties are formed, the terms are capitalized, and the names of the nascent parties are used" (p. xx).

Overall, Watson's effort to place the development of the national capital entirely on the shoulders of George Washington seems incongruous with the modern classroom. With its conclusion that "Washington had envisioned, then planned every aspect—its location, size, design, buildings—of the new capital city that would house the republic" (p. 279), the book seems oriented much more toward the owners of other hagiographies of the founding generation than to the history teachers in America's twenty-first-century classrooms.

Suspicious History: Questioning the Basis of Historical Evidence, by Jack Zevin. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. 176 pages. \$75.00, cloth. \$35.00, paper. \$33.00, electronic.

Since the 2016 presidential election, debates over the contours and content of teaching American history have become increasingly rancorous. These conflicts have spilled into public discourse, becoming increasingly weaponized and resulting in efforts to censor the teaching of histories that eschew American exceptionalism and question taken-for-granted “truths.” The 1619 Project by *The New York Times*, which centered the experiences of slavery as a defining force in American history, immediately became a lightning rod for controversy, resulting in a rejoinder project from the Trump Administration’s 1776 Commission. Meanwhile, critical race theory, an analytical framework developed in the legal field and later applied to educational studies, has become a target of conservative ire and efforts to outright ban its teaching in classrooms. With history classrooms in the crosshairs of the latest iteration of the culture wars, it can be intimidating for teachers to venture into the messiness of history. However, longtime teacher education scholar Jack Zevin invites the readers of his book, *Suspicious History: Questioning the Basis of Historical Evidence* to do just that: dive head into the controversies of the past using the richness of primary source data. Zevin’s title is instructive, as he encourages teachers to instill not only curiosity in their students, but also a healthy suspicion of the traces of the past to discern deeper historical understanding.

Zevin holds that for all the advances in pedagogy, “we have come yet again to the profound conclusion that students learn history best (meaning most deeply and insightfully) when they struggle with big questions connected to the primary and secondary sources” (p. 3). Ostensibly rejecting neatly packaged lesson plans that do little more than require students to regurgitate “facts,” *Suspicious History* further impels teachers to bring students into the contested, controversial, and complex worlds of the past through primary sources to create lasting understanding. In this sense, his book follows the call of curriculum scholars Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe for students to *uncover* meaning actively through analysis, rather than for teachers to merely *cover* content.

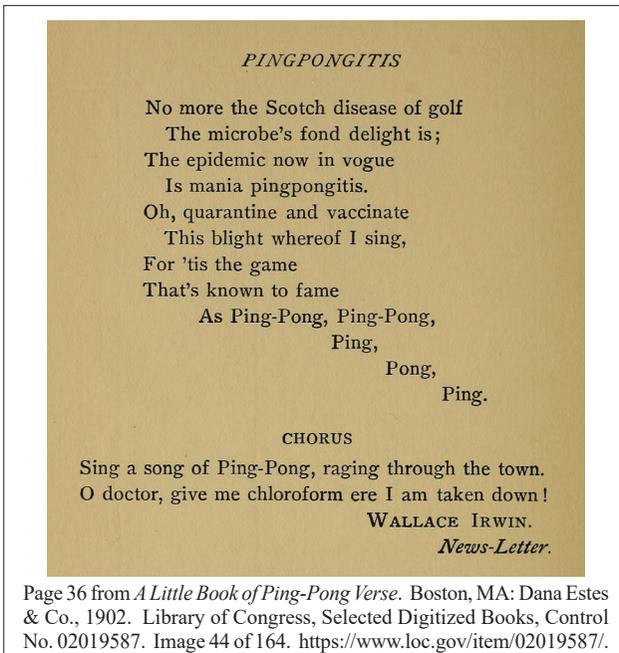
Suspicious History is broken down into five chapters that collectively emphasize the need for teachers and students to denaturalize linear metanarratives in service of more robust critical thinking. Chapter 1, “Suspicious!: Alerting Ourselves to the Suspicions, Dangers, and Excitements of Historical Thinking,” lays out the potential for critical teaching that is especially needed in the digital age where misinformation abounds. Zevin details the significance of excoriating authorship, claims, and selective manipulation, among other items. The second chapter, “Facts: Data as Information, Evidence, Stuff, Content, and So On,” focuses on deconstructing the nature of “truth” and the dichotomies between fact and interpretations. In “Bias: Human Prejudice and Feelings of Superiority,” Zevin invites readers to think broadly about the forces (from cultural codes to physical appearance) that shape our individual and collective understanding of

the past. Chapter 4, “Story: Fact and Fiction and in Between,” identifies how the craft of history often aligns more with literature than a precise science in the arcs of the stories we tell as a society and as historians. Those stories, of course, are shaped by multiple perspectives, which form the basis of “Lenses: Multiple Perspectives in the Teaching and Learning of History.” In that chapter, Zevin explains how multiple interpretations of a single event necessarily emerge. The final chapter, “Pedestals: Idolizing and Glorifying versus Demonizing and Deprecating,” explores how who is or is not valorized in historical memory reflects deeper lessons about the society that places people on the proverbial pedestal or not.

This is an excellent resource for classroom teachers stepping into the history classroom for the first time, as well as seasoned veterans interested in revisiting foundational principles of history pedagogy in a direct, unpretentious, and accessible manner. In addition to the clear ways in which Zevin breaks down heady concepts like bias and the nature of evidence, chapters also include mini-lessons with questions to model the kinds of thinking for which he calls. His examples and case studies traverse historical time periods and diverse geographies, making this volume useful for a variety of history and social studies teachers. Portions of his text, such as those where he breaks down the different nodes of bias, could be assigned to students themselves as they directly approach primary sources.

Windward School & UCLA

Jean-Paul R. Contreras deGuzman





The History Teacher

by the SOCIETY FOR HISTORY EDUCATION

The History of *The History Teacher*

Collaboration, Cooperation, Innovation, and Excellence

In 1940, the **Teachers' History Club** at the University of Notre Dame created the "Quarterly Bulletin of the Teachers' History Club" to improve the learning experience in the history classroom.

By 1967, the expanding collaboration of educators reorganized as the **History Teachers' Association** and decided to transform the bulletin into an academic journal—*The History Teacher*.

In 1972, the association transferred guardianship of *The History Teacher* to coordinating faculty members at the Department of History at California State University, Long Beach. In the interest of independence and self-determination, the associated teachers incorporated as a non-profit organization.

The Society for History Education, Inc. (SHE) was recognized by the State of California in 1972.

In 2012, the Society began offering full-text, open access to recent archives of *The History Teacher* at its website, thehistoryteacher.org.

In 2014, *The History Teacher* launched its full-color covers feature, showcasing historical documents on both front and back covers, specifically designed to spark classroom discussion.

In 2021, *The History Teacher* entered its **55th Volume**, and we ask you to join us in celebrating history teachers throughout the world and throughout time.

55th Anniversary

1967 • *The History Teacher* • 2022