
R E V I E W S

God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right

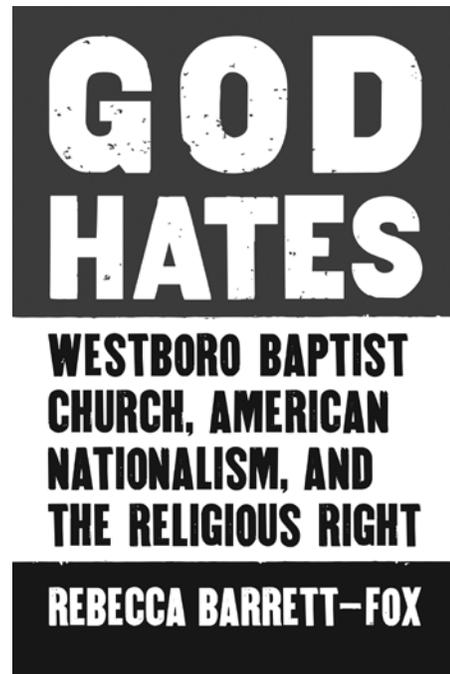
by Rebecca Barrett-Fox

x + 254 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016, cloth \$24.95.

Anyone who encounters the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) picket signs on a street corner—signs depicting sodomy between stick figures, signs reading “God Hates Fags” and “Thank God for 911”—will have questions: Who are those people? What Christian religious body could possibly justify such activity? What theology informs such a church? From 2004 to 2010, while completing doctoral research, Rebecca Barrett-Fox attended WBC services and Bible study groups, ate at WBC potlucks, and conversed with WBC members on the picket lines, inquiring into their beliefs to answer just such questions. The result is *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right*, an investigation into the history of the congregation and its theological belief system and an exploration of where it fits on the spectrum of Protestant churches.

Westboro Baptist Church is best known for its picketing; its fax and Internet campaigns aimed at gay citizens and their supporters, Jews, and artists; and, perhaps above all, for its picketing presence at the funerals of American soldiers. Formerly led by pastor Fred Phelps (who may have been excommunicated before his recent death), this Topeka-based group achieved a nationwide reputation for its website www.godhatesfags.com. Barrett-Fox identifies the WBC as a self-avowed Primitive Baptist congregation professing a hyper-Calvinism with a strong belief in double predestination, that is, that God decided at the beginning of time exactly who would receive eternal salvation and who would be damned to hell. She writes of WBC theology: “Because of total depravity, humans cannot be good enough to be chosen for salvation; only by being chosen for salvation can they be holy” (p. 73). As it applies to gay individuals, “Westboro Baptist Church does not preach that God hates people because they are gay but rather . . . that they are gay *because* God hates them” (p. 73). Barrett-Fox explains that members of the church nonetheless believe it is their God-appointed mission to preach the truth of His hatred to the world, even without the hope of saving souls since God has already made His choices.

The heart of the book is devoted to positioning the WBC on the antigay religious spectrum. Barrett-Fox cites potent antigay quotes from leaders of the Religious Right that are nearly identical to rhetoric from the WBC. She intimates that the church gives voice to what many Americans believe: “Westboro Baptist Church’s linking of homosexuality and military death is consistent with the tradition within the Religious Right that generally links homosexuality and national doom” (p. 143).



Barrett-Fox urges her readers to look beyond the bounds of this fringe church to the seemingly more palatable churches of the majority culture of America, where shockingly similar beliefs are held.

Barrett-Fox’s last chapter is based on her conversations with those who have left the church, either because of the pain it has inflicted on the outside or because of the increasing harshness experienced within its own walls. A full one-third of Barrett-Fox’s copious and informative footnotes cite e-mails, personal communications, and Internet postings from the WBC website. Her ability to offer the church’s stance on any topic is so outstanding that she sometimes teeters on the brink of being its apologist. But for those who have been targeted by the pickets and hate speech of the WBC (and I am one—for my theater piece *Visions of Right*), for those who have experienced anguish, humiliation, and pain at its members’ sign-wielding and tweeting hands, no amount of theological history or positioning can serve as balm.

Despite the national visibility of the WBC and its inclusion in several film and theater pieces (including my own work), there is little scholarship about the WBC. If one is seeking an investigation into the theological basis and societal context for the Westboro Baptist Church, *God Hates* is an important book. If one desires a look inside the WBC compound to learn how WBC members explain their behavior and belief system, how they profess to love and care for each other, *God Hates* is a necessary book.

Reviewed by Marcia Cebulka, playwright and novelist, Topeka, Kansas.

Manhood on the Line: Working-Class Masculinities in the American Heartland

by Stephen Meyer

xii + 272 pages, notes, index.

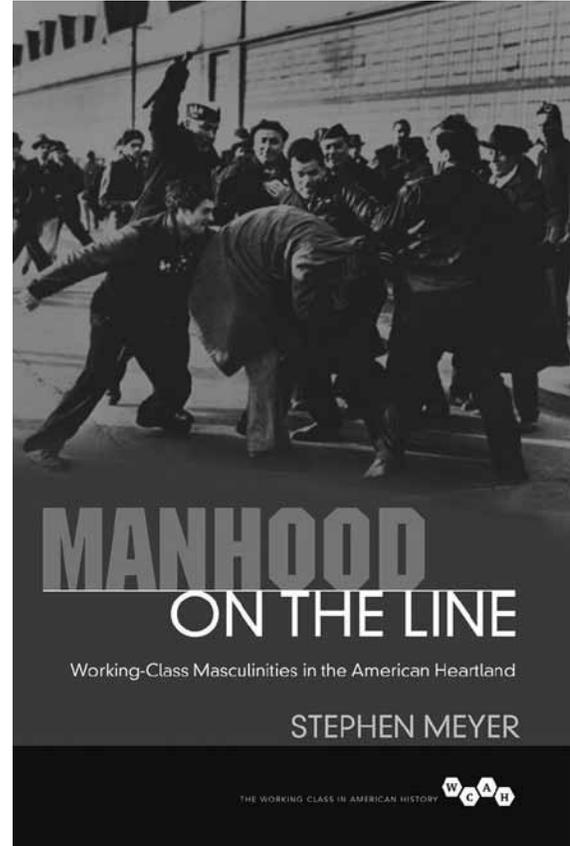
Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016, paper \$28.00.

In the scholarly study of masculinity, the history of working-class masculinity has often been neglected in favor of more accessible middle-class men's stories. Stephen Meyer's book is a valuable, if sometimes uneven, contribution to the work being done to rectify this omission. Meyer, a historian of labor, examines the culture of workers in the auto industry during the first half of the twentieth century. Although his focus is on auto workers, he implies that much of what he finds on the shop floors of Detroit can be used to understand other male-dominated work environments.

Meyer argues that male working-class culture in the industrial period before mass production had two general forms. A "respectable" version, based in the skilled crafts tradition, emphasized independence, stability, strength vis-à-vis management, and providing for a family. The other, "rough" form was associated with unskilled workers, many of them immigrants, and was influenced by a culture of violence, vice, drinking, and sexual expression. Meyer argues that the arrival of mass production in the early twentieth century undermined elements of both of these coeval traditions. "This book details how the dual crises of industrialism and of masculinity prompted working-class and other men to re-masculinize their work and male identities. To a certain extent, the newly forming masculine culture of semi-skilled mass production workers blended and merged elements of the rough and respectable manhood" (pp. 9–10). Because workers in the auto industry increasingly had less control over their work environment, this newly reshaped masculinity was particularly sensitive to anything that undermined white male position; thus, opposition to the influx of women, African Americans, and other minority groups, especially during World War II, became an essential part of these auto workers' view of themselves as men.

The author mines a rich set of sources to get at working-class culture, including grievance reports, oral histories, government studies, memoirs, and newspaper accounts. Meyer's nuanced reading of the grievance reports effectively reveals how workers shaped a masculine ethos of opposition to the degrading effects of mass-production and management regimentation. From slowdowns to fighting, from bragging about sexual exploits to yodeling on the job, workers drew upon both the respectable and rough traditions of masculinity to develop a shop culture of their own. The shop floor remained a regimented, often degrading place to work, but men continued to seek ways to influence the work process.

Meyer's interest in labor history is evident as he effectively situates his subject in the context of the labor history of the first half of the twentieth century, but the subject of working-



class masculinities often remains undeveloped. Chapter 3, for example, titled "'Rats, Finks, and Stool Pigeons': The Disreputable Manhood of Factory Spies in the 1920s and 1930s," is wholly focused on the auto companies' use of industrial espionage to undermine worker organization. It discusses the devious methods used by company spies, the pervasive nature of the spying, and retribution against discovered spies, but it does not have any substantial discussion of the place espionage had in the masculine culture of the workers. Meyer notes that the spy "represented the negative case for the auto workers' notions of exemplary manhood" (p. 58) but leaves this subject largely unexplored.

Meyer has provided an important service to historians of gender through his exploration of how work culture contributed to working-class masculine identity, yet there is much more that must be done to understand how gender shaped the lives of working-class men. We need a better view of how working-class masculinities were formed at home, in schools, and in the growing number of leisure venues of this time as well as the workplace. Future work can combine Meyer's exploration of masculinity on the shop floor with the stories of working-class men in all the varied places where masculinity was, in Meyer's words, "fashioned and refashioned" (p. 2).

Reviewed by Shawn Johansen, professor of history, Brigham Young University-Idaho.

Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature, and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West.

by Karen R. Jones

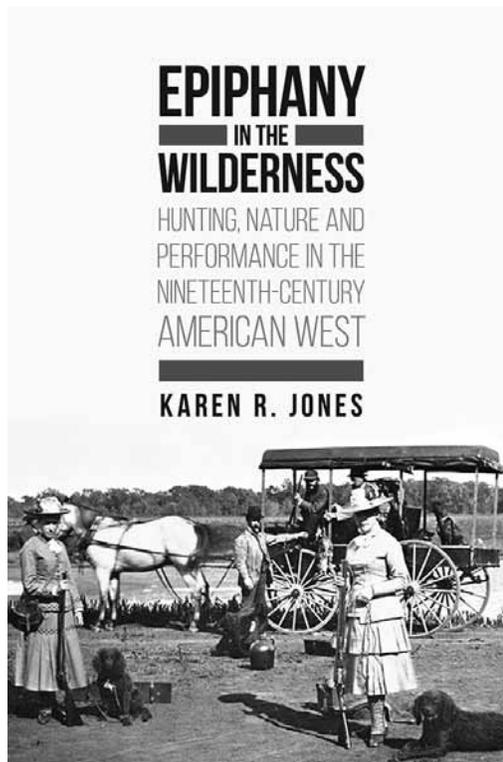
xiii + 363 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015, cloth
\$55.00.

Drawing on the postmodernist icons Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and their intellectual progeny, Karen R. Jones's *Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature, and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West* brings the intellectual avant-garde to western American history. In particular, Jones employs Michael Callon and Bruno Latour's "actor network theory" and the emerging field of performance studies "to see hunting as a ritually constituted activity in which protagonists construct a sense of meaning around an event, place, community, and self by repeating and reinforcing behaviors, rites, and interactions" (p. 13). Hunting, in her theatrical metaphor, puts actors (human hunters as well as their prey animals) on a stage (sometimes literally) that she calls "the game trail" to act and reenact the ritual of hunting. Hunting, therefore, has long contained a variety of important social meanings, helping to define gender, class, racial, and national identity.

Jones organizes her book around three "acts," as she calls them. Act one, "Actors and Agents," looks at the relationship between hunting and gender and the development of the hunter hero as "leading man" of the hunting drama, with his trusty steed and reliable firearm in supporting roles. Theodore Roosevelt, George Armstrong Custer, and William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody all took memorable turns playing this role. In a time of increasing material comfort and civilization, these men and their brethren hunted as a way to prove their masculinity and martial character. The initial act of hunting could best be completed in the rugged West, especially the Great Plains and Rockies, where the largest game animals dwelled. Typically, the hunting trail provided a male stage of trial and camaraderie, but some women participated as well as a way to transgress social norms and empower themselves.

Jones's second act, "The Afterlife," looks at the ways in which the ritual of hunting was remembered and reenacted in literature, art, photography, and theatrical performance. Hunter heroes penned thrilling narratives that testified to their authenticity and related the hunting trail experience to the masses. Photography added a sense of realism to tales of hunting, and theatrical representations—especially those of Cody's Wild West Show—made the hunting trail performance resonate with modern people. The art of taxidermy, meanwhile, provided material evidence, a theatrical prop, of the hunter's prowess.

Finally, act three, "Saving the Hunting Frontier," looks at the role performance played in developing a conservation ethos



at the fin de siècle and in the ghost dance movement among American Indian groups.

Hunting could take on many forms: subsistence hunting by American Indians and settlers to provide valuable meat for their families; industrial-scale market hunting, most notably by professional bison hunters; and sport hunting conducted by wealthy white elites. While Jones mentions the former groups in passing, it is clear that she is primarily interested in elite sport hunting, and with good reason, as this group is the most congruent with her theatrical schema—and most influential in shaping national mores. One of the challenges of reading any theory-laden work is to decide whether the addition of theory adds anything to our understanding of historical processes. At their worst, complex epistemological schemas make opaque that which is obvious, but at their best, they introduce a new framework for understanding the past. Fortunately, *Epiphany in the Wilderness* is much closer to the latter condition. Certainly, hunting is a familiar topic, and many historians, including Dan Flores, Elliott West, and Andrew Isenberg, have written on the demise of the bison and other topics, but none has done a better job of demonstrating the important role hunting played as a salve for a nation afraid of losing the characteristics that made it exceptional. Participating in the hunting trail (if only by reading tales of hunters' exploits or attending reenactments) gave Americans an identity, allowing them to act out familiar roles even if the play itself was changing.

Reviewed by Jason Pierce, associate professor of history, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West

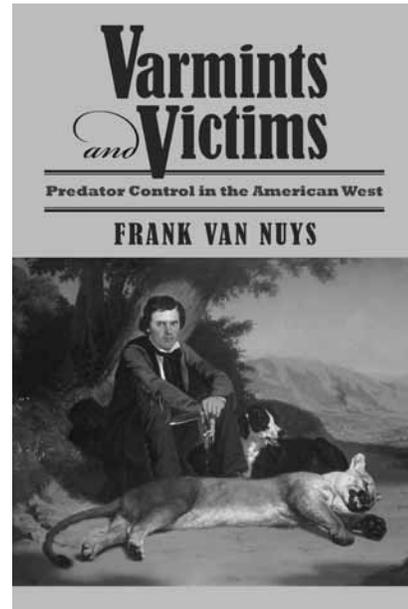
by Frank Van Nuys

xiv + 360 pages, illustrations, notes, index, bibliography.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015, cloth \$29.95

With a broad geographic and chronological reach, Frank Van Nuys investigates efforts to reduce, eliminate, and eventually revitalize several animal predators once common in the American West. The work follows four species—wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, and grizzly bears—through changing predator management policies over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Van Nuys presents them, American perceptions transformed from “a coherent set of beliefs and practices in relation to predators to an increasingly complex present beset by clashing interests and ideologies” (p. 5). This shift from consensus to conflict touches fault lines representative of broader, polarizing issues in the American West: experience vs. expertise, rural vs. urban values, human vs. ecological interests, state vs. federal control.

Van Nuys tracks efforts at predator control through the work’s brief introduction, seven chapters, and a short epilogue. Early chapters focus on initial efforts by entrepreneurial “wolfers” interested in the market value of their quarry’s pelts and, later, by hunters and trappers who collected state-funded bounties (p. 18). Though these early efforts resulted in a sizable number of dead predators, ranchers pressed for a more comprehensive solution to what they perceived as the serious problem of animals stealing valuable four-legged property. The creation of state game commissions, mandated to “protect the ‘good’ animals from ‘bad’ ones” (p. 28), helped both ranchers and hunters. Recognizing their shared predation problem, several western states began to appropriate funds to the first federal predator management agency, the Bureau of Biological Survey. During the years 1915–1930, which Van Nuys christens “the ‘golden age’ of predator control” (p. 52), hundreds of salaried bureau hunters systematically killed mind-boggling numbers of wolves, coyotes, and other predators, including an estimated 100,000 coyotes in 1924 alone (p. 69).

All this killing provoked a response from a growing number of academics and members of the nascent environmental movement. Figures such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and the University of Kansas’s E. Raymond Hall voiced criticisms of the Bureau, claiming that it used the mantle of scientific management as a cover for a project of blanket predator destruction (p. 91). In chapters 4 and 5, Van Nuys examines the efforts of these experts to fight back against the bureau, starting during the Great Depression and lasting through the 1960s. Working mostly through published papers and assorted advisory committees, the new conservationists scored few measurable victories on scientific consensus alone. Success largely eluded them until they



helped popularize a new view of predation as a fundamentally natural process itself worthy of protection (p. 177).

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the consequences of the Endangered Species Act, specifically efforts to make wolves and other predators protected species. Van Nuys cleverly follows the journey of the gray wolf as a test case for the successes and pitfalls of reintroducing a predator species. Advocates were thrilled when the species was brought back to Yellowstone but were less pleased when the reintroduction proved so successful that wolves were later removed from endangered species protection, allowing several states to start managed wolf hunts (p. 240). Local residents and ranchers, not thrilled about the initial reintroduction of wolves, were buoyed by the hunts, which they viewed as efforts to protect rural culture and states’ rights in the face of urban liberal federal intervention (p. 247).

This summation does little justice to the rich, dense nature of Van Nuys’s narrative. The work follows a plethora of individuals, committees, and agencies, examining their actions with clarity and detail. That said, the bureaucratic and organizational focus occasionally leaves larger social and cultural issues unexamined. How wolves and predators maintained their cultural status as bad animals and, perhaps more importantly, how exactly that status changed for a subset of the American population are questions largely unaddressed in the work. Of course, no book can be all things to all people, especially in this case, given the geographic and chronological reach of the study. Van Nuys has created a compelling account of predator control in the American West. *Varmints and Victims* presents a complex tale told in engaging prose and will without doubt serve as an inestimable resource and impetus for future research.

Reviewed by Matthew Reeves, PhD candidate, University of Missouri–Kansas City.

Out Where the West Begins: Profiles, Visions, and Strategies of Early Western Business Leaders

by Philip F. Anschutz

392 pages, illustrations, index.

Denver, CO: Cloud Camp Press, 2015, cloth \$34.95.

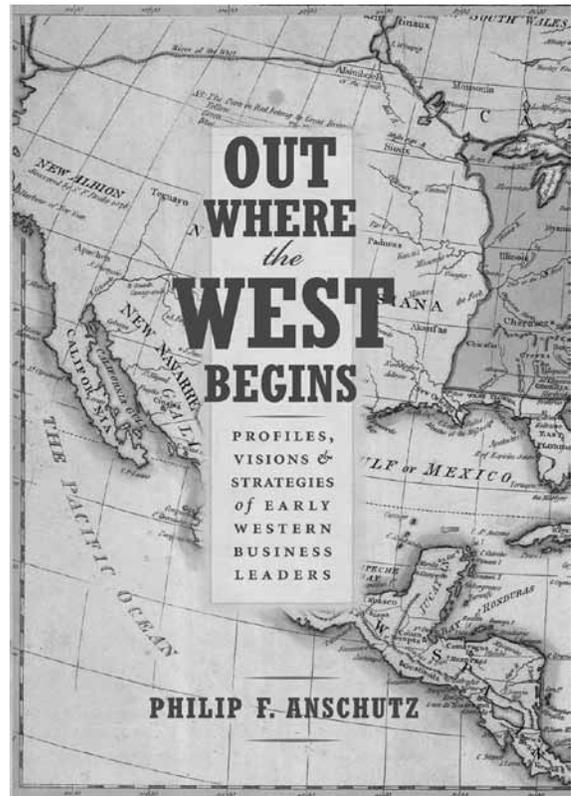
Philip F. Anschutz, author of *Out Where the West Begins: Profiles, Visions, and Strategies of Early Western Business Leaders*, writes in familiar territory. As of 2016, the Denver-based entrepreneur is number thirty-nine on the “Forbes 400,” the influential financial magazine’s list of America’s wealthiest billionaires.

A native Kansan, Anschutz was born in Russell. He grew up there and in Hays before he graduated from Wichita East High School in 1957. The same year that he earned a bachelor’s degree in business from the University of Kansas (1961), he purchased his father’s oil-drilling company. Using returns from that investment, he began building a financial empire that eventually included huge holdings in real estate, petroleum, railroads, telecommunications, entertainment, and sports. Philip and his wife, Nancy, are also known for their philanthropic efforts in the areas of health, community service, and cultural arts.

History has long been one of Anschutz’s interests, and in the foreword to his book, he notes, “For the last fifty years I have read [western entrepreneurs’] biographies, learned their histories, thought about their strategies and contributions, and have even purchased some of the companies they founded and extended their business strategies further.” He goes on to outline his intention to provide “fifty individual profiles of entrepreneurs and businessmen covering a period of about 120 years (1800 to 1920)” (p. 14). By that measure, *Out Where the West Begins* fulfills its purpose. In 360 pages of biographical sketches, the author describes businessmen in a range of categories: early trade/commerce, agriculture/livestock, railroads/transportation, mineral extraction, manufacturing, finance/banking, and entertainment/communication.

Each of Anschutz’s subjects made significant economic contributions to the history of the American West. Some names remain well known today (Cyrus McCormick, Frederick Weyerhaeuser, John D. Rockefeller, Samuel Colt, Levi Strauss, Adolph Coors, Henry Ford); other names are unfamiliar, but their accomplishments are no less important (John Wesley Iliff, Meyer Guggenheim, Edward L. Doheny, Spencer Penrose, A. P. Giannini, Carl Laemmle). Several biographies will be of interest to Kansas readers for their connections to the Sunflower State.

Anschutz’s biographical sketches are concise and readable. Each is followed by a brief list of sources, both historical and contemporary. The book would be of interest to anyone curious about the role of business in the American West. Unfortunately, with the exception of Spanish trader Manuel Lisa, Anschutz’s fifty subjects are all Anglo men. Admittedly, Brigham Young, Henry Wells, William Fargo, Andrew Carnegie, and others left indelible marks on history, but *Out Where the West Begins* might



have a more balanced outlook if some of the entrepreneurs included were women or men with different ethnic origins. After all, the West was large enough to accommodate entrepreneurs from a variety of backgrounds. For example, Sarah Breedlove (1867–1919), known as “Madam C.J. Walker,” lived in Denver and Saint Louis. She developed a successful line of hair-care products for African American women. One of the first female self-made millionaires in the country, she was also a social activist and philanthropist. Bridget “Biddy” Mason (1818–1891) was brought to California as a slave. After emancipation she worked as a nurse and purchased land in Los Angeles. With a fortune that approached a third of a million dollars, she established a school for black children and a travelers’ aid center and helped found the city’s first black church. William Leidesdorff (1810–1848), a West Indian of African and Cuban descent, gained both American and Mexican citizenship. His property holdings in California and his estate were valued at \$1.4 million after his death—not counting gold that was later mined from his land.

Out Where the West Begins is a fine effort and a worthwhile read for fans of the American West. As the author plainly states, “I was faced with a series of decisions in order to reduce the scope and number of profiles to approximately fifty individuals who seemed most critical” (p. 13). As a result, anyone interested in women and minority entrepreneurs during the West’s formative years should look elsewhere.

Reviewed by David Webb, retired assistant director of the Kansas Heritage Center, Dodge City.

The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society

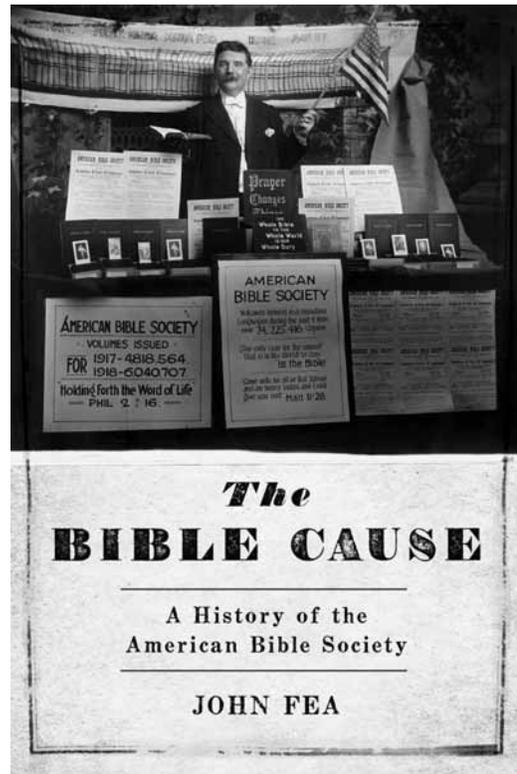
by John Fea

vvi + 356 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, cloth \$29.95.

Americans have long been a people of the book, and for most of their history, that book has been the Bible. In this sweeping survey of the American Bible Society (ABS), John Fea reveals how the society's mission to distribute the Bible to every man, woman, and child has intersected with projects of national and international reconstruction, from America's national integration after the War of 1812 to rebuilding Europe and Asia after World War II to fashioning a more ecumenical Christian community after Vatican II. Fea argues that amid remarkable cultural creativity, technological innovation, and organizational change, "two things have remained the same": the ABS seeks to distribute the Bible as widely as possible at an affordable price, and it works tirelessly to build a Christian civilization (p. 3).

Fea skillfully chronicles the ABS's far-reaching distribution and translation efforts over its two-hundred-year history. But nonspecialists will be most interested in his second theme. Here, *The Bible Cause* becomes a book about religion and politics that is not about politics. The ABS has dramatically shaped Christian nationalism in America, but it has done so as an apolitical organization laboring wholly outside political parties and interest groups. In a historiography of American evangelicalism dominated by narratives of the Religious Right, a work interpreting evangelicals apart from their alliance with conservative political organizations or the culture wars is a refreshing and significant contribution. Further, in tracing the ABS's alliance with mainline Protestantism for most of the twentieth century (and its rocky relationship with fundamentalists and evangelicals during those years), Fea demonstrates that conservative Protestants are not the only ones who have promoted the narrative of a Christian nation.

By integrating anecdotes of colorful and heroic agents such as P. M. Ozanne, Young Bin Im, and Frances Hamilton, Fea makes organizational history an enjoyable read. In an institution dominated by white men, he also goes out of his way to stress the importance of laypeople and women in accomplishing the society's goals. Commissioned by the ABS (though not paid) to write this book, Fea carefully navigates the tensions in the society. An interdenominational, untheological, apolitical organization, the ABS offered little social critique, moral voice, or theological leadership amid social and religious controversy; still, this same commitment to neutrality was central to its longevity. ABS agents sometimes defended immigrants' and Native Americans' right to speak and read in their own languages and even transcended political alliances to distribute Bibles to political enemies. But for most of its history, the ABS has been a vehicle of American



nationalism and promoted a vision of national harmony rooted in cultural homogeneity.

Fea's critiques of the society probably do not go far enough to satisfy most scholars, but this book was intended to be an armchair read—a dynamic story organized into twenty-seven short chapters—accessible to popular audiences. Thus, scholars who pick up the book will probably be bothered by how Fea tends to take the statements of ABS leaders and periodicals at face value. For instance, he largely accepts the ABS's rationalization for why it did not effectively distribute Bibles to African Americans before the twentieth century: because of a federalist system of auxiliaries that gave local branches sole responsibility for distribution (p. 88). Yet there is ample evidence in his own narrative that the society could have bypassed auxiliaries led by former Confederates if it wanted to, either by creating special auxiliaries, as it did for seamen, or by partnering with other benevolent institutions such as the U.S. Christian Commission. Fea does not ignore instances of persecution and resistance where ABS agents were unwelcome, but he does not set the ABS's sunny, promotional version of events against secondary sources that might suggest a different story.

The Bible Cause relates very little to Kansas history save in its treatment of Dwight D. Eisenhower and his support of the ABS. It will be of most interest to historians of the early republic, national identity, and American religion.

Reviewed by Jennifer Wiard, Center for Student Success, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.

American Vandal: Mark Twain Abroad

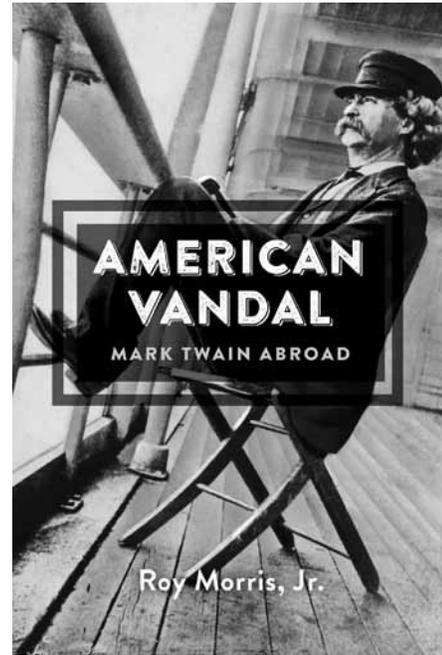
by Roy Morris, Jr.

279 pages, notes, index.

Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015, cloth \$27.95.

In his new book on Mark Twain, *American Vandal: Mark Twain Abroad*, Roy Morris, Jr., presents a little-known side of the beloved American author by focusing on his international travels and travel writing. Now primarily famous for his literary portraits of life along the Mississippi and in the American West, Twain was recognized in his own time as an accomplished traveler, lecturer, and travel writer. In fact, Morris estimates that he spent about 16 percent of his life abroad. From glamorous world capitals to the Swiss Alps, from India to South Africa, from the Middle East to Australia, there is hardly a corner of the world that Twain left unexplored. Alternating between the roles of tourist, “tramp” (Twain’s term), and self-styled exile—most notably during a worldwide lecture tour to pay off his considerable debt—Twain truly was, by the end of his life, a citizen of the world. As *American Vandal* illustrates, this cosmopolitan lifestyle influenced Twain’s writing and also shaped popular views of American literature and culture abroad. Commonly perceived as a “living embodiment of the American character” (p. 238), Twain often played into this perception with the persona he constructed for himself through his travel writings and international appearances.

Morris’s book takes its title from the character of the “American vandal”—an obnoxious tourist appropriating cultural artifacts with little appreciation for local customs—that Twain introduced in his first book-length success, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), a fictionalized account of his travels to the Mediterranean and Middle East. *American Vandal* uses this construct as a lens to examine Twain’s literary processing of his travels in five chapters presenting Twain’s international travels and travel accounts in chronological order from age thirty-one to his death. The first chapter, “Innocents Abroad,” describes Twain’s five-month voyage to Europe and the Holy Land. Morris is at his best in this chapter, commenting on the more absurd aspects of this “first prepackaged luxury cruise in American history” (p. 11) with a laconic wit and deadpan delivery that rival Twain’s own. As Morris writes, the young journalist Twain was an unlikely addition to the religiously motivated travel group, which consisted of “somewhere between sixty-five and eighty passengers, including several newly acquired fundamentalists from upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Missouri, and various other midwestern states” (p. 12). Once on board the *Quaker City*, Twain proceeded to drink, play cards, and otherwise scandalize most of his fellow passengers, all the while gathering raw material for what would become his first and most successful book of travel writing, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). Later chapters are equally insightful and well



written, if less rollicking in tone. Reflecting Twain’s increasing disenchantment with travel and humanity, Morris’s later chapters convey “the darkening of Twain’s worldview after his eye-opening experiences abroad” (p. 216). The last chapter, “This Everlasting Exile,” finds Twain looking back on a life now marked by loss and loneliness, an American adrift even within his home country and no longer the restless, roaming “vandal” of his youth.

With an impressive feel for Twain’s personality, Morris brings his travels to life by expertly blending anecdotes with well-chosen quotations from Twain’s letters, travel writings, and relevant secondary sources. Striking excerpts from Twain’s lesser-known accounts add to the feeling that readers are seeing an understudied side of the author’s life and oeuvre. Though Morris is well read in Twain scholarship, as his many scholarly references and footnotes demonstrate, the book does not lay claim to treading new ground in literary scholarship. Rather, *American Vandal* suggests that in order to fully appreciate Twain’s life, work, and self-declared status as *the American*, we must learn to see him as defined not only by his midwestern roots but also by the nearly twelve years of his life that he spent traveling and living abroad. “Born in the geographical center of America,” Morris notes, Twain “would come to embody the cultural ascendance of his country as unmistakably as Charles Dickens, another low-born, self-made man, had personified the England of his birth” (p. 199). With his masterful prose and keen eye for detail, Morris has mapped this ascendance onto Twain’s geographical wanderings, inviting the reader to follow along as he convincingly illustrates Twain’s journey from “vandal” to cosmopolite.

Reviewed by Vanessa Steinroetter, assistant professor of English, Washburn University, Topeka, KS.