
R E V I E W S

I Like Ike: The Presidential Election of 1952

by John Robert Greene

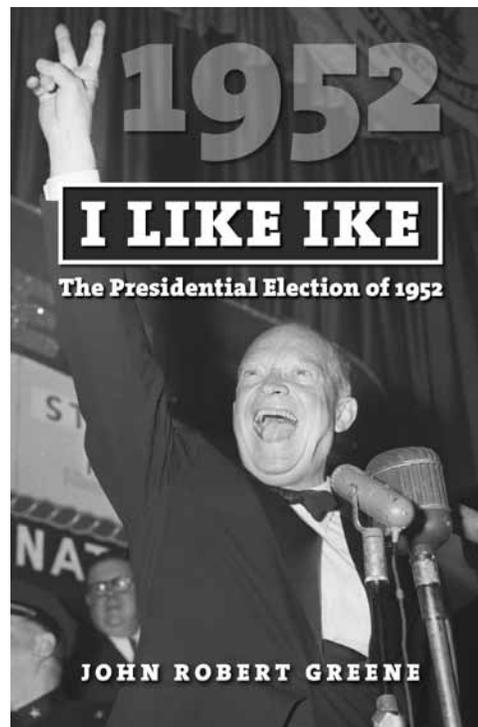
xvi + 254 pages, illustrations, notes, index, appendices.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017, paper
\$24.95.

I Like Ike: The Presidential Election of 1952 by John Robert Greene is essential reading for political historians and anyone interested in American politics. In this accessible work, Greene does a masterful job of weaving an interesting, compelling tale of the election of 1952. This book is a thoughtful update of Greene's earlier work *The Crusade: The Presidential Election of 1952*, which contended that both Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson wanted the job of president despite their words to the contrary. In that book, Greene took issue with most scholars, who have argued that each man was a reluctant candidate. However, over the years, Greene began to wonder if his argument was right. He decided to go back and expand on his previous work to see if the sources led him to the same conclusion. After a more patient and open-minded reading of the sources and literature, Greene arrived at the thesis that drives *I Like Ike*: that neither Eisenhower nor Stevenson had any desire to run for, or become, president. The book is a thoughtful analysis of what led each of them to become a candidate and the nuances of this significant presidential campaign.

Greene begins by explaining the key players in the days leading up to the campaign and election. Not only does he provide insight into the mind-sets of Eisenhower and Stevenson, but he also explains the roles of Harry Truman, Robert Taft, and a host of other candidates and advisers in shaping the election. Greene's decision to delve into the political climate during the Truman administration is truly useful in helping the reader place this election in its proper context.

As for Eisenhower's reluctance, Greene persuasively argues that he was legitimately uninterested in running. One of Greene's key arguments is that Eisenhower eventually capitulated because he feared for the future of the nation if Taft became president. Nicknamed "Mr. Republican," Taft was the probable nominee for his party. He was also an isolationist who refused to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or collective security. Eisenhower's military background and his role in the restructuring of postwar Europe made him fearful of an isolationist leading the nation. This analysis of his decision to accept the presidential nomination rings true.

One of the most riveting chapters is Greene's telling of the 1952 presidential nominating conventions. He delves into the Republican convention and explains the intricacies of party politics at both conventions. Most readers will be surprised to learn that Eisenhower nearly lost the nomination to Taft. In American memory, it seems a foregone conclusion that



Eisenhower would easily win the election. Greene's telling of how he almost was not even the nominee allows the reader to reimagine this election in a different light. Also of note is Greene's story of how Stevenson eventually decided that he did want to be president, but not until the second day of the convention. What could be boring minutiae becomes exciting insight into politics in Greene's hands.

Greene goes on to explain how Eisenhower and Stevenson chose their respective running mates and then devotes most of the remainder of the book to the actual campaign. He does an excellent job of comparing the rhetoric of the two candidates as well as explaining the importance of television in the campaign. He also offers a thorough conclusion that explains the significance of this election.

Greene has done the field of political history a service by revisiting and revising his prior work. He illuminates that although history does not change, our perception and understanding of the past do evolve. This book will be of great value for scholars of Eisenhower and the other key players in the 1952 election. It will also be useful for anyone studying Cold War politics or American elections. The general reader will likely find this book both enjoyable and an interesting, untold story. Those interested in Kansas history will appreciate this new insight into perhaps the most notable Kansan of them all, Eisenhower.

*Reviewed by Nicole L. Anslover, associate professor of history,
Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Indiana.*

Black Cowboys in the American West: On the Range, on the Stage, behind the Badge

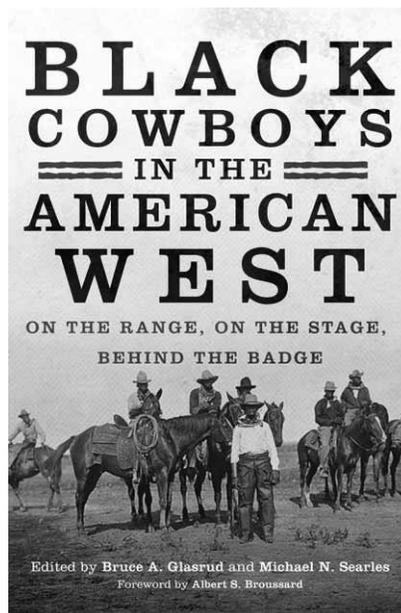
edited by Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles

vii + 248 pages, notes, index, bibliography.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016, paper
\$24.95.

In his 1972 collection, *Long Black Song*, literary analyst Houston Baker Jr. claimed that the legends of men “enduring the hardships of the West . . . are not the tales of black America” (University Press of Virginia, p. 2). Certainly the subjects of this anthology, as well as its editors, Bruce Glasrud and “Cowboy Mike” Searles, would be surprised by that assertion. *Black Cowboys in the American West* delivers the first overview of the topic in half a century through thirteen independent essays that explore ranch work, rodeos, music, and a general array of topics relevant for—as the subtitle promises—African Americans’ experiences “on the range and the stage.”

Scholars who are unaware by now that black cowboys existed have not been paying attention. Glasrud and Searles’s main challenge here is to distinguish their work from an already extensive literature, particularly Philip Durham and Everett Jones’s 1965 *The Black Cowboys* and Sara Massey’s 2000 anthology, *Black Cowboys of Texas*. Compared to the former, their collection treads new ground by expanding into the twentieth century, when “cowboy work” became more performative. Essays on black rodeo in Oklahoma and the Texas Gulf Coast, and an especially interesting piece on entertainer Herb Jeffries—“the Bronze Buckaroo” who starred in ill-fated films such as *Harlem on the Prairie*—reveal parallels to white romanticization of the frontier. Compared to Massey’s book and other studies that focus on the 1800s, however, the collection offers relatively little that is new. Several essays are reprints, and most deal with Texas cowboys (and cow-women, such as Johana July, a Black Seminole). Given Texas’s unique status as both a western ranching state and a southern slaveholding one, it is no shock that a tradition of African Americans in the cattle trade would be strongest there, which makes this book’s focus on the region as a whole problematic.

Glasrud and Searles achieve some degree of geographic diversity by including an essay on Mary Fields, a black female postal carrier in Montana (though why this qualifies as “cowboy work” is uncertain); a reprint of C. Robert Haywood’s article on black cattle workers in Dodge City, a place surprisingly free of racial segregation, at least until the 1880s, when Victorian sensibilities brought both an expansion of the color line and an end to the town’s “wild and woolly” reputation; and Searles’s own superior essay on Nat Love, whose 1907 memoir ranks



with James Beckwourth’s as the height of frontier hyperbole. Searles’s scrupulous treatment of the disparity between the documented corroboration of Love’s life and what is depicted in his dime-novel autobiography shows the frustratingly porous line between folklore and history with which researchers must grapple to understand the West.

To that end, the book might have benefited from deeper consideration of the distinction between the cowboy-as-worker and the cowboy-as-icon. Ranch labor, like mining and railroad building, was no different than most Gilded Age jobs in which a rigid set of class norms regulated male workers’ behavior, as explained in Jacqueline Moore’s fine study *Cow Boys and Cattle Men*—which, oddly, no contributor cites. One must wonder which loomed larger, race or class, in the lives of black “cow boys.” Only after the commercial success of Owen Wister’s 1903 fictional *The Virginian* did “the cowboy” assume more symbolic importance; perhaps in so doing, he also suffered a whitening effect that erased from popular memory the notion that black cowboys ever existed. Searles’s conclusion addresses this theme, but readers would benefit if that same theme were addressed throughout. Such continuity is understandably difficult in any anthology in which the author’s voice changes every few dozen pages. Despite some uneven quality, the contributors and editors have produced a welcome addition to knowledge about African Americans and the American West. In contradiction of Baker’s claim, the histories and legends of both are intertwined.

Reviewed by James N. Leiker, professor of history and chair, Department of History and Political Science, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas.

Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era

by Mark A. Lause

viii + 223 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

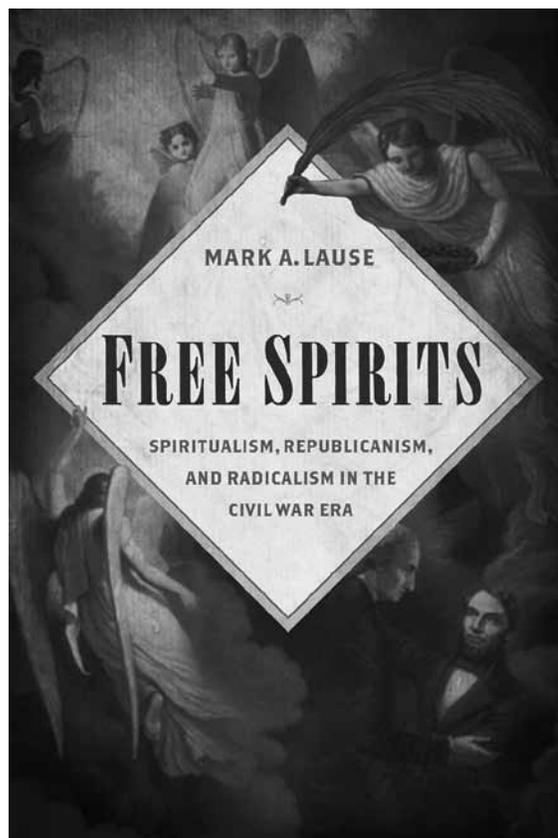
Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016, paper \$30.00.

In Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era, Mark Lause attempts to place the spiritualist movement at the center of the creation of the Republican Party during the 1850s. The religious movement, whose start Lause chronicles in the prologue, began around 1848 amid worldwide social and political upheaval. In the United States, the greatest discord came in the following decade with the deepening crisis over the extension of slavery to the territories, most notably Kansas. The rise of the Republican Party in 1854 came as a direct consequence of the Democrats' push to impose popular sovereignty on Kansas Territory and to render inoperative the Missouri Compromise ban on slavery that had existed there for thirty-four years.

Historians know the story well, but Lause seeks to add another dimension by connecting those who participated in the séances and other curious activities of the spiritualist movement to the birth of the Republican Party itself. Lause posits that the spiritualists who met in local communities ended up participating in the creation of the Republican Party. Indeed, spiritualism "grew most dramatically in places where people sought answers to the questions raised by the Kansas crisis and the *Dred Scott* decision" (p. 43).

The key to understanding the link between spiritualism and the Republican Party, Lause argues, stems from their shared intellectual currents. The fatalism of the spiritualist movement dovetailed with the notion of an irrepressible conflict that prominent Republicans such as William Seward and Abraham Lincoln touted to the followers of their emerging party. Moreover, the spiritualists' rejection of a Manichaeic notion of right and wrong fit well within a Republican Party divided over the question of when and where slavery should end. Spiritualists, Lause asserts, provided an intellectual framework that allowed politicians such as Lincoln to condemn slavery without calling for its immediate demise.

After attempting to link spiritualism with the genesis of the Republican Party, Lause turns to the movement's impact on the party's development during and after the Civil War. He analyzes how the war itself changed spiritualism and led the movement toward an embrace of liberty, equality, and fraternity that hinged on the reconstruction of the Union itself. Here, the radicalism of the spiritualists seemed to outpace that of the Republicans. Dreams of a reconstructed America based on the principles the spiritualists championed faded as Reconstruction wore on and the radical agenda got lost to the grind of conflict.



Yet spiritualists persisted where "Republicans backed away from such radicalism" (p. 123).

Lause has chronicled a fascinating movement in American intellectual and religious history, but the connections he makes to the political history of the Civil War era seem tenuous. The book's opening chapters on the link between spiritualism and the creation of the Republican Party make a stronger case than the evidence might suggest. The participation of spiritualists in Republican politics does not necessarily suggest that the one movement begat the other. Efforts to connect Lincoln to the spiritualists likewise seem based on a loose causal notion that the president's own well-known sense of fatalism must have been based on spiritualism. More interesting is the notion that spiritualism changed during the course of the war, and here Lause has a stronger case. The book shows how spiritualism, which had a pacifist undercurrent, changed amid the war's unspeakable human carnage. Erstwhile pacifists came to believe that the horrific bloodletting might bring about a moral cleansing of the nation and a new dawn for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

In sum, Lause's book has some interesting insights into the history of spiritualism across the span of the Civil War era, but in attempting to connect the movement to the reorientation of political parties, it attempts too much.

Reviewed by Christopher Childers, assistant professor of history, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas.

Prelude to the Dust Bowl: Drought in the Nineteenth Century Southern Plains

by Kevin Z. Sweeney

vii + 283 pages, illustrations, notes, index, bibliography.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016, cloth
\$34.95.

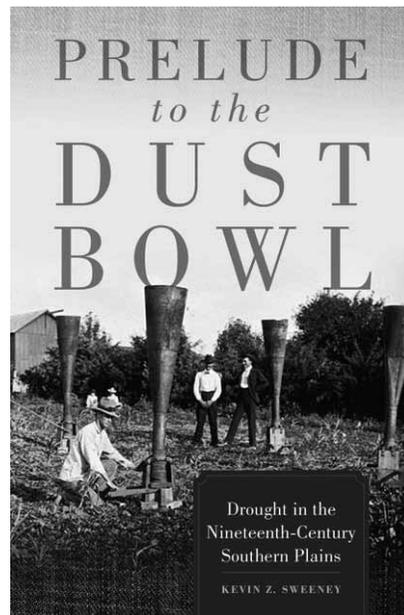
Irritatingly, in most people's minds, the phrase "Great Plains" is virtually indistinguishable from "Dust Bowl." If anyone knows anything about the Plains, it is that a dust bowl (whatever that term means) happened in the 1930s and caused hardship for farmers. Kevin Z. Sweeney's book *Prelude to the Dust Bowl* attempts to illuminate a regularly neglected truth: the 1930s drought that caused the Dust Bowl was not an isolated, or even unusual, incident. Droughts happen on the Great Plains—routinely. The 1930s Dust Bowl drought was not even the *worst* drought that has occurred in the region over the past couple of hundred years. It is just the one people remember.

Sweeney's thesis that a regular cycle of dry and wet conditions influenced how newcomers interpreted the Great Plains in the nineteenth century and influenced historical events in previously unexamined ways is an important one. While the method that the author uses to prove his argument is not without its problems, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl* is certainly a welcome addition to Great Plains environmental historiography.

The volume's early chapters raise expectations for the entire book. Sweeney's analysis of the Stephen Long expedition, for example, is fascinating. Historians routinely "blame" Long for his hasty and imprecise labeling of the Plains as "the Great American Desert" but never think about why Long came to this conclusion. Sweeney concludes that Long traveled the southern Plains during one of the region's frequent droughts, thus coloring the all-important first impression that the explorer—and everyone who read his report—had of the area. This chapter was one of those times, as a reader, that I thought, "Of course!" and wished that I had thought of the argument myself.

Sweeney also smoothly incorporates an interdisciplinary approach into his study. He utilizes tree-ring studies, for example, demonstrating how science can help illuminate history. This strategy was much appreciated and, again, set a high bar for the remainder of the book.

Unfortunately, the chapters in the latter half of *Prelude* do not quite meet these expectations. Sweeney attempts to cover the entire nineteenth century, a task that seems logical and appropriate. However, as the book progresses chronologically,



his argument becomes repetitive and the content less original. Some of the topics—notably several chapters on the Civil War—are not deserving of stand-alone treatment as they are short on original content and long on contextual background. The sections covering the buildup to secession similarly fail to cover new ground and could be condensed. It is more troubling that Sweeney often fails to adequately cite the existing literature. More than once, I recognized a familiar statement, only to check the endnotes and find no record of a book that should have been present.

Although not without its problems, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl* is a welcome addition to Great Plains historical literature for its important assertion that long-term interpretations of the Plains have been examined without consideration of the region's ongoing cycles of drought. The 1930s Dust Bowl—treated as an unusual occurrence for so long—has masked the more profound influences of other droughts that were just as bad or worse as their legendary successor. Even the title of Sweeney's book, perhaps a whim of the press rather than the author himself, continues to refer to the Dust Bowl in a book meant to deemphasize the uniqueness of that event. The paradox is perhaps unintentional but is present nonetheless.

Reviewed by Julie Courtwright, associate professor of history, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.