

Gods of the Mississippi

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American State Papers; and hundreds of books and other secondary sources.

This work will be an invaluable reference for anyone studying the early history of the Missouri River from its confluence with the Mississippi up to the Great Falls in Montana, through Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and the region of the Yellowstone and the Blackfoot nation. Students of history will not only learn of John Dougherty and his relationships with an amazing array of entrepreneurs, trappers, traders, soldiers, Indian chiefs, government bureaucrats, and friends but will also discover how the United States began the conquest of the trans-Mississippi West and its native peoples.

Gods of the Mississippi, edited by Michael Pasquier. Religion in North America Series. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. xiv, 223 pp. Notes, index. \$75.00 hardcover, \$27.00 paperback, \$22.99 e-book.

Reviewer Darrel E. Bigham is professor of history and director of Historic Southern Indiana emeritus at the University of Southern Indiana. His books include *On Jordan's Banks: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley* (2005).

Gods of the Mississippi comprises nine essays and an afterword. In his introduction, Michael Pasquier declares that “overwhelmingly Protestant, nationalist, and frontier narratives of the United States have directed the attention of historians away from the study of religion and culture along the Mississippi” (5). In his afterword, Thomas A. Tweed states that the book identifies motifs that allow readers to examine the movement of people and religious practices, sheds light on the characters in these stories, and challenges the prevailing view of westward expansion by white Protestants.

Each essay is amply documented. The first essay, Jon F. Sensbach’s “‘The Singing of the Mississippi’: The River and Religions of the Black Atlantic,” evokes Langston Hughes’s description of the confluence of many black Atlantic cultures along the river that “jarred, mingled, and created something new” (31). In “Religion and Empire in Mississippi, 1790–1833,” Sylvester Johnson contends that American Christian foreign missions partnered with the War Department, making Mississippi Territory an Anglo-American dominion. In “Movement, Maps, and Wonder: Civil Religious Competition at the Source of the Mississippi River, 1805–1832,” Arthur Remillard demonstrates how the smallest point of the Great River has shaped, and been shaped by, the discourses of explorers and conservationists. Thomas Ruys Smith, in

"Looking for the New Jerusalem: Antebellum New Religious Movements and the Mississippi River," probes the formation of new religious movements—notably the Mormons and the Millerites. In the essay that follows, "'Go Down into Jordan: No, Mississippi': Mormon Nauvoo and the Rhetoric of Landscape," Seth Perry avers that the distinctive bend of the river held such power over Mormons that they transformed *land* into *landscape*, assigning it a symbolic role and selecting the site for the city's temple. John M. Giggie's "The Mississippi River and the Transformation of Black Religion in the Delta, 1877–1915" reveals how train travel, fraternal orders, and consumer markets helped to create spiritual experimentation and renewal and to give rise to Holiness and Pentecostal movements. The Delta is also the focus of Alison Collis Greene's "The Redemption of Souls and Soils: Religion and the Rural Crisis in the Delta." The most significant effort at cooperation between Delta workers and middle-class reformers was the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Justin D. Poché's "Bonfires on the Levee: Place, Memory, and the Sacred in River Road Catholicism" offers the book's only examination of Roman Catholic practices—in this case the annual Christmas bonfire celebrations along the levee between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The final essay, "'Big River': Johnny Cash and the Currents of History," observes the religious symbols in Cash's last music video, published just before his death in 2003. Author John Hayes demonstrates the arc of homecoming in Cash's life—roots in the religion of the Delta, journey through popular culture, and return to youthful traditions.

The notion that a river is an independent force is unpersuasive, as people and places continually interact. Hence, portions of a river corridor will differ markedly, for instance, from each other. People along rivers not only divide, moreover; they unite. Little if any effort is made here to compare and contrast the Mississippi River with other rivers. Differing labor systems along the Ohio's banks, for instance, determined where people settled. Germans bypassed the lower Mississippi. St. Louis became the home to many, including two major Protestant groups: the orthodox Missouri Synod Lutherans and the liberal Evangelical Synod of North America.

Iowa readers will find little of direct interest here. Language, format, and subject matter make this a reader for specialists. Whether the "north-south" approach to American religious history will gain traction depends on more studies involving less esoteric topics and more—dare I say it—white Christian subjects.