

# Following Father Chiniquy: Immigration, Religious Schism, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Illinois

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(This review is based on an uncorrected advance copy provided by the publisher which also contained a number of infelicitous phrasings that one hopes will be corrected in the final book.)

Phillips overstates when he says that “most historians hold that the Ohio River was a clearly defined and static demographic and political boundary between North and South and, by its distinctive cultures, an extension of the Mason-Dixon Line” (7). There has been too much recent work challenging the Ohio River as a boundary by scholars such as Kim Gruenwald, Stanley Harrold, and others to present that as the consensus of current historians. Their theses require both Ford and Phillips to downplay antebellum conflict. In her introduction, Ford acknowledges Elizabeth R. Varon’s *Disunion: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (2008). Varon analyzed the rhetoric of disunion and its eventually destructive effect. In addition, Stanley Harrold’s recent *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (2010) illuminates the violent struggle over slavery that often occurred in the same region Ford and Phillips cover. Ford—and Phillips in his early chapters—are more interested in how the Union held together in a border region where freedom and slavery were in constant contact, but Ford’s in-depth analysis nonetheless reveals formidable conflict within each city and between the states on the opposite sides of the river. Both are valuable works. Phillips’s book will clearly be a seminal study of the Midwest during the Civil War and a work that scholars will be turning to—either for enlightenment or to challenge—for a long time.

*Following Father Chiniquy: Immigration, Religious Schism, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Illinois*, by Caroline Brettell. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. xvi, 312 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 paperback and e-book.

Reviewer Franklin Yoder recently retired as an academic adviser at the University of Iowa. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1999) was “A Rural Kaleidoscope: Property, Mobility, and Ethnic Diversity in the Middle West.”

In a research field dominated by studies of German, Irish, and other northern European immigrant groups, Caroline Brettell’s examination of a French Canadian settlement in northern Illinois offers a new perspective on nineteenth-century ethnicity and immigration in the Midwest. By bringing the analytical tools of an anthropologist to this work, Brettell adds a layer of complexity that provides a rich and detailed look at this small French immigrant settlement.

Studies of immigration and ethnicity generally focus on groups and pay little attention to specific individuals within those societies. This

book has the added elements of a strong charismatic leader, religious division, and a clash between an established religious hierarchy and a renegade church leader—the Roman Catholic church and Charles Chiniquy. As Brettell states, her study examines “the significance of charismatic leadership in processes of social and religious change” (2).

The French settlements in northeastern Illinois faced many of the same challenges that confronted most midwestern immigrant communities. Occupational choices, marriage patterns, and educational systems reflected the tensions between immigrants and established settlers as immigrants sought to maintain their culture and way of life. However, in St. Anne and other local French Canadian settlements, immigrants dealt with an internal choice that created tensions and strife—the decision to be Catholic or to be Protestant.

Religion is a dominant theme in this study. However, unlike many ethnic communities where religion served as a common rallying point that helped maintain an ethnic identity, religion in the French Canadian settlements also drove a wedge within the group. As a result, these settlements offer a fascinating opportunity to compare two groups with the same French roots who came to embrace two different religions. Brettell provides excellent data and analysis to illuminate how different religious choices led to marked differences in political preferences, occupational choices, birth rates, and land transfer patterns.

The central figure in this analysis—Charles Chiniquy—presents a complex and convoluted picture. To some, he was a saint, a visionary, a caring leader who stood against an institution riddled with corruption and greed. To others, he was a charlatan, a demagogue, and a troublemaker who preyed on the weak and vulnerable. As becomes clear when current residents in St. Anne were questioned about Chiniquy, he remains a controversial figure even today.

When Chiniquy led several families of French Canadians out of the Catholic church and out of Canada, he committed two major sins—leaving Canada and leaving the Catholic church. The ensuing conflicts were amplified by the close familial and ethnic connections among the various factions within this small, closely connected ethnic community. Those conflicts give credence to Freud’s “narcissism of small differences,” when seemingly insignificant disagreements are never so intense as when they are present within a largely homogenous group.

In addition to issues of assimilation and ethnic identity, this book raises the question of where historians should focus attention—on the broad middle or on the fringes? What do we learn by examining a small settlement that by all accounts is an anomaly? Do the extremes help us understand the middle by offering sharp contrasts and keeping us aware

that the middle is never the complete picture? At the very least, this examination of French Canadians in northern Illinois reminds us to be wary of painting with too broad of a brush.

*We Are What We Drink: The Temperance Battle in Minnesota*, by Sabine N. Meyer. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xiv, 269 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 hardcover.

Reviewer James E. Klein is associate professor of history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. He is the author of *Grappling with Demon Rum: The Cultural Struggle over Liquor in Early Oklahoma* (2008).

In *We Are What We Drink*, Sabine N. Meyer provides a nuanced examination of the campaign to ban alcohol in early Minnesota. The stance individuals took on the liquor question was determined by religion, economic class, ethnicity, gender, and civic identity. The latter, she argues, is a product of the former factors, but also of place, citing St. Paul as an example—that city’s civic identity influenced residents’ stance on liquor. She also studies the staunchly dry position of Bishop John Ireland and the split that created between Irish and German Catholics. While the temperance issue shaped Irish and German ethnic identities in Minnesota, it also created a public identity for Minnesota women, who previously had been relegated to the home.

Meyer begins with the early European settlement of Minnesota by fur traders and the raucous reputation earned by early St. Paul, originally named Pig’s Eye after a local liquor dealer. The 1850s temperance movement saw middle-class reformers, relocated from New England, attempting to civilize the Minnesota wilderness. They failed to curb St. Paul’s liquor industry because it was a part of residents’ civic and masculine identity.

By the late nineteenth century, Irish Americans, aspiring to middle-class status, remade their ethnic identity by adopting abstinence as a badge of respectability. German immigrants, from the distinct regions of Prussia, Saxony, Westphalia, Bavaria, and others, instead used opposition to temperance (based on a devotion to the concept of personal liberty) as a shared trait to create a unified German American culture. As their initial social standing was higher than that of Irish Americans, they saw no need to emulate the middle-class expression of respectability—opposition to alcohol. Rather, they viewed the temperance movement as an attack on German American culture.

St. Paul, influenced by the prominent position of German American brewers and by residents’ devotion to the notion of *joie de vivre*, opposed and resisted liquor regulations, pitting the city against the state