

The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class

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The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class, edited by Christopher D. Cantwell, Heath W. Carter, and Janine Giordano Drake. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016. xiv, 249 pp. Notes, index. \$95.00 hardcover; \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Paul Emory Putz is a doctoral candidate in history at Baylor University. His research focuses on urban Protestant reform movements in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, addressing intersecting themes of religion, region, race, class, urbanization, and consumer culture.

Coming 50 years after Herbert Gutman's essay "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age" in the *American Historical Review*, *The Pew and the Picket Line* represents a full flowering of Gutman's suggestion that historians pay more attention to the religious lives of working people. To be sure, some historians in the intervening years—such as Ken Fones-Wolf, who writes the foreword to this book—have heeded Gutman's call. But more often than not, labor and religious historians have operated on separate tracks. With *The Pew and the Picket Line*, Christopher Cantwell, Heath Carter, and Janine Giordano Drake bring together an impressive group of (mostly) younger scholars in an attempt to demonstrate that "there is not a history of religion in America that is not also a history of labor . . . [and] there is no history of labor in America that is not also a history of religion" (12). Along with linking labor and religious history, this volume's ten essays emphasize the contingency and complexity of working-class religious life. Puncturing broad claims about the relationship between Christianity and working people—for example, the notion that religion served as a form of social control imposed on the laboring masses, or that the working classes turned to religion out of desperation—the essayists refuse to make any overarching claims about working-class religious life except to say, "It depends" (13).

Collectively, the chronological focus of the essays ranges from the early nineteenth century through the 1970s. The majority, however—six of the nine—are set in the years following the Great Depression. The emphasis on place is another shared characteristic; eight are historical case studies set in a specific city or region. And, as the title of the book makes clear, all of the essays focus on Christianity. Despite these shared themes, the book covers a wide range of people and places. Three essays (by Erik Gellman, Alison Collis Greene, and Kerry Pimblott) give substantial attention to African Americans; a fourth (by Matthew Pehl) includes them within the narrative. Latinos/as are primary subjects for Brett Hendrickson and Arlene Sánchez-Walsh. And places stretching from Rhode Island to California and Detroit to San Antonio are given prominence.

Scholars interested in the Midwest will be pleased to see four essays connected to the region. Matthew Pehl looks at Detroit autoworkers in the 1950s, exploring how the experience of industrial work shaped their religious practices. Kerry Pimblott uses Cairo, Illinois, to show how Black Power activism relied heavily on the town's black churches. Erik Gellman also highlights the religious dimensions of Black Power activism, examining the 1960s life of Chicago's Urban Training Center for Christian Mission. Jarod Roll, on the other hand, looks at a more rural setting: the mining town of Galena, Kansas, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He explores the "belief world" of the town's miners and how their faith in the myths of capitalism shaped the development of Pentecostalism. Dan McKanan's essay is somewhat connected to the Midwest as well: it provides a close reading of the popular fiction of George Lippard (a Pennsylvanian) and Ignatius Donnelly (a Minnesotan). But McKanan's piece is largely devoid of a sense of place, striking a bit of a discordant note compared to the other essays in the book.

Essay collections have a negative reputation in some quarters; they can be perceived as superfluous or incoherent, lacking thematic unity. But *The Pew and the Picket Line* is an example of a collection done right. With an outstanding introductory essay on the historiography of religion and labor by Cantwell, Carter, and Drake, along with cutting-edge research throughout the rest of the book, this collection should be essential reading for historians of American religion and labor. With substantial attention given to communities in Illinois, Kansas, and Michigan, it should also be of interest to scholars of the Midwest.

Thomas Hart Benton: Discoveries and Interpretations, by Henry Adams. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015. xi, 364 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Breanne Robertson is a historian at Marine Corps University. She has published two articles in the *Annals of Iowa* (2011 and 2015) about New Deal murals.

Thomas Hart Benton: Discoveries and Interpretations provides a retrospective look at art historian Henry Adams's career-long fascination with Missouri muralist Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975). One of American Regionalism's "Big Three," along with Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry, Benton painted narrative scenes of midwestern history, mythology, and modern life that resonated with Depression-era audiences; in December 1934 he became the first American artist to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine. Yet Benton also regularly defied expectations and provoked critics with candid depictions of controversial subject