

## Billy Sunday, The Baseball Evangelist: The Story of a Remarkable Life, 1862-1935

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These are minor points, however, in comparison to the accomplishment that the book as a whole represents. *Prairie Fires* is a monument to Fraser's years of working in the archives and thousands of hours thinking about how best to understand the sources. It will be the last word on Wilder's and Lane's lives for years to come.

*Billy Sunday, The Baseball Evangelist: The Story of a Remarkable Life, 1862–1935*, by Craig A. Bishop. Collierville, TN: InstantPublisher, 2016. 100 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$20.00 hardcover.

Reviewer David Brodnax Sr. is professor of history at Trinity Christian College. He is the author of "'Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy': Iowa's African American Regiment in the Civil War" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2007).

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Iowa produced what may have been a disproportionately large number of professional baseball participants, including seven Hall of Famers. Perhaps the most famous of them all achieved his greatest fame off the diamond. The life of Billy Sunday, who was born the orphaned son of a Civil War veteran and went from a middling major leaguer to America's leading Christian evangelist, is the focus of this self-published book by ministry leader and politician Craig A. Bishop.

The book consists largely of photographs and quotes from newspaper articles about Sunday's travels and speeches interspersed with Bishop's descriptions of his life based on newspaper articles and magazine biographies. This is followed by information about Billy Sunday landmarks, a brief account of Billy Graham (who was converted by men who knew Sunday), and interviews of fellow evangelicals who knew Sunday or his associates or whose deceased friends and family members did.

Although Bishop states that his goal is to "tell the story of a man who had a profound influence in our life and culture in America," he also injects his religious and political viewpoints into the past world in which Sunday lived (5). All historical scholarship reflects the values of its authors, but this is usually implicit. Bishop, on the other hand, asserts that theological liberals issued "false teachings" and that "Roosevelt's views of a large federal government were dangerous, socialist and anti-American" (61–62). He also theorizes that after Emma Goldman gave an anti-Sunday speech, "perhaps God had an answer" because the building in which she spoke caught fire but collapsed before the homes of nearby Christians were damaged. Bishop concludes, "Would this be a miracle from God? Coincidence?" (52–53). He is certainly entitled to these beliefs, but his explicit mention of them further highlights the

differences between his work and conventional historical analysis. He briefly cites Roger Bruns's biography but not William G. McLoughlin's classic study or more recent works by Robert Martin and Margaret Bendroth. This newer scholarship has benefited from access to Sunday family papers, but Bishop instead cites a Wikipedia article about Sunday's wife. He does not contextualize Billy Sunday within broader social changes such as urbanization, twentieth-century evangelical culture, or (despite the book's title and cover photo of Sunday in his baseball uniform) the creation of sports celebrity culture. The citations are sparse and somewhat disorganized (one footnote number is used twice), some of the items listed in the bibliography are not in the citations, and there are spelling and grammatical errors.

Those interested in facts, newspaper quotes, and photographs about the most famous Iowan of the early 1900s will find them in *The Baseball Evangelist*. The book may also be appreciated by those who share the author's values and would use Billy Sunday's life as a meditation on those values. Those who desire a more scholarly analysis or just a thorough and meticulous description, on the other hand, should look to one of the other works mentioned in this review.

*Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*, by Kenneth Whyte. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. xvii, 728 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Kendrick A. Clements is Distinguished Professor of History emeritus at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. He is the author of *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Imperfect Visionary, 1918–1928* (2010).

Kenneth Whyte's *Hoover* is a thoughtful, well-researched, and well-written one-volume biography intended especially for the general reader. If it should miraculously emerge as the best seller it deserves to be, it could transform the reputation of the 31st president.

Written in brisk, vigorous language enlivened with flashes of wit, *Hoover* is downright fun to read. Colorful biographical sketches introduce major figures, and concise background summaries of important issues make following the story easy. Whyte is skillful in presenting both sides of issues fully and impartially, making it easy to understand why there was disagreement. Although the author is clearly sympathetic to Hoover's critique of big government, this is as near an impartial biography of this controversial figure as is likely to be written. And interestingly, impartiality serves Hoover well. Few if any other Americans can match his remarkable contributions to the nation and the world over a half-century of public service.