

Long Road to Harpers Ferry: The Rise of the First American Left

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dition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of" (22). Rather than analyzing such nuances of nineteenth-century race relations in the border South, Scharnhorst disputes Clemens's representation of his own life, concluding condescendingly that "[Sam] overstated his lack of racial prejudice" and "harbored some biases for the rest of his life" (22). It is certainly true that Clemens was a product of his own time, but a literary biographer might helpfully have explained how that time differs from our own, and how the nineteenth-century experience was reflected in Twain's own writing.

Geographically, *The Early Years* is expansive, following Sam Clemens from Hannibal east to New York as a journeyman printer, south along the Mississippi River as he studied to become a river pilot, and west to the silver boom town of Virginia City, Nevada, where he learned the craft of journalism and first appeared in print as Mark Twain. Iowa readers might be intrigued to learn that Clemens's first public speech—on Benjamin Franklin—was delivered in Keokuk in 1856. A pattern of itinerancy emerged as Clemens wrote for newspapers in San Francisco that sent him to Hawaii and sponsored the 1867 expedition to Europe and the Middle East that was transformed into his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*. Capitalizing on such experiences, and with a gift for humor, Clemens launched a career as a lecturer before the publication of his first books. He spent time in Washington, D.C., as a senator's clerk and briefly owned a share in a newspaper in Buffalo, New York. The volume ends with his marriage to Olivia Langdon in 1870 and their decision to relocate to her hometown of Elmira, New York, after the birth of their first child in 1871. Two additional volumes await the reader whose taste for detailed recounting of Samuel Clemens's literary practice has been whetted by this one.

Long Road to Harpers Ferry: The Rise of the First American Left, by Mark A. Lause. People's History Series. London: Pluto Press, 2018; distributed by University of Chicago Press. vi, 266 pp. Notes, index. \$99 hardcover, \$26 paperback.

Reviewer John R. Kaufman-McKivigan is Mary O'Brien Gibson Professor of History at IUPUI. He is editor or coeditor of several works by and about Frederick Douglass and is the author of *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (2008) and *War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (1984).

Historian Mark A. Lause seems engaged in a multivolume master project to document the history of antebellum and Civil War-era American radical movements. In recent years, he has authored volumes on the

early nineteenth-century labor movement, Civil War-era spiritualism, "Bohemian" free thinkers and free lovers before and during the war, and radical agitation within Union Army ranks. All of these books about often overlooked individuals and organizations are characterized by meticulous research into newspaper and archival sources. The volume under review is typical in providing 56 pages of dense notes to accompany a modest 200 pages of text. In his introduction, Lause explains that the *Long Road to Harpers Ferry* is an effort to synthesize his extensive body of scholarship into a concise single volume detailing "the origins of an American movement against capitalism" (4).

Lause begins by examining radical currents present in the American Revolution among the rank-and-file of the Continental Army, wartime urban "mobs," and intellectuals like the iconic radical Thomas Paine. Those individuals questioned colonial-era political, social, economic, and religious hierarchies and espoused republicanism, a democratic social order, and an end to economic privilege. Lause next describes the efforts of an assortment of communitarians, "Workies," and "land reformers" in the early nineteenth century to block the unrestrained accumulation of personal wealth and power. Most of these antebellum critics of capitalism drew on European models, and immigrants played influential roles in almost every radical campaign occurring in this country. Nevertheless, these movements continued to draw most heavily on the radical strains of the nation's own revolutionary heritage.

A hallmark of Lause's view of antebellum radical fervor is his assertion that exponents of these movements were able to minimize ideological disagreements and work together effectively. For example, socialists and free thinkers could make common cause, spiritualists and woman suffragists recruited overlapping memberships, and land reformers and labor radicals shared platforms and publications. This interpretation contradicts the claim of many other historians that radical movements in the United States generally floundered in sectarian ideological squabbles. Lause shows instead how the collaboration of these radical groups allowed them to grow into a significant political presence. Rather than internal quarrels, it was the predatory practices of the mainstream political parties that seduced away radical voters with promises of substantial economic reforms that were never fulfilled.

Lause also contradicts the portrayal of antebellum white American workers as virulently racist and often enthusiastically proslavery. He demonstrates instead the considerable sympathy they displayed for both oppressed slaves and Native Americans. The last third of the book concentrates on the cooperation between economic and social radicals and the antislavery movement of the 1840s and 1850s. Lause documents

these radical groups' enthusiastic support for the 1848 Free Soil Party. He stresses the ideological connections of that party's anti-extensionist platform to the decades-old campaign of land reformers like George Henry Evans. When the opportunistic followers of Martin Van Buren returned to their former Democratic allegiances after the 1848 election, Lause argues, the radicals gained an even greater influence in the subsequent Free Democratic Party. The early 1850s seemed a moment of intensifying revolutionary potential. Lause portrays that decade's "abolitionists, Free Democrats, land reformers, and European revolutionists" working as "something of a cadre organization aimed at radical social transformation (149).

Among the many antislavery factions, the closest alliance that Lause detects was between land and labor reform groups and the small remnant of the post-1848 Liberty Party ironically led by wealthy New York land speculator Gerrit Smith. Besides its uncompromising antislavery views, this group frequently endorsed radical social and economic proposals. Smith's followers, who included African Americans such as Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith, also justified violent opposition to slavery and recruited none other than John Brown to their small circle.

Lause shows that Brown, in his plot to violently assault slaveholding, worked clandestinely with Hugh Forbes, a former English soldier who had fought in Garibaldi's legion before migrating to this country in 1853. Forbes is often dismissed in historical literature as a money-seeking adventurer, but Lause rehabilitates his reputation by revealing the Englishman's success at forging ties among East Coast immigrant and native radical workers groups. Lause also uncovers the ties of several of Brown's Harpers Ferry raiders to those economic radicals.

Ultimately, *Long Road to Harpers Ferry* is an informative read about the activities of the myriad varieties of early American radicals. While Lause clearly admires his subjects, the book is largely free of polemics or analogies to contemporary situations. He makes a persuasive case that these groups were well informed about each other's activities, frequently attended and addressed each other's conventions, and issued vague but sincere endorsements of each other's goals. Despite his mass of circumstantial evidence, however, Lause has not fully proved the central role of antebellum radicals in fomenting the great transformation the nation underwent in the Civil War crisis that his book ascribes to them.