

sire to be both scholar and prophet. It has been done successfully. But, alas, not here.

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The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power. By Jeff Sharlet. (New York: HarperCollins, 2008. x, 454 pp. \$25.95, ISBN 978-0-06-055979-3.)

Recent decades have produced considerable scholarship on evangelicalism, much of which laudably reminds audiences that the tradition is not a monoculture. Yet Jeff Sharlet's prodigiously researched text reminds us of conservatism's abiding power. The book does for conservative Christianity what Greil Marcus did for punk in *Lipstick Traces* (1989): it establishes connections between disparate phenomena, thereby enabling fresh thinking about religious conservatism.

The group known to its members as the Family describes itself as "an 'invisible' association . . . organized around public men" whose dense secret history—extending from Billy James Hargis to Sam Brownback—is filled with personal encounters that Sharlet uses to illustrate broader developments, such as the Cold War—era revitalization of conservative Protestantism (p. 7). He locates the Family's conceptual roots in the exceptionalism of John Winthrop and Cotton Mather and in Jonathan Edwards's visions of a regenerate society. Abraham Vereide, an early leader of the Family, appropriated those themes, along with others such as the "Gospel of Wealth" and "Muscular Christianity," in "arranging the spiritual affairs of the wealthy," advancing a Christology opposed to conceptions of worker radicalism (p. 101). Vereide and his circle went on to exercise considerable influence on post-World War II American power, with a goal of ultimately "replacing the rule of law and its secular contracts" (p. 44). In this postwar narrative Sharlet finds the roots of the Right's rhetoric of persecution (p. 127), "faith-based initiatives," "compassionate conservatism" (p. 236), and the twin desire for revolution and empire (p. 219). The Family, then, emerges as a kind of metonym for a Christian conservatism that,

"fifty years ago no more than a corollary to American power, twenty-five years ago at its vanguard, is now at the very center" (p. 337).

The narrative is engaging and well documented, though some of its claims regarding American religious history are debatable. Sharlet describes the Family "an avant-garde of the social movement I call American fundamentalism" (p. 3). While the organization's power is convincingly documented, it sometimes seems simply a variant of dominionism, buttressed by superb networking (p. 198). Historiographically, it is questionable to link Edwards's and Charles Finney's evangelism to "fundamentalism," as Sharlet does. While their concerns resonate broadly in American culture, they do not necessarily connect to those of "fundamentalism" broadly speaking. While Sharlet writes wonderfully about the importance of such figures to our national dream life, it is unclear that they are continuous with the religious culture of the Family or its specific geopolitics. It is doubtful, for example, if Edwards's vision can properly be described as "theocratic" or that he dreamed of a Christian nation in this sense (p. 61).

These sections of the book, though, serve mostly as background to Sharlet's broader account, which is powerful. Sharlet touches on some of the "spectacles" that attract bloggers, but he contextualizes and analyzes them much more perceptively than is customary. Though one would like to see further explication of important categories like gender, this work contributes vividly to our understanding of Christian conservatism. While the tone is different from that of an average monograph, this work is original in its conception and articulation and is a fine contribution to the literature.

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Homeschool: An American History. By Milton Gaither. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. x, 273 pp. Cloth, \$89.95, ISBN 978-0-230-60599-2. Paper, \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-230-60600-5.)

Scholarly histories of education commonly emphasize ideology, policy disputes, and or-

ganizational development more than what teachers taught or children learned. *Homeschool* is firmly in that tradition. Milton Gaither's narrative centers on the relationship between home and school, proceeding from the colonial era, when government supported schooling at home, through the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, when formal schools achieved hegemony, eclipsing homeschooling. Then, mainly since 1970, antagonisms directed against "the mass culture of the modern liberal state" (p. 85) led countercultural parents—some leftists and many evangelical conservatives—toward privatism and homeschooling. Idealizing the family as a bastion against false values, post-Calvinist evangelicals also saw each child as "a promise" and "a possibility" (p. 114).

Having traced a sometimes meandering path through the history of American families, religion, culture, politics, demography, education, and child-rearing, Gaither turns in the second half of *Homeschool* to original research and offers a detailed, heroically compressed account of the recent spread of homeschooling. Faced with the challenge of opening up the history of so recent and fractious a movement, Gaither has drawn from homeschoolers' magazines and books, the mainstream press, homeschoolers' Internet sites, court cases, law review articles, and interviews and correspondence with homeschoolers. He traces ideological influences of figures as disparate as the leftist John Holt and the Christian dominionist Rousas Rushdoony. Loose alliances of leftists, conservative Christians, and Christian Reconstructionists soon succumbed to bitter divisions. Gaither strives to balance his account between the more diverse, sometimes secular wing of the movement, which he terms the "open communion" group, and the larger, better organized (pp. 143–44), and more strident "closed communion" wing of conservative Christians who set belief tests for participants. Understandably, the second group looms larger. Though sympathetic to homeschooling, Gaither details the infighting to control profitable conferences of homeschoolers and to sell curricular guides. The central story is of the takeover of most homeschooling by entrepreneurial conservative Christians, represented conspicuously by the Home School Legal Defense Association

(HSDLA). The HSDLA took credit for court victories that stopped educators from curbing or stringently regulating homeschoolers. In reality, Gaither asserts, homeschoolers triumphed mainly by lobbying state legislatures to pass permissive laws in the 1980s and early 1990s. An impressive array of state-by-state narratives bolsters his conclusion. Following the story remarkably close to the present, Gaither concludes optimistically that homeschooling today has grown more diverse and become more mainstream. Yet he conscientiously traces crosscurrents, such as efforts by conservative Christians to create a fully separate culture for homeschooled teens and their resistance to cyber charters (schools that provide instruction and assignments over the Internet) through which public school authorities and secular businesspeople have recruited homeschoolers.

Beyond passing references to conservatives' fondness for phonics, work sheets, and memorization, teaching methods receive little attention. Critics of homeschooling may regret that discussion of what homeschooled students learn is limited to anecdotal reports of their success in national spelling and geography bees and admission to elite colleges. But as a guide to the politics of homeschooling and to the contending ideologists, organizers, and entrepreneurs who shaped it, this pioneering history is an informative account of a dauntingly complex movement.

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American Pests: The Losing War on Insects from Colonial Times to DDT. By James E. McWilliams. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. xii, 296 pp. \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-231-13942-7.)

James E. McWilliams's book seeks to frame within a paradox a comprehensive interpretation of agricultural insect pests from colonial times to the present. He argues that Americans sought to control nature for economic development but that insecticides undermined the ultimate goal. McWilliams recounts the contributions of early scientists such as Timothy Dwight (president of Yale University),