

been. Nevertheless, if she threw the White House open to a wide variety of visitors, it is surely an exaggeration to argue, as Abrams does, that “citizens of all stripes” were welcome at her gatherings (228).

Accessible and entertaining, *First Ladies of the Republic* offers readers a refreshing and often perceptive view of its subjects. Abrams is thoroughly versed in the voluminous literature on women’s and gender history, employing her understanding of that literature to good advantage. She clearly admires these women—an occasional criticism would be welcome. And she could have used a good editor. She repeats herself constantly. How many times, for instance, do we need to be told that Martha, not Dolley, was the first presidential wife to serve ice cream? Or how often must we be reminded that Abigail profoundly disliked the aristocratic ceremonies she encountered in Europe? Nevertheless, this is a compelling effort, and one that historians and the general public will profit from reading.

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JIMMY L. BRYAN JR. *The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017. Pp. x, 393. Cloth \$39.95.

*The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion* is an engagingly written book that tells a story about stories. Its central thesis, worked through all the chapters, is about the cultural power of narrative. Jimmy L. Bryan Jr. shows that between 1812 and the Civil War, generations of restless young men journeyed to the as-yet-unsettled parts of the U.S. and, on their return, wrote up their travels not as factual narratives surveying landscape, flora, fauna, and indigenous people but as tales of derring-do. These tales, he argues, “beguiled a generation of Americans into believing in their own exceptionalism and in their destiny to conquer the continent . . . Manliness and whiteness, landscape and frontier, nationhood and otherness represented malleable categories that readily yielded to their manipulations. As both products and creators of these constructs, adventurers demonstrated that individual preference, informed by caprice, sentimentality, and yearning, drove territorial expansion as meaningfully as social, economic, and political imperatives” (5–6). Adventurers’ words ennobled “greed as enterprise and chauvinism as virtue” (20), by transplanting from the fictions of Lord Byron and Walter Scott some of the motifs of English Romanticism. Especially important motifs were “emotion, imagination, the elsewhere, and the individual” (25). Bryan traces these motifs across several chapters and many texts. Washington Irving’s stories of the American fur trade are strongly featured; novels and, to a lesser extent, poetry are also discussed.

Bryan is a phrase maker: *The American Elsewhere*

abounds in aperçus that evince his grasp of his disparate material and give his history purchase on the reader’s imagination. Writing of the storytellers’ engagement with sublime western landscapes, he notes that “adventurers were devout narcissists. They channeled grandeur inwardly” (39). Describing tales about the spectacular brutality of the Texas Rangers, he argues “the expedition became the stage on which the Texans performed for a national audience. They reinforced the popular mythology of the common yet extraordinary man, and their exclusive companionship insulated their violence from criticism charged by those who could only observe yet not truly understand” (242). Mexicans and Native Americans, it follows, were positioned as inferiors—foils for the white men’s assertion of manliness. That manliness, however, was unexpectedly sentimental: Bryan shows that the tales emphasized the adventurer’s capacity to shed tears and act tenderly, usually in the context of homosocial bonding. A certain homoeroticism was also present in the form of admiration of the youthful, muscular bodies of mountain men and Indian warriors. Away from the farms and towns of the East, masculinity was under construction. New roles could be tried out: “the expedition functioned as the stage on which . . . friends would assess their manly attainment” (211). That attainment was then fed to the public in books and articles, and influenced the versions of American manliness constructed by now canonical writers including Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman.

*The American Elsewhere* is vivid and various. I finished it, however, with two reservations. One affects its central claim. While Bryan amply demonstrates that the stories were beguiling, he does not prove that they facilitated conquest of the continent (by which he means the U.S.). He does show that, within each generation, a small number of restless men were inspired by tales of adventure to leave domestic life and travel in search of adventures themselves. He also shows that some of these men took part in the conquest of Texas. But if conquest depended on settlement, he does not amass the large-scale evidence that would be needed to show that the stories motivated either the settlers who crossed the Appalachians in search of land or the capitalists whose technological investments facilitated the process. These people may well have been driven by more mundane factors—poverty, or profit—and have been unmoved by, or even ignorant of, the myth of the romantic frontiersman. For conclusions to be arrived at, an analysis of such things as the percentage of settlers who were literate in English and who read, and approved of, some version of the stories would be needed. And since this evidence would be very difficult to find, it might have been wise to moderate the claim that the stories caused a generation to believe that conquest was their destiny. From one perspective, it would have been counterintuitive if the settlers

had indeed been motivated by the adventurers' stories, since those stories valued the West as a wild place, where the American found manliness by wandering on horseback, with a rifle, far from the farm and the business. Encouraging conquest, if it meant agricultural settlement, was the last thing many of those who idealized the mountain man wished to do. That idealization, insofar as it was associated with western settlement, may have functioned as a post facto romanticization of a process fueled by other causes and rather different people. Manifest Destiny may have been a convenient excuse rather than a causative belief.

The second limitation, at least to a reader trained as a literary critic, is that its analyses of the stories stay mostly at a broad-brush, thematic level. While Bryan clearly delineates themes that are common across many texts, and that therefore cumulatively construct a myth, he tends not to dwell in detail on any one narrative. The rhetorical structures employed to narrate adventures at plot, paragraph, and sentence level are not examined, and as a result the persuasive efficacy and revealing contradictions of any individual story are not revealed from the inside out. I would have liked to have heard more about how the stories work, as well as what they say—what register of language they use, what sentence structure they employ, and, thereby, what level of education they anticipate among readers.

Despite its limitations, *The American Elsewhere* is a fine book. Full of fascinating detail put in service of a strongly expressed and important argument, it merits the attention of all historians of the American West and of American masculinity.

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BENJAMIN E. PARK. *American Nationalisms: Imagining the Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783–1833*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi, 248. Cloth \$49.99.

Fifty-seven years ago in the pages of this journal, David M. Potter tried to clear up confusion by analyzing how sectionalism and nationalism could work together, for example in the coming of the Civil War (“The Historian’s Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,” *AHR* 67, no. 4 [July 1962]: 924–950). In a 2001 article, Andrew W. Robertson posited a dialectic of partisan nationalisms with international reference points (“‘Look on This Picture . . . And on This!’: Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787–1820,” *AHR* Forum, *AHR* 106, no. 4 [October 2001]: 1263–1280). With *American Nationalisms: Imagining the Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783–1833*, Benjamin E. Park bids to join these sophisticated accounts. His title is not a typo. American nationalisms were not only “provincial,” they were “plural,” not to mention “imaginative, fraught, and local” (7, 68).

Park underplays or ignores scholarship that has made similar arguments with different emphases. Protesting that there has not been enough attention to religion, he focuses on the most culturally and religiously distinctive midsized states—Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina—and finds their versions of nationalism to be strikingly different from one another. A lengthy first chapter focuses on 1787, when creative but inchoate attempts were made to imagine the relationship between nation and state. Drawing out this distinction, Park finds “fissures,” eliding the fact that commentary on regional differences by leaders in Congress and by other travelers is an often-remarked-upon phenomenon of the mid-1780s. Rather than rigorously investigate the constitutional ratification debates, the latter half of this chapter compares Benjamin Rush’s Pennsylvanian acceptance of diversity within unity with fellow federalist Noah Webster’s Yankee hopes for nation-building linguistic uniformity.

Aside from announcing his focus on three states, Park never divulges his rationale for choosing very limited sources. The evidence often seems thin and the analytical emphasis arbitrary when not obvious—here a quote from a magazine, there a three-page discursus on a novel. With his focus on 1787, 1795–1798, 1812–1815, and 1831–1833, one might say the deck is decidedly stacked in favor of crisis and conflict. Scene-stealing cavaliers and Yankees mute the voices from Pennsylvania. The chapters on the 1790s and the War of 1812 are mostly about Massachusetts ministers and their published sermons, which self-consciously projected a New England exceptionalism that “laid the foundation for America’s states’ rights philosophy” and “set the stage for later nationalist conflict” (121). Uneven treatment of different regions and the very selective attention to actual politics vitiates Park’s ability to make much of his sensible argument that key sectional nationalist dynamics were emerging in the 1810s, seeding the ground for antislavery and proslavery nationalisms (my terms, not Park’s). Despite a half-dozen pages on African American nationalism, mostly focused on James Forten in Philadelphia, the implications of the simultaneous flowering of free black civic life and “the awakening of American nationalism” that George Dangerfield (another uncited prizewinning historian) analyzed a half century ago in *The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815–1828* (1965) does not receive the probing it needs here.

For the period after 1815, Park mostly shifts to South Carolina, with a brief nod to Denmark Vesey there. He emphasizes the similarities of elite ideas to contemporary developments in Europe, especially the rise of romantic nationalism. He posits even nullifiers like John C. Calhoun as alternative cutting-edge nationalists, despite both Calhoun’s oft-remarked evolution from National Republican to states’ rights theorist and his Carolinian peers’ growing insistence by the late 1820s that