

*America* is unable to provide the sort of developed analysis associated with the author's *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (2011) or other works such as Louis Menard's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001). In addition to addressing such topics as Victorian American culture or the Harlem Renaissance in only a few pages, Ratner-Rosenhagen's analysis rarely moves beyond published texts from scholars, public figures, and other elites. The author also provides little hint about the robust historiographical debates that have enriched the field of intellectual history in recent decades. Furthermore, the few mentions of American literature, film, architecture, and other forms of art suggest that their importance rests solely on their reflection of existing ideas rather than as developments that, on their own, drove the intellectual trajectory of American society. While the book is far too brief to be comprehensive, the significant scholarly attention to the importance of popular culture in American history or the complex role of collective memory and such cultural products as Confederate monuments makes the omission surprising. Nevertheless, Ratner-Rosenhagen's enjoyable chronicle of American ideas and the author's thoughtful commentary on the challenges and opportunities of intellectual history should prove invaluable to students of history as they broaden their notion of American history and begin to participate in a much larger and ongoing "conversation of American thought" (180).

Illinois State University

Richard L. Hughes

**Chris Wickham. *Medieval Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. 352. \$20.00**

Medievalists know Chris Wickham as one of the foremost scholars of the field. He held the Chichele Professorship of Medieval History at the University of Oxford until his retirement

in 2016 and is currently a Fellow of All Souls College. Although he began his career as a historian of Italy during the central Middle Ages, he has long since branched out chronologically and geographically. Wickham's numerous books and articles show his unique talent to focus on specific peoples and places while also stepping back to situate on-the-ground changes within wider socio-economic transformations, most notably in the heavy tome, *Framing the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007) and *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400-1000* (Penguin, reprint ed., 2010). In short, Wickham is the ideal historian to write a concise history of medieval Europe.

In terms of both prose and content, the book remains accessible yet simultaneously complex. Wickham does not shy away from controversies, e.g., "Why did the Roman Empire fall?" and makes his positions on such historiographical issues abundantly clear: "The short answer is that it didn't" (22). The chapters correspond to big moments of change, and Wickham consistently characterizes change as gradual. Although crises may suddenly strike, he argues that immediate catastrophes appeared as part of long-term structural changes in society. The scope of each core chapter reiterates that perspective: "Rome and its Western Successors, 500-750"; "Crisis and Transformation in the East, 500-850/1000"; "The Carolingian Experiment, 750-1000"; "The Expansion of Christian Europe, 500-1000"; "Reshaping Western Europe, 1000-1150"; "The Long Economic Boom, 950-1300"; "The Ambiguities of Political Reconstruction, 1150-1300"; "1204: The Failure of Alternatives"; "Defining Society: Gender and Community in Late Medieval Europe"; "Money, War and Death, 1350-1500"; and "Rethinking Politics, 1350-1500." As the chapter titles show, Wickham's book moves more thematically than chronologically. He chooses to describe Christianization (Chapter 4) in its own right and underscores the diversity in its manifestations across Europe. Likewise, he devotes a separate chapter to society and gender (Chapter 10). The decentralization

of power during the tenth century is inextricably linked to the Carolingian collapse of the ninth (Chapter 3). Again, his approach stresses how slowly change took place.

In *Medieval Europe* Wickham manages to distill over one thousand years of human history into around two hundred pages, but the book should not be confused with a textbook of Medieval Europe; it is not sufficiently comprehensive, nor does it try to be. It provides an overview of critical events that changed the face of Europe from ca. 500-1500. Wickham has created a narrative that would best serve teachers of medieval history in course development. It would also be a good text for graduate students in the context of a seminar on any topic during the Middle Ages. *Medieval Europe* discusses Eastern-Western relations in the Mediterranean and beyond, but Europe occupies the center of Wickham's book. Wickham deliberately avoids the "great men" (or even "great women") model of scholarship. We read more about land tenure, taxation, economic production, or "the politics of land," in his words (11). Wickham prefers to identify patterns rather than to detail the biographies of kings and popes. The major players are there but with respect to their role in wider changes. In spite of the emphasis on structural change, the downside of which tends to reduce people to numbers, through Wickham's descriptive examples individual personalities emerge.

Illinois State University

Kathryn Jasper

**Carol Berkin. *A Sovereign People: The Crises of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2017. Pp. 307. \$30.**

While one may be tempted to wonder whether either the public or academia need another recounting of the American political landscape of the 1790s, senior historian Carol Berkin puts that issue to rest in the first several pages of her crisply