

without doing a history of the present. This is an urgent, engaged text written accessibly and concisely that can open up paths for history students and teachers to engage with some of the most critical issues facing people and the planet.

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Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen. *The Ideas That Made America: A Brief History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 220. \$18.95.

Every survey of American history discusses the importance of abolitionist John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry in 1859. Few narratives, however, also argue that the importance of John Brown's martyrdom is forever tied to another event that occurred a month later, the publication in London of Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species*. Both opponents and defenders of slavery in the United States interpreted the meaning of Brown's raid through the powerful lens of Darwin's ideas. As historian Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen explains in *The Ideas That Made America: A Brief History*, abolitionists argued that Darwin confirmed the common origins of both whites and blacks while defenders of slavery and, later, Jim Crow found the notion of the "survival of the fittest" a potent rationale for rigid racial hierarchies.

Such intellectual connections "across national [and] temporal borders" and "across borders within American culture" lie at the heart of Ratner-Rosenhagen's accessible survey of American intellectual history (4). Ranging from European exploration of the New World to more recent debates over postmodernism and globalization, Ratner-Rosenhagen manages to accomplish two goals within a concise work: a survey of major intellectual developments in American history and a valuable introduction to the work of intellectual historians. She enriches the genealogy of American thought with numerous comments about the goals

of understanding “competing moral viewpoints” and the “factors that shape historical actors’ intellectual options” (77). The author combines her effort to “eavesdrop on the past” through revealing portraits of such individuals as Puritan ministers, Thomas Jefferson, Margaret Fuller, John Dewey, Betty Friedan, and the student authors of the Port Huron Statement with a reminder that historians strive to assess the “balance of power between need, desire, fear, follow, sagacity, and foresight” in shaping the perspectives of historical figures (2, 77). The result is both laudatory portraits of key figures and instances where the complex world of American ideas reveals more hypocrisy and inconsistencies than merit. For example, Ratner-Rosenghan describes how both the Enlightenment and a commitment to slavery shaped the development of American colleges and how Benjamin Franklin’s remarkable life coupled seminal sermons on self-reliance with an impressive dependence of family and support staff.

While most survey textbooks largely focus on political and social history and invariably divide American history into discreet chronological periods, *The Ideas That Made America* is most effective when the author illuminates, even if only in a few paragraphs, the “traffic of intellectual exchange” over time (67). Readers encounter revealing links between such figures as Benjamin Rush and classical Athens and Rome, Thomas Paine and the Old Testament, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Langston Hughes, and between cultural critic Randolph Bourne, author of the 1916 essay, “Trans-National America,” and contemporary debates over globalization. The author’s references to “portals of the past,” “mindscapes,” “textual marketplace,” and accessing the “mental and moral worlds of people” also provide students with the vocabulary for engaging the vibrant and nuanced field of intellectual history in ways rarely present in traditional survey courses (117, 3, 32, 46).

Of course, at 180 pages plus notes, *The Ideas That Made*

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).

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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