

convincing case for *Playboy's* relevance to historical processes to which it has not usually been linked, and sustains her conclusion that “popular discussions of *Playboy* have become, in effect, debates about American life, revealing then and now much about the cultural preoccupations and anxieties of American society” (216).

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Liyakat Nathani Takim, *Shi'ism in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009, £23.00). Pp. 284. ISBN 978 0 8147 8296 5.

This is a generally competent survey of a minority but significant element in the Muslim community of the United States. Takim reviews the history of the various ethnic groups in America that owe allegiance to Shi'ism, some of long standing such as the Lebanese, and others more recently arrived, from Iran, Iraq, the Indian subcontinent, and East Africa. He shows that the double minority status of Shi'is in America has led not to coalescence, as might have been expected, but to the accentuation of cultural differences; religious identity is expressed in tenaciously distinct cultural forms. Of particular interest is the author's frank discussion of the failure to integrate African American Shi'is – called by him, questionably in the opinion of this reviewer, “Black Shi'is” (206–7) – into any segment of the broader Shi'i community. He suggests that in the aftermath of 9/11 younger Shi'is in particular have become intent on developing a supra-ethnic “American identity” by engaging in civic and political activity (228–29). The net result has been, however, a proliferation of rival organizations and thus new forms of division. A further symptom of the will to assimilate is the importance given to “dialogue” with Christians and Jews, which is also a preoccupation of many Sunnis.

As for Shi'i relations with the Sunni majority of American Muslims, Takim chronicles instances of unity and rapprochement as well as cases of obstinate or even deliberate mutual distrust. His treatment of this delicate subject leaves something to be desired. His consistent equation of Salafism with Wahhabism is questionable, although common, and he fails to challenge the fantastic assertion made by a body styling itself grandiosely the Universal Muslim Association of America that a whole slew of Islamic organizations in America form “a very large Wahhabi empire” (127). Likewise, with respect to the creedal questions perennially at issue between Sunnis and Shi'is, Takim is sometimes in error. It is not true, for example, that Sunnis believe straightforwardly in predestination; the Ash'ari position to which Takim refers is far more complex (apart from which, it is highly unlikely that the great mass of Sunnis in North America should ever have heard of al-Ash'ari). Equally, Shi'i tradition does not espouse unbounded free will; authoritative for Shi'ism is the statement of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq that situates the truth of this troublesome matter between the two extremes (217). Takim's assertion that Shi'i political theory “views all governments in the prolonged absence of the twelfth Imam to be illegitimate” (223) is, again, an oversimplification at best.

Takim is on much firmer ground when examining in detail the role of the *maraji'*, the supreme authorities of Shi'i Islamic law that reside in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, in

dispensing guidance on problems faced by their followers in the United States, living as they do in an overwhelmingly non-Muslim society (chapter 4, “Shi’i Leadership and America”). He reviews an interesting variety of opinions on matters as diverse as permissible and impermissible types of music, the evidentiary value of DNA, the ritual purity or impurity of non-Muslims, artificial insemination, and euthanasia. The opinions reflect different methodological choices on the part of the *maraji* and thus have a broad significance that transcends the American context.

In sum, a useful book, an original contribution to the burgeoning literature on Islam in America.

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John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, £22.99/\$39.95). Pp. xi + 543. ISBN 978 0 19 538780 3.

John Wigger is a leader in what might be called the Methodist “turn” in American social and religious history during the last couple of decades. The Puritans, it seems, we have always had with us – on both sides of the Atlantic – and Methodism has achieved secular historical notice in its English incarnation from the “Halevy thesis” and E. P. Thompson’s controversial twist on it in the twentieth century. But Wesley’s American followers, despite their meteoric rise to prominence in the early nineteenth century, had been little regarded outside denominational history until relatively recently.

Prompted by the “crossover” attention given Methodism by Donald Mathews, Russell Richey, Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, a second generation of historians like Wigger, Dee Andrews and William Sutton (all of whom teach in state universities, not in Methodist theological seminaries) has also taken up the challenge. Wigger’s 1998 monograph *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* exemplifies the approach, and so does this splendid biography of Francis Asbury, well-known within Methodism as John Wesley’s primary American lieutenant, but not a flashy figure and rarely given his due in wider circles.

Born, minimally educated, and apprenticed as a metalworker in the English Midlands, Asbury arrived in North America in 1771 at the ripe age of twenty-six as one of John Wesley’s appointed lay “assistants.” He had served in a similar capacity in English Methodist circuits for a scant four years and adapted that itinerant ministry of preaching and organizing in and around Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore, as well as the Delmarva peninsula, Virginia and the Carolinas, and eventually into Georgia, New England and across the Alleghenies. He successfully brokered various deals between the distant authoritarian Wesley and the American Methodists, particularly southerners, increasingly restive for ecclesiastical as well as political independence. Famously electing to stay on through the Revolution, despite the obvious unpopularity of Wesley’s Tory views, Asbury directed the movement’s fortunes from hiding in Delaware when all the other official assistants returned to England, thus earning the respect of the American Methodists. Unsurprisingly,