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Baptists in America. By **Bill J. Leonard.** Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. x + 316 pp. \$26.00 paper.

In this insightful book, Bill Leonard illuminates the diversity, complexity, and divisiveness of Baptist life in the United States. Most impressively, *Baptists in America* builds on Leonard's earlier contributions—especially *Baptist Ways* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 2003), his comprehensive survey of Baptist history, *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), which he edited, and *God's Last and Only Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), his history of the Southern Baptist Convention and its fragmentation. And yet *Baptists in America* does not simply rehash previous arguments in an updated form. What Leonard offers instead is a new evaluation of the Baptist experience from historical and contemporary perspectives. As part of the Columbia Contemporary American Religion series, this book emphasizes current issues. Here Leonard examines Baptist perspectives on scripture, theology, polity, race, religious liberty, women in ministry, and controversial morality debates, including arguments over sexual ethics, divorce, war, alcohol, gambling, and other issues. The book contextualizes these discussions with two chapters of historical survey, followed by an overview of theology and practice as viewed especially through historic confessions. Next is a remarkably concise and instructive classification of Baptist groups in all their teeming variety. National, American, and Southern Baptists receive due attention, but not to the neglect of Seventh-Day, Primitive, Old Regular, Union, Free Will, and Independent Baptists, among others. Informed by the vast diversity of Baptist communions, the focus here is on identity—both present and past—and the historical formation of contemporary positions.

Baptists always defy simple classification. As Leonard observes, Baptist ranks have included such diverse figures as Jesse Jackson, Jesse Helms, Martin Luther King, Jr., Strom Thurmond, Tim LaHaye, and Maya Angelou (2). Certainly the Baptist common denominator is not political, nor is it easily identified theologically. Aside from a historic commitment to believers' baptism, Baptists differ greatly in thought and practice. Historians and theologians have listed several distinctive characteristics of Baptist theology and polity, including soul competency, freedom, individualism, community, Biblicism, and mission, among others. Leonard recognizes, however, that these convictions are not uniquely Baptist. Moreover, Baptists have disagreed over the meaning of each "mark" of Baptist identity. Leonard's provocative solution in this and previous works is to locate the perennial tensions in Baptist life. For example, Baptists have consistently expressed reverence for biblical authority (sometimes

inerrancy) while also proclaiming the liberty of the individual conscience; Baptists have safeguarded the authority of the local church but often in relation to some influence from associations and conventions; and Baptists have professed to be patriotic citizens while also proclaiming some conception of religious liberty that has often placed them in opposition to government (88–89). These and other paradoxical relationships frame Leonard's skillful analysis of Baptist diversity.

In one of his most insightful chapters, for instance, Leonard reveals the conflicted Baptist heritage of religious liberty. That is, throughout their history, Baptists have fiercely defended religious liberty, though they have just as fiercely debated its meaning and its implications for the relationship between church and state. In the seventeenth century, for example, Roger Williams believed that any attempt to establish a Christian nation violated Christianity itself and contradicted the sacred truth of religious liberty. In the next century, however, Isaac Backus believed that religious liberty and a Christian nation were compatible (158–161). Today Baptist advocates for religious liberty fall into at least two categories: separatists who deny any government assistance to religion and accommodationists who accept any government support of religion that does not privilege one faith over others (179–181). Throughout Baptist history, therefore, the conviction for religious liberty, including the intense conflict over its meaning, has been integral to Baptist identity. Likewise in the other tensions that Leonard examines, Baptists have defined themselves more by their conflicts than by their substantial agreements. Succinctly put, “being Baptist is messy, controversial, and divisive” (156). And yet in each case Leonard captures the coherence amid the contention.

Given all this paradox and diversity among Baptist groups, it is no surprise that Baptists have held conflicting perspectives on political and social issues. Leonard surmises that Baptists often position themselves as a “sectarian establishment” in the United States. The “sectarian” identity makes good historical sense. After all, Baptists were outsiders in the colonial period—quite literally a sectarian minority, often in revolt against oppressive governments and their established churches. And even today it is clear that sectarian identity and rhetoric die hard. Despite their phenomenal growth in the United States over the last two centuries, Baptists often retain a sectarian perspective, speaking out on all sides of controversial issues ranging from civil rights to abortion rights and prayer in schools, most often positioning themselves in conflict with the status quo. And yet due to their sheer numbers—over thirty million strong—Baptists have contributed to a Protestant establishment that has exerted substantial influence on society. Ironically, therefore, Baptists have become “at once the ‘culture despisers’ and the ‘culture promoters’” (3).

Baptists in America is engagingly written and remarkably comprehensive. Leonard's analysis connects with the latest scholarship on Baptists and

American religious history, and includes an annotated bibliography that documents the prolific scholarly interest in Baptist topics. As this book convincingly demonstrates, Baptist life in America is diverse—so diverse that no single book can possibly represent it all, though this one comes as close as one can expect in a single volume. Moreover, no book surpasses this one in placing contemporary questions in conversation with historical precedents. In *Baptists in America*, Bill Leonard not only narrates the Baptist past, he skillfully analyzes its place in the Baptist present.

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Race, Nation, and Empire in American History. Edited by **James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and Robert G. Lee**. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. xiii + 384 pp. \$65.00 cloth; \$22.50 paper.

Ramón Gutiérrez has remarked that the fundamental problem of historiography is the persistent devotion to telling history in contiguity with the rise and progress of the nation-state (“What’s Love Got to Do With It?” *Journal of American History* 88:3 [December 2001]: 868). This is no accident. Virtually all of us have been trained since grammar school to think about the past as the story of a particular nation, usually our own. We are taught to study the formation of “citizen-subjects” of the state in hope of becoming the same. National boundaries and nationalist frameworks shape the plot and determine the cast of characters (American history must be about American citizens). The nation-state, consequently, functions as the default mode for examining “what has happened.”

In the past decade, however, transnational methods have emerged in departure from this approach, opting instead to recognize that invented geopolitical borders are by no means impermeable boundaries, and that societies are networks, first and foremost, marked by constant movements, exchanges, intricate relations and interests of power, and intersubjectivities that transcend the nation-state. Recent examples include Thomas Bender’s edited *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and John Carlos Rowe’s edited *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). The editors of *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History* “tilt their hats” to the revisionist imperative of these new approaches in order to craft an astute volume whose fifteen selections “rechart the historical mainstream” (7) to