the 1990s. Slade traces the organization's beginnings to prayer breakfasts attended by Christian businessmen in Jackson and to a series of informal meetings between white and black clergy hosted by the theologically conservative First Presbyterian Church of Jackson. He then follows the arc of Mission Mississippi's development as it moved from sponsoring large stadium-type revivals featuring black and white evangelists in the 1990s to its present focus on church partnerships and biweekly prayer breakfasts held alternately at white and black cultural spaces, from all-white prep schools on the outskirts of town to black Baptist churches in drug-ridden neighborhoods.

Mission Mississippi is avowedly apolitical, focussed intently on fostering interpersonal racial reconciliation. The organization demurs from engaging any of the issues of social justice that quickly surface in any interaction between whites and blacks in the state with America's poorest African American population. Much of Slade's book reads as a response to the work of sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, whose *Divided by Faith* (2000) criticized the individualistic and relational approach of Mission Mississippi as ineffective and even inhibitive to the progress of social justice. In response, Slade probes the relationship between reconciliation and justice, evaluating Mission Mississippi practices alongside Miroslav Volf's theology of reconciliation to argue that Mission Mississippi's prayer meetings represent a vital forum where, through listening to and praying for one another, participants practice open friendship and develop the ability to see through the other's eyes, an essential first step on the road to reconciliation and justice.

Mission Mississippi, as its African American director Dolphus Weary says, is "Reconciliation 101." Slade recognizes as much, and argues that the organization represents a pragmatic and theologically sound, if incipient, approach to the intractable problems of racial reconciliation and social justice in Mississippi. He nevertheless expresses at the end of the book the hope that Mission Mississippi will eventually "relax its dogmatic insistence on the separation between spiritual and social spheres" (181). In one sense, then, this book is a theological analysis awaiting the final verdict of history. And while Mississippi's history gives little reason for hope in this regard, Slade's perceptive study does.

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Claude S. Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, £22.50/$35.00). Pp. 511. ISBN 0 226 25243 8.

Made in America is a new book that seeks to resurrect a very old concept: "American character." Claude S. Fischer, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley, attempts nothing less than a synthesis of American consciousness from colonial times to the present, arguing that across several centuries Americans became more "American." As ordinary Americans obtained greater security, longevity, choices, and possessions, argues Fischer, more of them were able to "live,

think, and feel more intensely in ways distinctive to mainstream, middle-class American culture" (10).

The American trait Fischer considers most definitive is "voluntarism," which combines the belief that "each person is a sovereign individual: unique, independent, self-reliant, self-governing, and ultimately self-responsible," with the conviction that "individuals succeed through fellowship – not in egoistic isolation but in sustaining, voluntary communities" (10). By thus placing American individualism within a communitarian setting, *Made in America* is in marked debt to Alexis de Tocqueville.

Americans' penchant for "faith, moralism, violence, and cheeriness," Fischer admits, may derive from sources other than voluntarism. Belief in an all-determining God, for example, is difficult to square with the view that individuals shape their destinies. To Fischer this merely demonstrates the contradictions present in any culture. He insists that "many traits that outside observers have for generations described as particularly American – such as self-absorption, 'can-do' confidence, egalitarianism, conformism, and status-striving – derive from a voluntaristic culture" (11).

Curiously, neither pragmatism nor practicality is among the qualities identified by Fischer as American; even in a chapter on "mentality" neither appears. In all other respects, this work is reminiscent of evocations of American character from the nineteenth century to the early Cold War. Today the claim of a unitary national character will summon scepticism in scholars of American studies, to whom it will seem a throwback to a bygone American order dominated by white, native-born, English-derived Protestant men who sought to impose their presuppositions upon the nation. To press Americans' commonalities into a singular national persona not only obfuscates their variations and differences but, more ominously, might stigmatize as "un-American" those departing from the putative norm. It is not to be regretted that Americans to a considerable extent now see themselves as plural.

"Discussing distinctive national character does make sense," Fischer insists (12). His case hinges upon the assumption that character is interchangeable with culture. While Fischer acknowledges the transformations of American life that have altered the old WASP-dominated order, he holds that these shifts resulted in "American" qualities being extended to ever-wider segments of the population. As slaves, sharecroppers, immigrants, and other denigrated groups won access to a self-oriented "bourgeois" personality, Fischer argues, Americans have "become more characteristically 'American,' meaning – among other things – insistently independent but still sociable, striving, and sentimental" (1).

On the cover of *Made in America* is a sepia-tone photograph of an all-white marching band, baton twirlers and drum corps in the lead, parading down Main Street in Butte, Montana in 1939. It is an image redolent with nostalgia. The same could be said of the method of American studies practiced inside.

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