

## NOTE

1 Dawn Raffel, *The Strange Case of Martin Couney: How a Mysterious European Showman Saved Thousands of American Babies* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2018).

## Historicizing the Golden Age of “Independent” Journalism

Rodgers, Ronald R. *The Struggle for the Soul of Journalism: The Pulpit versus the Press, 1833–1923*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2018. xvii + 320 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-2158-2.

Janine Giordano Drake

University of Providence, Providence, Rhode Island, USA

doi:10.1017/S1537781418000774

We often hear complaints about how journalists today are straying from their primary calling. “Real journalists,” the argument goes, perform independent investigative work that prioritizes “truth” over the interests of the media’s investors or owners. Yet, there was never an era when commercial journalists were entirely independent of their corporate sponsors. In the early twentieth century, the high point of so-called “independent” journalism, advertising was bringing in more money to newspapers than sales of papers themselves; all papers had some responsibility to please their sponsors. Muckraking abounded where writers found patrons, but truly “objective” reporting, to the extent it was explored, never captured the public interest. When and where, then, did these aspirational journalistic ideals come from? In a thoughtful intellectual history of journalism as a profession, Ronald Rodgers convincingly traces these ideals back to the Social Gospel movement.

Rodgers grounds the “soul of journalism” in the rivalry between the press and the pulpit in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of the nation’s most influential ministers of the late nineteenth century, he shows, worked as public intellectuals. Among these were Lyman Abbott, Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, Charles Sheldon, and Walter Rauschenbusch, editors of the eminent publications, the *Outlook*, *Collier’s*, and *The Independent* and authors of popular paperbacks. Each of these ministers accused the press of either offering an insubstantial effort at grasping social problems, or of doing so without inspiring the public to systematically reform society. Not unselfishly, these Social Gospel leaders urged the public to instead support their truly “independent” editorial work.

Rodgers convinces us that Protestant ministers’ rivalry with mainstream newspaper editors was also grounded in their concern that the pulpit was losing its once-prominent authority in American life. Ministers were so jealous of the popularity of commercial Sunday newspapers that they criticized them for violating the Sabbath

and secularizing the nation's values, yet, they made several attempts to create a comprehensive "Christian daily" newspaper of their own. Ministers mobilized the rhetoric of bias in order to defend the primacy of their own publications and the importance of their religious authority on matters of reform. Rodgers shows that commercial journalists responded carefully to this assault. In the early decades of the twentieth century, associations of professional journalists began to define their calling by the ideals ministers argued they needed to live up to. It was here, and not in any golden age of fair and balanced journalism, that we saw the birth of the journalistic "mission" as an "educator of public opinion vital to society and the maintenance of democracy" (82). The idea that journalism should be prophetic and inspiring came directly from the chastisement of religious leaders.

The book is directed primarily to communications scholars, but it offers an important contribution to the history of the Social Gospel. It reminds us that prominent, denominational ministers were well-resourced but saw themselves fighting an uphill battle for civil authority against secular professional writers. Rogers confirms the observations of historians Elesha Coffman, Matthew Hedstrom, and Timothy Gloege that Protestants used print culture (and particularly, the convenience of direct mail marketing) to shift and maintain religious authority structures throughout the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> However, Rodgers' limited research into the scope of early twentieth century print culture also limits the study. The book gives the impression that ministers were the most important competitors for local newspaper reporters, but that point is not substantiated.

The Progressive Era saw a multitude of partisan, even "expressly Christian" newspapers and magazines, all of which relied upon a combination of subscriptions and advertising. When ministers discredited mainstream news, they sought not only to suppress the authority of Rockefeller-backed local papers but also the prominence of labor and anarchist newspapers, women's rights publications, magazines of fraternal associations, temperance groups, and the multiplicity of "foreign language" immigrant papers. The local, commercial news may have been some ministers' primary target, but it was hardly their only formidable competitor. Moreover, it was not only liberal Protestant ministers who marketed their religious authority with the rhetoric of unbiased, Christian truth. As Timothy Gloege illustrates in his study on the rise of Dwight Moody's ministry, religious leaders used the same direct marketing strategies of wholesale manufacturers selling their "pure" commercial goods.

If we expand the category of "Social Gospel" leaders to include this larger group of self-proclaimed Christian reformers, Rodgers's argument is more convincing. But the book sometimes makes the mistake of interpreting early twentieth-century print culture through the eyes of the Anglo-Protestant establishment. For example, Rodgers categorizes secular muckrakers like Upton Sinclair and Jacob Riis as "yellow journalists." Had he explored the veracity of their claims that Rockefeller-backed newspapers suppressed reporting on strikes, industrial accidents, systematic racism, immigrant poverty, union organizing drives and impoverished immigrant communities, he might have concluded that commercial newspapers really did work to suppress stories on the working classes. He may have found that "muckrakers" created a new market of readers among working class intellectuals and rank-and-file union members, and that both Anglo-Protestant ministers and professional journalists competed to capture these working-class audiences with their aspirational, journalistic ideals.

Nevertheless, one book can only do so much, especially bridging fields as disparate as Communications and History. Rodgers should be commended for bringing the history of journalism closer to the histories of print culture and religion. Historians should

engage with Rodgers's central insight—that journalism's aspirations to "prophetic" and "educative" work were a response to the chastisement of self-proclaimed Christian publishers. Rodgers reminds us that our historical scholarship has hardly begun to explain John Rockefeller's curious investments in both a religious- and commercial-news empire.

## NOTE

1 Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and the Rise of American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

## Law and Empire

**Coates, Benjamin Allen. *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 296 pp. \$37.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780190495954.**

Ross A. Kennedy

Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, USA

doi:10.1017/S1537781418000786

International law is not a topic one usually associates with the rise of America's global power. But in *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century*, Benjamin Coates makes a convincing case that international lawyers were central to American expansionism as well as to its entry into World War I. Legalists helped to provide the rationale to justify the colonization of the Philippines and other territories, developed legal codes that protected corporate interests overseas, and created an organizational infrastructure promoting a vision of world order compatible with American interests. International law "cast an imperial shadow," Coates declares, and his book explains how, thus providing a new interpretation of a crucial era in American diplomatic history.

The heart of Coates's analysis lay in his careful description of the ideology of "legalism" that animated international lawyers such as Elihu Root, John Bassett Moore, and James Brown Scott. These "lawyer-officials" viewed law as "an apolitical expression of reason" and the development of international law as the expression of "advancing civilization" (2, 71). Sovereign states, they believed, were increasingly interdependent and should therefore see international cooperation under formal rules as both practical and an "ethical duty" (71). Legalists did not call for world government to implement a regime of international law. Instead, they "reconciled sovereignty and internationalism