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The Mountains Are Calling: Tourists and the Unmaking of Yosemite National Park

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Francis MacDonnell, *Policing Show Business: J. Edgar Hoover, the Hollywood Blacklist, and Cold War Movies*. University Press of Kansas, 2024. 308 pp. Hardcover, \$39.99.

In *Policing Show Business*, Francis MacDonnell examines the FBI's key role in the Hollywood Blacklist from 1942 to 1948. Books on this subject are scant. For a decade since the early 1990s, scholarship was limited to academic articles and parts of books, most notably Athan Theoharis's *Chasing Spies* (2002), which examined the FBI's just-released Communist Infiltration–Motion Picture Industry (COMPIC) file. By 2012, John Sbardellati's book *J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies* became the first to explore the FBI and the origins of Cold War Hollywood blacklisting. MacDonnell “builds and expands upon his [Sbardellati's] important work” (2). The two books should be seen as companion studies.

MacDonnell's approach, though, is different. His research is rooted in accessible FBI files, and he takes a biographical approach to various FBI targets, informants, and other players. He writes: “Individuals matter” (1). He is correct. His subjects range from actors Betsy Blair and Ward Bond, to studio heads Walt Disney and Dore Schary, to singer Burl Ives, to director Cecil B. DeMille, among numerous others. The starring role, of course, is FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover himself, for it was his obsession with communism and the immense power he had built in his FBI that enabled an apparatus of national security to focus on the film business somehow as a threat. As MacDonnell puts it, “Hoover emerges as the prime mover and first cause of the blacklist” (7).

*Policing Show Business* dips into scholarship on the FBI, the Cold War, Soviet espionage, and the motion picture industry. This scholastic layering lends to the book's insightfulness, which is evident in MacDonnell's initial exposition on Hoover and COMPIC. He explains Hoover's method—concealing the FBI's tracks and working through third parties to keep the bureau “insulated from scandals” and not having publicly “too close a collaboration with countersubversives” (18). MacDonnell also demonstrates the impact the investigations had on Hollywood. Films and their underlying messages became markedly less progressive, less creative, and more in line with Hoover's preferences. The FBI director liked staid films in which crime never paid and vice was punished. Indeed, between 1948 and 1954, Hollywood produced some forty B movies involving plots about evil communists. A master bureaucrat, Hoover knew full well from experience to avoid

public opprobrium, especially in the realm of free speech. The FBI was central, proving in its Hollywood investigations to be “an important foundational step in the blacklisting of individual artists” (28).

Still, that work necessitated having supporting actors, so to speak, to effect a blacklist. These were first developed during World War II. Hoover became a radical anticommunist during the First Red Scare in 1919–20, and his beliefs never went away even if he muted them at inopportune times. During World War II, the FBI became a sophisticated counterintelligence agency, most successfully against Nazi spies. Hoover learned how to use informants, double agents, and other techniques to undermine foreign influences. If naively, he truly believed communists were trying to infiltrate the country with leftist messages planted in movies. Thus, the FBI developed high-level informants like Paramount studio director Cecil B. DeMille. Many of them, unsurprisingly, were members of the conservative Motion Picture Alliance (MPA). The FBI’s relations with the MPA were “uneasy” (39), as it often overreached, but many of its individual members commonly cooperated with FBI agents. There were exceptions, though. Conservative MPA member Gary Cooper, while quite willing to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), refused to inform on his colleagues.

Hoover’s most famous Hollywood informant was studio head Walt Disney. In recounting this oft-told story, MacDonnell demonstrates the careful and considered approach of his research, showing that Disney was not an equivalent cooperator as, say, DeMille. A problem is that available FBI records leave Disney’s full story unresolved. Nevertheless, by using Disney’s FBI file and carefully analyzing his biography and the films his studio released, MacDonnell clearly shows that while Disney was a prominent anticommunist in the 1940s and ’50s—indeed, he was an FBI “special contact” by 1954—by the 1960s it seems evident via several Disney films that the man wasn’t so chummy with Hoover anymore. Disney put out films that took gentle jibes at FBI agents or portrayed them as clumsy investigators foiled by a cat. A man obsessed with his FBI’s image, Hoover would never tolerate such depictions from intimate informants, suggesting Disney wasn’t a top cooperator.

MacDonnell further offers balanced assessments of some liberal Hollywood FBI cooperators. Such is the case with MGM Studios head Dore Schary, who was open to sacrificing the famous Hollywood Ten to forestall further probes. MacDonnell shows through Schary’s biography that he was less a sellout than an adept dodger and weaver. He, too, appeared before HUAC but took a safer middle-ground approach, and he eventually produced films that were more pleasing to Hoover’s eyes and ears, like the Cold War documentary *The Hoaxters* (1952). This short framed Nazism, fascism, Japanese militarism, and communism as being in the same basket, even if at the very end it cleverly warns of unjust targeting of liberals.

If the FBI’s successful wartime counterintelligence targeting led it to focus similarly on supposedly dangerous film industry types, MacDonnell also shows the failures of Cold War FBI counterintelligence tactics employed in Hollywood. Such was the case with songwriter Yip Harburg, author of the lyrics in the musical *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). The political polar opposite of Hoover, Harburg was blacklisted. Yet FBI agents’ probes of him

lacked good analysis, favoring instead the simple accumulation of data. Agents also abjectly failed in properly judging the reliability of their sources of information.

*Policing Show Business* is satisfyingly rich with detailed and nuanced stories of those targeted for blacklisting, more than can be relayed here. MacDonnell shows that Hoover was central to making the blacklisting possible, intimidating Hollywood liberals, and egging on Hollywood countersubversives. It is a story, in the short term, of Hoover's unchecked success during a dark period against his adversaries and with his allies. This story also had long-term effects. FBI agents and officials cut their teeth in Hollywood with patterns of targeting that would be replicated later against civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. Hollywood creativity suffered thanks to Hoover's FBI. Hollywood and its blacklist endured for decades, whereas, for example, Broadway was mostly ignored by countersubversives. MacDonnell concludes his book with some nuanced comparisons of the Cold War blacklist to today's "canceling" in public culture, and he provides a satisfying discussion of the varying literature from interconnected fields. All in all, *Policing Show Business* is an excellent book that should be used in tandem with Sbardellati's.

DOUGLAS M. CHARLES

DOUGLAS M. CHARLES is professor of history at Penn State University's Greater Allegheny campus and a specialist in the history of the FBI. He has written three books about the FBI and a two-volume FBI encyclopedia. He's currently writing a detailed two-volume history of the FBI from 1908 to the present.

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Michael W. Childers, *The Mountains Are Calling: Tourists and the Unmaking of Yosemite National Park*. University of Nebraska Press, 2026. 259 pp. Hardcover \$65.

In this new study of California's first protected area, Michael Childers reminds us that while the issues associated with overuse at Yosemite may seem specific to our present day—as personally experienced or read about—many of the challenges have existed since the park's development as a tourist destination in the mid-nineteenth century. The reader is guided through three sections: the dispossession and unremembering of the Ahwahneechee from their land; the early years of boosterism, infrastructure development, and reliance on concessionaires to provide adequate facilities; and the growing environmental consciousness of society and limits on recreational use, all the while considering for what purpose and for whom the park should be made accessible.

As Childers shows, some notable themes have influenced tourism over the years since 1855, when James Hutchings traveled to Yosemite and Thomas Ayres published the first image of the valley, a lithograph that allowed those who hadn't traveled to the area to see it for the first time. Themes of change that are expounded upon over the course of the book include innovation in transportation and technologies that have changed how visitors connect to park resources, contested meanings of place for what purpose the park should serve and for whom, and the influence of political/legal and environmental complexity in shaping management outcomes.

The mode of transport and technologies that have allowed visitors to access the park and enjoy its scenery and natural wonders have evolved. Owing to the late entry of passenger rail into the Sierra Nevada, the Yosemite Valley Railroad existed for only six years before the first automobiles were permitted into the park in 1913. The declining use of the stagecoach and increasing reliance on the automobile created a demand for paved roads, enabling visitors to access scenic vistas and experience the park at a different pace—as a “windshield wilderness.” Innovations in camping equipment and outdoor clothing, together with mobile data and apps, allow visitors to optimize their trip planning and adapt to changing conditions.

The varied assemblages of landscapes, recreational opportunities, and visiting publics have produced different discourses over what purposes the park ought to serve. Beginning in the late 1950s, a debate among multi-pitch climbers centered around purists who believed that one shouldn’t climb with the help of metal pitons and those who believed that steel spikes permanently embedded in rock were the ultimate expression of ingenuity and essential for climbing. Furthermore, pitons trammelled on the otherwise unchiseled nature of granite and big-wall climbing, presenting an aesthetic and philosophical impairment. These different philosophies were largely about different place meanings. While differences may exist as much among user groups as between, there isn’t always such a clear philosophical division. The Stoneman Meadow riots, occurred over the Fourth of July weekend in 1970, feature prominently in this book. The author analyzes the event through the lens of those whose comments and actions reflect different understandings of the place: park managers and law enforcement (many of whom were from other agencies), visiting families (with impressionable youth), and the people occupying the meadow. While the law enforcement response was provocative and uncoordinated, many park visitors that weekend appeared unconcerned by the forms of countercultural expression that law enforcement regarded as problematic. The response tactics were not well thought through, but park staff, as stewards of visitors’ experience, were justified in concluding that the gathering detracted from the experience (and place meaning) sought by other visitors.

As technologies change and interest coalitions wax and wane in their influence over outcomes, management actions proposed to ameliorate experiential impacts and resource impairments have been stifled by legal incongruencies and environmental complexities. For instance, the Yosemite Valley Plan and later Merced River Plan have shaped the built environment and visitor capacity of the valley through both contested legal process and response to climatic extremes. The Merced River’s designation as a Wild and Scenic River meant that when the 1997 flood occurred, closing the park and causing widespread damage to visitor facilities and infrastructure, management had to remove buildings within a buffer zone of the river and set limits on total visitor capacity to the valley. While the public comments for these plans were voluminous—including arguments both for and against a strict use limit, as well as support for the park’s preference for a flexible range, each reflecting different place meanings—the Ninth Circuit Court’s decision ultimately compelled the park to set specific user-capacity limits for the valley.

The book contributes to public history scholarship by examining how people understand a place and construct meaning around it. The strength of Childers’s narrative lies

within the stories of individuals, often framed through personal accounts by tourists, public comments of superintendents, or the opinions of those belonging to advocacy groups. He highlights his motivation in pursuing an emphasis on tourists: Histories of national parks are often based on “key individuals who played significant roles in the creation, preservation, and management of a particular park. These narratives, however, frequently marginalize or overlook the millions of visitors who contribute to the park’s story. Most experienced Yosemite through their recreation” (5). These stories have been overshadowed by news media that measure a park’s success or failure in terms of visitor numbers rather than the experiences of families, groups of friends, or climbing partners with personal histories, motivations, and expectations.

While there are some insightful accounts of tourists’ experiences of the park’s backcountry, notably Half Dome, this book focuses more on the front country visitors’ experiences. This is an understandable and appreciated emphasis, since many of the contested visitation and conservation issues discussed in the book occur where infrastructure and visitor facilities designed to accommodate large numbers of people intersect with wildland areas. However, with relatively less emphasis placed on the backcountry, this book may oversimplify the historic and evolving social and technological challenges facing wilderness managers and the visiting public, especially with the high demand for overnight use. The addition of the overnight permit system in the 1970s and the designation of Yosemite as a congressionally designated Wilderness in 1984 are relatively recent developments in the scope of the park’s history. However, the Sierra Club’s High Tripper alpine groups were described as “the horde” in the early 1900s, and today those visiting the park face challenges over campsite selection with through-hikers along the Pacific Crest Trail or the John Muir Trail, which either begins or ends in the park (depending on your inter-agency permit). Regardless, the author gives considerable attention to wilderness through the connection between Native American dispossession and shifting cultural ideas of nature, leisure, and progress that “attempted to erase the park’s Indigenous history, aided tourists and park managers in reshaping the landscape to meet recreational demands, and shaped debates over Yosemite’s fundamental purpose” (5).

Over time, the pendulum tends to swing between use and preservation in part as a function of the current political administration or of some longer-term regional economic transition, as with the collapse of rural extractive industries and subsequent dependency on tourism. However, the protections afforded Yosemite as a congressionally designated protected area—and by the Park Service’s 1916 Organic Act and a wave of environmental laws, notably those beginning in the 1960s—have ensured that changes are incremental and don’t cross the line of resource impairment and that major proposed projects go through a public review process. Reservation systems since the Covid pandemic and the increasing frequency of wildland fire and other hazards from year to year have affected visitor access. These issues have also impacted the bottom line of gateway communities, particularly those in Mariposa County, which is economically dependent on the park, with 77 percent of primary, secondary, or tertiary spending transactions related to tourism. Recent staffing and funding cuts to the park and the decision to eliminate the 2026 summer day-use reservation system will undoubtedly lead to a subtler kind of impairment, in which data are not used to inform management actions, impacts are not

tracked or addressed, and ecological function, scenic integrity, and visitor experience are ultimately compromised. Those with the authority to forgo the reservation system hope that would-be visitors will hear that the park is too crowded and be dissuaded from visiting. However, Michael Childers's book shows that this strategy has been used in different ways throughout the park's history to no avail, often resulting in further overcrowding and resource impacts.

This book is accessible to a broad audience and recommended for the experienced or soon-to-be visitor to Yosemite National Park, the leaders and scientists responsible for managing it, and those living and working in gateway communities around the park. Through a public history of how a landscape was unmade, may we remember decisions that have brought us to this point and better understand our role in protecting it for future visitors, each with their own story.

JEFFREY S. JENKINS

JEFFREY S. JENKINS studies the history, management, and the geography of visitation at Yosemite National Park and at state and other national parks in the Sierra Nevada and throughout California. He is an associate professor of parks and outdoor recreation in the Department of Management of Complex Systems and is affiliated with the National Parks Institute and Sierra Nevada Research Institute at the University of California, Merced.

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Melissa Villa-Nicholas, *Data Borders: How Silicon Valley Is Building an Industry Around Immigrants*. University of California Press, 2023. 212 pp. Paperback \$29.95.

As many writers have established, the origin of Silicon Valley as the center of technological innovation for consumer products owes a great deal to the local market for tech established by the valley's defense contractors in the postwar period. With this catalyst, within a few years consumer products far outweighed the governmental market in economic heft. Yet in *Data Borders: How Silicon Valley Is Building an Industry Around Immigrants*, Melissa Villa-Nicholas argues that the industry is now returning to its government roots, with disastrous implications for the country's immigrants.

It should be established at the outset that this is not a traditional book of history—that is, one exploring change over time. The author, a professor of library and information studies, provides a cursory timeline of changes in border enforcement, but that is not her main focus. Rather, she sounds the alarm about how California's tech prowess is being harnessed by government agencies employing the latest tools of artificial intelligence to spy on immigrants—with the potential to extend that surveillance to all of us. The book should interest historians because, given the frequency of our reliance on the internet in our research, we leave electronic trails on a regular basis. Moreover, the library, another go-to place for our research, plays a central role in aggregating data points for surveillance and may also serve as a site for resistance to the creation of a surveillance state.

To understand the concept of data border is to begin to grasp Villa-Nicholas's argument. In the past, there have been various physical barriers between the United States

and Mexico, whether rivers to cross, walls to scale, or electronic devices to elude. Some of the barriers have been more effective than others in keeping out would-be newcomers to this country, but none has been as successful at preventing border crossings as authorities have desired, particularly at times when public anti-immigrant fervor has been most pronounced. But now, border enforcement can be more reliable even if more ethereal.

The explanation lies in a raft of recently developed technologies, such as facial recognition, and new means of establishing data points via cell phones or social media. Such data can be fed into algorithms that mobilize the power of AI to pinpoint an immigrant's location. Immigrant data thus becomes a digital product, from which money can be made. California firms like Anduril and Palantir have been at the heart of this enterprise, though it should be noted that Palantir has now moved to Denver. What we've thought of as "the border," in fact, has become a matter of where data can help locate an undocumented person.

The book was published in 2023, so while it explains the groundwork for the harsh treatment of immigrants under President Trump—including some who are legal asylum seekers—it does not include information about the ways the data points, whose creation it describes, are being utilized. As of early 2026, readers who would like to know the extent to which they are being deployed can turn to the press. "How ICE Already Knows Who Minneapolis Protesters Are" is one story that explains that "agents use facial recognition, social media monitoring, and other tech tools not only to identify undocumented immigrants but also to track protesters."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps even more striking is the review of a play that opened off Broadway in January 2026. *Data*, by Matthew Libby, centers on a young tech genius who is being recruited to work for "Athena Technologies," one of the "tech companies like Palantir that are producing technology to aid ICE in tracking undocumented immigrants." The drama lies in the moral struggle of the protagonist, who's torn between his desire for a high-flying career and his knowledge of the potential harm that his new employment might do.<sup>2</sup>

A work about a very important subject and one that makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge about the new world of AI, the book is not without flaws. In the first place, the author's use of the term "Silicon Valley" in the subtitle is confusing. If she means the Santa Clara Valley or even the greater Bay Area, then what about the fact that one of the key firms, Anduril, is headquartered in Orange County? Moreover, Clearview AI, the pioneer in facial recognition technology, is headquartered in New York City. If she means to use "Silicon Valley" as a stand-in for the entire tech industry, then she should say as much and explain her reasons.

Secondly, although Villa-Nicholas has clearly engaged in years of research, including useful oral histories with border crossers, her bibliography is missing books whose absence is felt. Up until fairly recently the tech industry, particularly in its Silicon Valley locale, has had the reputation of being socially liberal, while libertarian in its stance toward the state. Why, then, have some of its acolytes been willing to participate in so intrusive a use of state power as the creation of ultra-sophisticated techniques for spying on individuals? Earlier books, ones that she does not cite, can shed light on this question. More than forty years ago, for example, Lenny Siegel and John Markoff published *The High Cost of High Tech: The Dark Side of the Chip*, whose title telegraphs its critical stance at

a time when most treatments of the world the chip made verged on the panegyric.<sup>3</sup> A somewhat later book, *Cultures@Silicon Valley* by the anthropologist Jan English-Lueck, deals with the often toxic work culture in the tech industry owing to the unrelenting pressure to come up with the latest new thing.<sup>4</sup> The material in each of these books would have greatly enriched a book about how portions of the tech world have embraced the creation and manufacture of the hyper-intrusive tools being deployed by federal agents in the Trump administration—and possibly earlier.

These criticisms notwithstanding, *Data Borders* has much to offer our profession as we navigate the new world of AI.

GLENNA MATTHEWS

GLENNA MATTHEWS has retired from a teaching career that included both a tenured position at Oklahoma State University and a number of visiting positions at UC campuses and at Stanford University. She is the author of five books and coauthor of one, including *The Golden State in the Civil War* (2012) and *Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream* (2002). Her research has been supported by fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

#### NOTES

1. Sheera Frenkel and Aaron Krolik, "How ICE Already Knows Who Minneapolis Protesters Are," *New York Times*, January 30, 2026.
2. Tim Teeman, "The Shock of the Present from a New Technology," *New York Times*, January 27, 2026.
3. Lenny Siegel and John Markoff, *The High Cost of High Tech* (Harper & Row, 1985).
4. Jan English-Lueck, *Cultures @Silicon Valley* (Stanford University Press, 2002).

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Brian D. Behnken, *Brown and Blue: Mexican Americans, Law Enforcement, and Civil Rights in the Southwest, 1935–2025*. University of North Carolina Press, 2025. 352 pp. Paperback \$36.95.

In this book, historian Brian Behnken explores the problematic relationship between law enforcement and the Mexican-origin community of the Southwest from the 1930s to the present. Based on an exhaustive survey of newspapers across the Southwest, Behnken has compiled the most comprehensive record of police misconduct in the border region to date. Most of his eight chapters chronicle incidents city by city within each state. As Behnken notes, this is a difficult history and "may be difficult for some to read and will likely be painful. . . . there is a lot of ugliness to get through" (12–13). This history is not one of progressive improvement, but one of fits and starts and reversals. But Behnken has hopes that this book will ultimately help build a better future. He concludes with a coda of nine specific recommendations for reform of the criminal justice system.

Behnken's overview is organized in rough chronological order. In one chapter, he reviews the politically inspired police surveillance and repression of the Chicano social movement during the 1960s and '70s. The actions taken by the police departments of Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Denver, and the Texas Rangers are noted in detail. A companion chapter looks at the same period to describe the nonpolitical police violence that resulted from minor complaints, mistaken identities, mistaken addresses, or poor judgment. Here

Behnken highlights the 1973 Russian roulette killing of twelve-year-old Santos Rodriguez by a Dallas policeman and the 1977 beating and drowning of Campos Torres by a Houston police squad. He also discusses a number of “strange cases”—the Arizona Hannity case involving the torture of immigrants, for example—that, despite their notoriety, do not fit neatly in a book about police abuse.

Throughout the book, Behnken stresses that the Mexican American community was not antipolice but antipolice abuse. He describes the community resistance and mobilization that led to several instances of police reform—minority hiring initiatives, the creation of athletic programs, and the formation of police–civilian review boards. The community resistance to unjust practices in the criminal justice system has been documented in several Supreme Court cases involving Mexican Americans, of which *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) is the best known. Because of the *Miranda* decision, all those arrested have to be notified of their rights to remain silent and to have a lawyer.

The detail and number of dramatic cases demonstrate convincingly that relations between police and the Mexican American community have been troublesome. But Behnken’s survey has uncovered only those incidents that became major news because they provoked some community reaction. His qualitative documentation would have been strengthened with quantitative or comparative data to demonstrate how widespread the policing problems have been. The statistics that Behnken does cite—that 41 percent of those arrested in California were Latino when Latinos made up 39 percent of the total population (206), for example—do not support an argument about unjust policing.

Nonetheless, Brian Behnken deserves considerable credit for highlighting the long history of Mexican Americans’ problematic experience with the criminal justice system. Given the current campaign of mass deportation and detention of undocumented immigrants, his book provides a timely and relevant overview of policing practices and policies. For those interested in this topic, Behnken’s *Brown and Blue* is essential reading.

DAVID MONTEJANO

DAVID MONTEJANO, professor emeritus of ethnic studies and history at UC Berkeley, is the author of the prize-winning *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (University of Texas Press). His forthcoming book, *A Red Badge of Cotton*, will appear this fall (Yale University Press).

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Marc Stein, *Bicentennial: A Revolutionary History of the 1970s*. University of Chicago Press, 2026. 416 pp. Hardcover \$30.

In 1976, the United States marked 200 years since its declaration of independence from Great Britain. In *Bicentennial: A Revolutionary History of the 1970s*, Marc Stein chronicles the complex events surrounding that milestone, with a particular focus on how the nation’s bicentennial played out in Philadelphia. This rich and timely history reminds readers of the opportunities such national celebrations can (but often do not) provide for reflection about the past, assessments of where things stand, and speculation about what lies ahead. As the United States marks its 250th year since independence, Stein’s deeply

researched and thoughtfully argued book provides a useful starting point for a better understanding of diverse approaches to the Semiquincentennial.

Organized into nine chronological chapters, the book weaves together five “historical narratives”: rethinking how historians have approached the history of the 1970s; urban politics and roots of the rise of the New Right; what Stein calls “the contested politics of national commemoration” (7); the role of tourism and various cultural institutions in revitalizing urban economies; and the commemoration as a “key moment in the history of democracy,” especially evident in struggles between official and “counter-bicentennial” movements and organizations (8). Stein begins in the twenty-some years leading up to 1972, moves to the intensive planning in 1973–75, and ends with the key events of 1976. Drawing primarily on a range of official and alternative print sources, the book gives a detailed sense of how debates about the bicentennial played out in various communities.

One might begin engagement with *Bicentennial* with the acknowledgements section, which nicely frames how Stein approached the book’s journey of nearly thirty years. Known for his prolific scholarship in LGBTQ history, Stein initially imagined this book to focus on the “relationships between nationalism and sexuality” (323). And, while the focus changed over time, Stein nevertheless deeply considers how gender and sexuality shaped the planning for and experience of the bicentennial, especially for women and LGBTQ communities, whose histories are thoughtfully woven through the book. Moreover, Stein uses his vantage point as a historian of sexuality to queer how we frame the very narrative itself. A good example is the complicated relationship between Philadelphia mayor Frank Rizzo (a Democrat) and President Richard Nixon (a Republican). Stein frames this relationship as a “queer courtship” through which Nixon hoped to both build support from the White working-class voters who supported Rizzo and Rizzo to secure federal funding for the city (Chapter 1). Some members of the press framed the transactional relationship of these two politicians as an unlikely “love affair,” which existed alongside Rizzo’s notorious anti-gay politics and actions and Nixon’s homophobia. Such framing shows how useful gender and sexuality can be in shaping our understanding of nationalistic celebrations—and the political transactions that made them possible.

Remaining chapters focus on how various official organizational structures and plans for the Bicentennial emerged in Philadelphia and nationally amid the upheavals of the early to mid-1970s—the U.S. war in Vietnam and southeast Asia, Watergate, rising unemployment, and global energy crises—all of which affected bicentennial plans. Stein outlines how five plans to mark the Bicentennial developed in Philadelphia between 1957 and 1972 alongside various initiatives at the federal level, culminating in the formation of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) in 1973. Despite this emerging structure, ongoing uncertainty continued about funding promised to the city by the Nixon administration, which never really panned out, in part the result of Watergate and its fallout, an uncertain political climate, and dwindling government economic support. As a result, officials, including those in Philadelphia, continually struggled to secure the resources they needed for planning.

By 1974, rather than one clear national focus, what emerged was what Stein calls a “loosely coordinated set of initiatives without much central direction” (104). Some projects were organized at the state and local level; others were national in scope.

Many were the result of advocacy by marginalized communities. A movement to create a Bicentennial Women's Center, for example, emerged from feminist criticism that Philadelphia's plans for the bicentennial had not much considered women as subjects of activities planned—nor were women much represented as planners (79). At the national level, some projects were supported by ARBA but funded privately, including by corporate sponsors. These included a “national slogan contest,” the American Freedom Train (which provided viewers the chance to ride a conveyer belt and view the traveling exhibition), and a Wagon Train Pilgrimage celebrating “an all-pervasive pioneer spirit,” as the advertising executive who conceived of the idea described it (123). The wagon train is a good example of how Stein approaches an analysis of these Bicentennial projects. With its horse-drawn Conestoga wagons, riders in period costumes, and exhibits, it began in June 1975 from various locations and converged on Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in July 1976. Stein nicely unpacks the complex responses to this project, from local celebrations to the reactions of some Native Americans, like Stillaguamish tribal leaders in Washington state, who temporarily blocked the wagon train in protest (124).

One strength of this book is how Stein examines parallel efforts to mark the Bicentennial by communities and organizations outside of officially sanctioned projects. Chronicling this complicated mix is a challenge—but Stein's chronological approach helps, detailing these various efforts as they intersected, sometimes in alignment, and often in conflict with official ones. This “do-it-yourself” Bicentennial, was in part a product of that uncertain financial support and in part a desire to reframe how official planners imagined the Bicentennial, including from diverse racial and ethnic communities, Native people, people with disabilities, women, and LGBTQ communities. Moreover, groups like the Peoples Bicentennial Commission, founded by New Left activists in 1971, challenged the triumphalism of official Bicentennial visions as well as the commercialization of what some came to describe as the “Buy-centennial,” criticizing overreliance on corporate sponsorship and tourism to the detriment of real needs for communities in the city—jobs, housing, and authentic reflection of where the nation was at this point in its history.

While debates surrounding what a Bicentennial celebration would look like and mean continued throughout the period, the impact on Philadelphia was lasting and important. For example, struggles to create an Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum mobilized many people in the Black community and resulted in the museum's opening in 1976. Historical attractions were refurbished or constructed in the Old City and Society Hill neighborhoods, including a new home for the Liberty Bell, a major tourist draw. Counter-Bicentennial advocates staged their own events, challenging erasure from the official conversation through protests, marches, and cultural events. Such activities continued through July 4, 1976, evidence of the persistence of vibrant debates over the meaning of the commemorations.

In an accessible style, with detailed examples, *Bicentennial* provides a roadmap to the complicated efforts to mark the 200th anniversary of the founding of the United States, taking a closer look at how the planning, implementation, and struggles over such commemorations are critical during such moments in a nation's history. For the Bicentennial, this period was “a transformative moment when social justice coalitions helped democratize our understandings of the past, present and future” (320). One can only hope that

the U.S. Semiquincentennial in 2026 offers an equally important opportunity for a range of communities to do the same in our own time.

DAVID A. REICHARD

DAVID A. REICHARD is professor emeritus of history and legal studies at California State University Monterey Bay. He earned his JD from Villanova University School of Law and a PhD in history from Temple University. He is the author of *Here Are My People: LGBT College Student Organizing in California* (University of Georgia Press, 2024), part of the *Since 1970: Histories of Contemporary America* series.