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Chas S. Clifton. *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America.* Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006. xiv + 191 pp. $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-0201-9; $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7591-0202-6.

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Toward the History of an Emergent New Religion

Her Hidden Children examines the historical development of American Wicca and the broader Pagan movement. Together, these two combine to constitute what is likely the fastest growing new religious movement in the United States today. Chas S. Clifton, a Colorado State English professor and movement member since 1972, suggests that Wicca, the largest branch of Paganism, has even "become a world religion, although a tiny one" (p. 3). Despite its explosive growth, American Paganism is an amorphous and elusive entity. It lacks the elaborate institutional structures and centralized hierarchies of many established religions. In addition, as many as 80 percent of all Wiccan practitioners are "solitary," meaning that they worship outside of formal groups. These characteristics provide obstacles for the scholar seeking to narrate the movement's history. Indeed, Clifton suggests that "there is no one narrative about the growth of Pagan Witchcraft in America, but rather multiple narratives springing up at once" (p. 11). Despite such difficulties, Clifton has provided readers with an initial and useful step toward the emergent history of American Paganism and Wicca.

In seven chapters, Clifton utilizes primary source books and magazines, personal interviews, and secondary scholarly works to produce a historical narrative of Wicca's (particularly) and Paganism's (secondarily) modern births and transformations. Though not explicitly fronted in his book, Clifton's narrative suggests a persuasive three-part historical periodization. First, in the 1950s and 1960s, the American movement reflected its debt to English occultism by presenting itself as an ancient mystery craft of the British Isles. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Wicca's American branch came to view itself as an earth-based "nature religion." The decade of the 1970s saw the influential rise of American feminist Wicca, which combined with the new nature religion identity and moved back across the Atlantic to shape British Wicca and Paganism. In this manner, the small occult tradition became the rapidly growing new religious movement.

In offering this historical periodization, Clifton broaches a broad range of intriguing subjects, groups, and figures. In the first chapter, Clifton narrates how Pagan Witchcraft moved to the United States from across the Atlantic. He discusses figures already familiar to new religion scholars, including the retired British civil servant Gerald Gardne; and Raymond and Rosemary Buckland, Gardner's students and later émigrés to Long Island. But he also includes more obscure individuals, such as the science fiction writer Margaret St. Clair. Throughout, Clifton stresses the importance of texts in the transmission and growth of Paganism. In the second chapter, Clifton describes how American Pagans in the sixties simultaneously found identity in elite Renaissance "High Magic" traditions and the indigenous Paganism of the European peasantry. By 1970, he argues, the movement had become a "nature religion." Clifton discusses the rhetoric and politics of naming in chapter three. Among other things, he suggests that the shift from "witchcraft" to "Wicca" served the purpose of giving the American movement a distinct religious identity that distinguished it from occult magical practice. In chapter four, Clifton discusses and compares popular exposes and insider works from the 1970s. While noting that most fit either the *Cosmopolitan* or *Playboy* genres of journalism, he argues that such works were crucial to the growing movement because they provided examples of emergent practices and encouraged social networking.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss influences on American Wicca in the 1970s and offer portraits of non-Wiccan Pagan groups. In his description of "West Coast Wicca," Clifton suggests three significant contributions made by feminist witchcraft groups: critiques of the patriarchal tenor of the early, particularly Gardnerian-influenced, movement; consensus-based decision making within covens; and the rhetorical identification of Wiccan prac-

tice and identity as a form of empowerment. He argues that California Wicca promoted a distinctively left-wing politics that countered the politically conservative disposition of early British Witchcraft. In chapter 6, Clifton discusses a number of non-Wiccan, nature-oriented, American Pagan groups. These include the Church of Aphrodite, founded in 1938 by Russian émigré Gleb Botkin; Feraferia, founded in the 1950s by Frederick Adams; the short-lived (1969-73) Psychedelic Venus Church, which promoted free love and psychedelics; and several American Druid movements. Chapter 7 serves as the book's conclusion.

Though it succeeds in breaking new ground, readers may desire more clarity, explanation, and elaboration from some parts of *Her Hidden Children*. For example, the first clear articulation of Clifton's historical periodization does not appear until the bottom of page forty-one, making the early flurry of names, book titles, and lineages hard to follow. In terms of explanation, Clifton briefly critiques secularization and youth culture theories of Wicca, yet he never provides readers with his own alternative interpretation for the movement's explosive growth. In other spots, readers are presented brief accounts of topics that cry out for more elaboration and analysis. This is particularly the case with his absorbing, yet fleeting, description of internal debates over authenticity (especially the subjects of textual borrowing and family lineages) and the class elements of sixties Pagan practice and identity. But these latter quibbles also suggest that *Her Hidden Children* succeeds in stimulating questions for further research. Overall, Chas Clifton has provided a foundational step toward the history of a new religion that is still in the process of emergence. He has brought forth figures, movements, and a constructive historical periodization of which future scholars of Wicca and Paganism will take note.

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