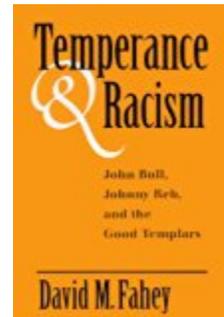


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David M. Fahey. *Temperance and Racism: John Bull, Johnny Reb and the Good Templars*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996. xii + 209 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-1984-7.

Reviewed by K. Austin Kerr (Ohio State University)
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For almost two hundred years now there has been widespread concern about the misuse of beverage alcohol among Americans. Today it is hard to conceive of anyone in the United States living without some first-hand adverse experience with someone misusing liquor. Historians have long recognized the importance of the temperance and prohibition movement in nineteenth century America, as traditional attitudes accepting high levels of alcohol consumption changed. American reformers developed organizations to encourage temperate behavior and to encourage and support complete abstention from liquor consumption. Although considerable scholarly attention has been paid to these phenomena, and especially to the political expression of the values that they represented, surprisingly little was known about the International Order of Good Templars. It was the largest of the nineteenth century organizations that sought abstemious behavior and supported efforts to change public policy to strike at "the liquor traffic" by taking away the license to do business from the saloons, distributors, and manufacturers of beverage alcohol.

David Fahey, a specialist in Victorian Britain, has corrected that deficiency with this book. Fahey observes that many of the sources for studying the Good Templars are in British temperance newspapers. He has used those sources, plus material in American libraries and archives to inform us about this organization. (Regrettably, personal letters of the participants have not survived.) He focuses on the ways in which race, and conflicting attitudes about race, divided the Good Templars, divisions which add to our understanding of the complexities of racism in the nineteenth century. Thus the book is about race in America. But it is also a book that informs us about a sizeable temperance organization that was bit-

terly divided over issues of race. And because the Good Templars were an international organization, the book is also about different views toward race between Britons and Americans in the nineteenth century.

The Good Templars formed in 1851 and 1852 among young persons in New York's "burned over district." Rooted in evangelical Protestantism, it quickly evolved as a fraternal organization appealing mostly to working class people under the age of 30. Very early the organization rejected selling insurance as a condition of membership lest the costs keep away poor people. The Templars also accepted women as members and officers. In fact, the organization grew and spread out from New York State on a principle Fahey calls universalism, that anyone could join so long as they pledged to abstain from alcohol consumption. The Templar lodges were solidly in the tradition of American temperance groups that sought to persuade people to abstain from consuming liquor, and offered support for recovering alcoholics. Eventually the group also demanded that members support prohibition laws. At its peak in North America in 1868 there were 207,387 members. Then the movement leaped across the oceans. By 1873 there were 200,000 members in England, and Good Templar lodges existed on every inhabited continent. By 1876 nearly 3,000,000 persons had been initiated. (In 1992 the International Order of Good Templars claimed a membership of more than three and a half million members in over fifty nations.)

The Good Templars divided bitterly, however, in the 1870s over issues of race. The ideology of universalism, that anyone was eligible for membership so long as they promised to be teetotalers and to support prohibition, conflicted with the desires of members in former slave

states to forbid membership by black Americans. And membership in the south, especially in Kentucky, was growing. It was also growing in Great Britain at the same time, and Templars in the two regions were soon at odds. Southern Templars wanted to violate the principle of universalism and segregate the organization, while British Templars, supported by some Americans, both black and white, wanted to maintain the principle of universalism. "Contemporaries personalized the dispute as a duel between a Kentuckian and an Englishman," John J. Hickman and Joseph Malins, respectively (p. 32). Their dispute, and the competing values that the contestants represented, caused a "great schism," which lasted from 1876 to 1887.

In the schism, the Hickmanites wanted to set up separate lodges for African Americans. The British wanted to maintain the principle of universalism. Fahey believes that the British view reflected a long-standing aversion to the slave trade and a belief that black people deserved better treatment than they received in America. In the dispute, northern Americans played little role, probably for the most part accommodating themselves to segregation in the south. What Fahey finds especially interesting is how the principle of universalism interacted with racism among the Templars in America. Typically, fraternal societies refused to have anything to do with blacks. But the Templars, in contrast, attempted to create separate lodges for black members. These lodges, however, were not especially successful. Eventually, Malin's supporters formed a separate organization abiding by the principle of universalism, but it had little success in the United States in general, and in recruiting black members in particular.

Eventually the schism ended, in effect, with the Hickman view prevailing. The effort to develop a rival Good Templar organization true to the principle of universalism had succeeded in Britain, but the original group remained largest on a worldwide basis. Malin's supporters had attempted to organize integrated lodges in the south,

to no avail. The two groups reunited in 1887, and Malin remained an important figure in British life until his death in 1926.

Fahey's book is well crafted and clearly written. The details of the story can, however, be taxing to the reader. In his principal objective, to make the Good Templars visible, the author has succeeded well. He recognizes the limitations that his focus on Britain and the United States place on the history of an organization that was so widespread around the world. We learn from him that southern white racism was not always simple. Racist southern Templar leaders were often willing to accept the reality of black members elsewhere, and willing to attend national and international meetings in which black delegates participated. Those same racist leaders tried to help blacks form segregated local lodges in the south. In the end, racism prevailed, but it was tempered somewhat by the idea of universalism.

Finally, Fahey's findings may change somewhat prevailing views about the nineteenth-century American temperance movement. Although previously ignored in favor of attention to other groups, especially the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Templar lodges were, collectively, the largest organization of voters committed to prohibition laws, and the lodges thus merit attention. They also merit attention because they were working-class organizations. Moreover, although specialists in the history of temperance and prohibition have generally found that the appeal of the reform cut across lines of social class, sometimes this finding is not accepted. Fahey's work should remind us all of the importance of temperance and prohibition measures in the thoughts and actions of sizeable numbers of working class Americans, who also had fraternal links to counterparts abroad.

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