

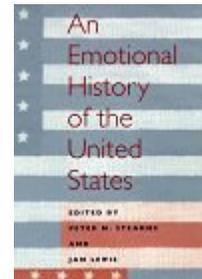
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Peter N. Stearns, Jan Lewis, eds. *An Emotional History of the United States*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. ix + 476 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-8088-6; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-8087-9.

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Images in the media invoke desire and envy; discourses in religious literature provoke fear; grief and sadness are felt through death of loved ones and by stories in the popular press. *An Emotional History of the United States*, the fourth volume in the History of Emotions series, analyzes those aspects of human emotion rarely explored by historians. In the introduction to the anthology, Professors Lewis and Stearns write, “not every aspect of the human experience has been equally well studied by historians” and claim that “emotions have a history” (p. 1). These essays, divided into six sections, delve into the emotions connected to class, gender, and race, religion, and ethnicity and consumer economy to prove that emotions do have history. The volume provides new ways to think about history and suggests ways scholars may wish to consider when viewing events, issues and people. Looking at a few examples will demonstrate the richness of the essays included in this collection.

Historians who contributed to the anthology work across disciplines, exploring historical events as well as music, journalistic styles, and biographies of literary figures. Religious discourse is examined in several essays in this anthology. In “‘Stand by Me’: Sacred Quartet Music and the Emotionology of African American Audiences, 1900-1930,” Kimberley L. Phillips examines the “diverse repertoire” of African American spiritual, folk, blues, and gospel music. She explores not only the emotion involved in performing the music, but also the responses of the audiences who listened to and participated in performances. Phillips looks at the intersections of the religious experiences and the secular performances and considers the meanings of both. Timothy and Joseph Kelly examine fear in “American Catholics and the Discourse of Fear.” The authors explore the views promoted

by the Catholic Church that people embraced as part of their religious faith and meaning well into the twentieth century. They demonstrate how these fears permeate the discourse and rituals. R. Marie Griffith focuses on another facet of American religious experience. In “‘Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory’: The Vocabulary of Pious Emotions in the Narratives of American Pentecostal Women, 1910-1945,” Griffith dissects the religious literature of the Pentecostal church through an examination of letters and testimonies printed in periodicals as proof of deep emotional commitment to the faith. She follows selected women’s correspondence over several years to track the struggles and triumphs that they share in print.

Images and stories presented in the American press are responsible for evoking desire, greed, envy and grief. “Journalistic Gore: Disaster Reporting and Emotional Discourse in the New York Times, 1852-1956” contemplates the differences in reporting standards over a century. Beginning with contemporary reporting and the question of his young son—“Why aren’t they sad?”—Michael Barton explores the balance between details and rhetoric used to provoke emotional response in news stories of tragic events from the past century. Peter N. Stearns’ essay “Consumerism and Childhood: New Targets for American Emotions” explores the effects of consumer goods and advertising on children’s and parent’s perceptions of need. He considers what the media has told a child he or she must have and what parents have been told they need to do to be good parents since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Early American and Antebellum eras are not ignored in this volume. Jan Lewis looks at Early American events in “‘Those Scenes for Which Alone My Heart

Was Made': Affection and Politics in the Age of Jefferson and Hamilton," while Jeffrey Steele contemplates rituals surrounding death in "The Gender and Racial Politics of Mourning in Antebellum America." Lewis considers the role and influence of emotion in Early American politics.

Emotions have not been entirely ignored by historians or literary critics; however, they are often brushed aside because they are not seen as the most important aspect of a study. The essays presented in this volume provide ways into the emotional side of life and to the responses left out of history because they do not always

represent the best of human behavior which shape daily life and culture. There are many more essays than those I have mentioned here. *An Emotional History of the United States* gives scholars an alternative way of thinking about history and human life and is a volume worth reading.

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