

BOOK REVIEWS

Rodney Hessinger. *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle Class America, 1780–1850*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. Pp 182. Photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.) Hardcover \$45.00

For many years historians, who primarily focused on working people, have looked to the early republic in order to understand the shaping of class identity. Rodney Hessinger's *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, which employs an innovative approach that considers how struggles between elderly reformers and unruly youth articulated the values that came to define the bourgeois, examines the often overlooked creation of middle class values. In these conflicts Hessinger finds that reformers, through the creation of literature, advice manuals, reform groups, as well as educational and religious institutions sought to counter the erosion of patriarchal authority that resulted from the emergence of a competitive marketplace. In voicing their concerns about the

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY: A JOURNAL OF MID-ATLANTIC STUDIES, VOL. 73, NO. 3, 2006.
Copyright © 2006 The Pennsylvania Historical Association

morality of the next generation, these debates, Hessinger concludes, articulated and codified social values that members of the middle class used to recognize and define themselves.

Although historians have often focused on the urban Northeast, especially New York, Hessinger relies on original archival research and places his narrative primarily in Philadelphia. He creates a vibrant and detailed analysis of the city and those within it. A central site for the formation of moral organizations, higher education, and the development of Sunday schools, Hessinger contends that the city “led and mirrored reform movements across America” (16) and was the cultural core of the nation until the early ninetieth century. Although focused on Philadelphia, Hessinger deftly balances regional depth with larger national experiences.

Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn begins with an overview of seduction tales. This genre, with its focus on the male cad and female innocent, created new notions of virtue. Hessinger explores the tangible effect of these tales through the creation of The Philadelphia Magdalen Society. Formed by elite reformers to assist those women sexually exploited by men, Hessinger observes that the society’s members had unrealistic expectations of their female charges and gradually became disillusioned with their increasingly working class clients’ morality. This disappointment, Hessinger recognizes, helped lay the foundation for chastity as a middle class aspiration.

In addition to offering moral lessons, reformers were concerned about white youths’ increasing disregard for authority. How to control the next generation became an issue for both burgeoning educational and religious institutions. In chapter three, Hessinger considers the attempts made by University of Pennsylvania’s provost Frederic Beasely to assert authority over the student population. Energetic undergraduates who rebelled at any perceived unfairness by the school’s administration made Beasely’s task difficult especially since the university needed to maintain enough students for the campus to function. Using Lockean ideals, Beasely worked to create an establishment centered on adult authority and student meritocracy. Religious revivalist went another direction, encouraging young men and women to evangelize and criticize conservative church leaders. This effort to empower youth created the Sunday School movement which had the overarching goal of nurturing children from a young age into pious adult church members.

The last two chapters of *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn* are the most innovative, and yet the most frustrating. In them, Hessinger examines colonial

advice books for young men. The fifth chapter demonstrates the shift in guidance manuals' messages from an emphasis on public virtue to that of becoming a self-made man. This promotion of self-interest, Hessinger argues, was the consequence of shifting market values that required authors to create appealing messages to sell their books. In chapter six, Hessinger focuses on the popular manuals about the dangers of city life aimed at those flocking to the cities. Overwhelmingly, colonial authors focused on masturbation as the worst vice of urban life. By noting that reformers saw the world of consumption as one of emotion, and therefore as feminine, Hessinger concludes that condemnations against masturbation represented warnings against destroying one's manhood through indulgence in the metropolitan lifestyle. He asserts that colonial authors believed that masturbation "would cause the loss of vital energies that were needed for consumption in the marketplace" (175). Connections such as this clearly illustrate that colonial reformers not only used a language of virtue, but also that of gender. Throughout the book, Hessinger notes shifting patterns of masculinity and femininity, but this treatment lacks the layered analysis that class receives.

Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn traces how youth, exposed to an increasingly consumer culture, began to slip from patriarchal control. Seduction literature, educational and religious institutions, and guidance manuals attempted to assert authority by connecting success with virtues such as chastity, determination, and self-control. Well written, engaging, and conscientiously researched, Hessinger brings a novel approach to the consideration of the role consumerism played in class formation, reform, and attempts at socializing the early republic's youth.

KRISTINA DUROCHER WILSON

Morehead State University

David Hackett Fischer. *Washington's Crossing*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 576. Illustrations, appendices, notes, index. Cloth, \$35.00.)

David Hackett Fischer keeps producing engaging, readable, controversial works of history. In this volume, an entry in Oxford University Press's "Pivotal Moment Series," Fischer moves effortlessly through that portion of the Revolutionary War's 1776 campaign that featured George Washington's beleaguered rebel troops trying to stand up against the powerful British and