

BOOK REVIEWS

How the Quakers Invented America. By DAVID YOUNT. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. 176 pp. Bibliography, index. \$19.95.)

Using many of his previously published essays, author, journalist, and theologian David Yount has created a unique book. It is part personal spiritual journey and confession of faith (he's a former Roman Catholic who is now a convinced member of the Religious Society of Friends), part spiritual guide, and part exposition of Quaker religious belief and practice that utilizes history to provide important background information and to illustrate key points. The provocative title suggests that the work promises much, but anyone expecting an accurate and thorough explanation of the impact of Quakers and their values in American life and culture over the last three centuries will be disappointed. There are many problems with this book. Yount makes generalizations that are too broad, and he offers grand assertions without providing examples. In general, his vision of Friends is idealistic and static. Some of what we know to be hallmarks of Quakerism developed and became new testimonies only after many years of quiet reflection on the Inner Light. Yount pays inadequate attention to change or growth over time in their faith or culture. Moreover, there are multiple historical lapses and errors throughout the book.

An insufficient grounding in history is the work's most significant flaw. Some of his misrepresentations effectively rewrite the past. Yount asserts, for example, that the "first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, known collectively as the Bill of Rights, were adopted in 1791 after the model of the Constitution of Quaker-led Rhode Island" (14–15). Although Quakers may have dominated Rhode Island, its government operated under the old colonial charter until the people of the state created a constitution in 1843. Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts, and several other states adopted declarations or bills of rights before either the United States or Rhode Island. Yount also asserts that "[t]he Quaker sense of simplicity in dress, manner, and language was quickly adopted by their fellow countrymen and women and continued to this day" (2–3). Few nineteenth-century Americans, if any, adopted typical simple Quaker-style clothing—"shad-belly" coats and broad-brimmed hats—and the "thees" and "thous" of Friends' conversation remained a quaint curiosity among some Quakers into the twentieth century. Actually, it was Friends who gradually became more like their non-Quaker neighbors, not the other way around. And the author displays little regard for the facts in his explanation of Penn's fall from grace at the royal court. According to Yount, "[w]hen the Puritans in Great

Britain overthrew the monarchy and proclaimed a commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell, William Penn fell out of favor in the mother country and went into hiding. After the restoration of the Stuarts under Charles II, Pennsylvania came under royal governance for two years (1692–1694), primarily because the colonial Quakers refused to cooperate in Pennsylvania's defense" (81).

The English Civil War took place between 1642 and 1646 and resulted in the execution of Charles I in 1649. William Penn was born in 1644. Stuart King Charles II returned from exile to rule in 1660, and Penn received his charter for Pennsylvania from him in 1681. Charles II died in 1685 and was succeeded by his brother James II. Penn fell out of favor at the royal court after the autocratic James II was overthrown in the Glorious Revolution in 1688. After the ascension of the joint sovereigns William III (ruled 1688–1702) and Mary II (ruled 1688–1694), the proprietor was arrested and jailed several times on suspicion of treason, and when free on bail he was forced to retire from public life. Penn's close relationship with the deposed Catholic King James II led to fears that he was active in plots to topple the new rulers and restore his royal patron to the throne. In 1692, William III and Mary II took control of Pennsylvania not only because pacifist Quaker legislators refused to provide troops to aid in colonial defense but also to bring order to the colony's fractious, ineffective, quarrelsome government and to punish the suspected traitor. In 1693, William III released Penn, and the Privy Council cleared him of treason; the royals returned control of Pennsylvania to him in the following year.

Yount reminds readers that "journalism is a sometimes-slapdash enterprise" (91). Historical scholarship, however, requires a rigorous adherence to factual accuracy and interpretations supported by evidence. Although the book has a bibliography, seekers of both historical and religious truth might find more valuable information and spiritual inspiration in these works: Margaret H. Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels: The Story of the Quakers in America* (1969); David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (1989); Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (2003); Sydney V. James, *A People among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (1963); T. Canby Jones, ed., *"The Power of the Lord Is over All": The Pastoral Letters of George Fox* (1989); and Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption* (2003).

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