

Joseph Priestly and English Unitarianism in America. By J. D. BOWERS.
(University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007. 296 pp.
Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.)

New England no longer holds pride of place in histories of early American religion, and J. D. Bowers argues that even Unitarianism was not a uniquely New England expression of antebellum Protestantism. Rather, the early history of American Unitarianism was shaped by competing theological positions, especially those advanced by English émigré Joseph Priestly, in what Bowers labels “English Unitarianism.” Bowers successfully recovers the influence of Priestly and English Unitarianism, but he utilizes a denominational model that is both useful and constraining.

Covering a period from the 1780s through the 1890s, Bowers identifies and explains the development and influence of a “Socinian faction” within American Unitarianism (12). The core theological principle of English Unitarianism was Socinianism, a belief that Jesus was God’s prophet but not divine. Priestly was an ardent Socinian who ably promoted his beliefs in England. Though he arrived in the United States in 1794, his theological writings preceded him, generating a small but dedicated American audience. Integral to the establishment of Unitarian congregations in Philadelphia and Northumberland, Pennsylvania, Priestly also ministered at the Northumberland church until his death in 1804. Subsequently, Priestly’s followers persevered, and Bowers concludes that they successfully gave English Unitarianism and Socinian theology a denominational presence in American culture.

English Unitarians in the United States were also convinced that Socinian theology allowed for denominational alliances with like-minded Christians, especially Protestant liberals in New England. Bowers clearly parses esoteric theological controversies within early nineteenth-century Congregationalism to explain why New England liberals distanced themselves from English Unitarianism’s Socinian theology and from Priestly’s legacy. Bowers’s most original contribution is his exploration of how New England Unitarians, such as William Ellery Channing, split from the Congregational Church in part by developing a distinct Unitarian identity and denominational history that elided Socinianism’s influence and presence in the United States. Bowers convincingly argues that dominant interpretations of American Unitarianism’s distinct New England beginnings reiterate a view of Unitarianism’s origins as first devised and deployed in early nineteenth-century Unitarian controversies.

Bowers successfully establishes the presence of English Unitarianism in the early republic, which allows for an insightful revision of Unitarianism’s denominational beginnings in the United States. However, Bowers’s ambition to demonstrate the utility of denominational histories for understanding early national religion has its limitations. Using published and archival sources, he nevertheless

focuses on efforts by Priestly and others, such as Priestly's Northumberland successor, James Kay, to build a viable Unitarian movement. Yet, emphasis on actions and writings of English Unitarian leaders prevents warranted attention from being given to popular Socinianism in the eleven Unitarian churches established from Maine to Kentucky under the auspices of English Unitarians. Bowers's denominational approach also precludes the full exploration of Atlantic themes alluded to throughout his book. He maintains that transatlantic networks of intellectual exchange and immigration transmitted English Unitarianism to the United States and sustained the Socinian faction. However, English Unitarian émigrés such as Thomas Cooper, or the printers and booksellers who distributed Unitarian writings, appear only sporadically throughout the text. Although Bowers's book is unlikely to influence debates over the early republic's place within Atlantic intellectual or cultural history, it is nevertheless an indispensable study of the origins of American Unitarianism and of Pennsylvania religious history.

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Backcountry Crucibles: The Lehigh Valley from Settlement to Steel. Edited by JEAN R. SODERLUND and CATHERINE S. PARZYNSKI. (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2008. 349 pp. Notes, notes on contributors, index. \$46.50.)

Several years ago, a popular bumper sticker proclaimed, "Pennsylvania: America Starts Here." In various ways, this book reinforces that statement. As a result of the Lehigh Valley's racial pluralism, freedom of worship, political democracy, and "boom and bust" economic cycles, this region could be considered a microcosm of the nation, especially the backcountry, as a whole.

The editors divide the book into four chronologically arranged sections comprised of fourteen original articles that cover the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The introduction presents the editor's rationale for writing the book and tells readers what they will find in it.

Not all articles focus on the Lehigh Valley, however. Marianne S. Wokeck ascribes Pennsylvania's economic growth to its "redemptioner system" (32) that supplied abundant immigrant labor and facilitated the colony's westward expansion. Michael Baylor points out that Pennsylvania's German Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic clergy found the transition from the European "state church" to Pennsylvania's separation of religion from the civil government difficult, while sectarians, such as Mennonites, rejoiced in Pennsylvania's comparatively free environment. The Lehigh Valley is scarcely mentioned in Andrew Shankman's "Perpetual Motion—Perpetual Change—A Boundless Ocean Without a Shore": Democracy in Pennsylvania and the Consequences of the