

operated. Whether as a reformer or a partisan, Swisshelm's political power was limited by her need to maintain female respectability and financial resources. In the end, Hoffert concludes that Swisshelm was both contained by her world and a shaper of it, for she left a legacy of public, professional activism for the next generation of women.

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*Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity.* By DAVID CHAPIN. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. viii, 257p. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$80; paper, \$24.95.)

Something in David Chapin's new book brings to mind a historical version of DNA, a double helix composed of the lives of the arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane and his paramour Margaret Fox, the Spiritualist medium. Intertwined in the public mind by virtue of their ardent affair, and perhaps marriage, the two shared a penchant for aggressive self-promotion and for seeking fame by placing themselves on display before a public fascinated with exotic and unknown terrains (Kane presenting the arctic, Fox the afterlife). They were, Chapin argues, epitomes of the "Culture of Curiosity" that flourished in antebellum America, in which vestigial appeals to Enlightenment ideals of moral betterment through scientific knowledge were commingled with the new world of mass culture and commercial profit through public amusement. The "performance of mystery" for which Kane and Fox were renowned earned them both the fame they eagerly sought, but, ironically, also brought them a level of public scrutiny that caused each great discomfort. Kane, as Chapin suggests, struggled with his proximity to the baser forms of mass entertainment as he increasingly became an entertainer, rather than the scientist and educator he wished to be. Yearning for middle-class respectability, Chapin argues, Fox similarly discovered that as her fame and independence grew, her social status as a respectable woman became increasingly tenuous.

Yet in his most perceptive and original observation, Chapin argues that like DNA, these intertwined lives were not simply parallel, but antiparallel, for as similar as they were, Kane and Fox represent alternate poles in American society that reveal a great deal about the rapid transformations affecting antebellum culture. The dynamic relationship that Chapin sketches for Kane and Fox, and the dynamic culture of which they were part, hinges on the tension between the disparities in gender and class, publicity and privacy, education and ambition. Chapin's engaging narrative offers a refreshing new perspective on American culture at midcentury and a skillful depiction of the emerging tension between

personal lives and public personas. Yet inevitably, not every element of the narrative lives up to this exciting challenge, and several key constructs are too little developed to be fully convincing. In his treatment of science, for example, Chapin seems to consider Kane's search for the Open Polar Sea as a form of "pseudo-science," an assertion that is both problematic and anachronistic, and classifying Kane as an "Humboldtian" is accurate only in the comparatively banal sense of having far-flung scientific interests, but not in the more important sense of engaging in grand cosmic theorizing. Chapin's discussion of Spiritualism fares even less well. In contending that Spiritualism was largely about entertainment and practice, rather than ideas, Chapin is too ready to discount its importance as a set of ideas and social practices.

More fundamentally, the "Culture of Curiosity" that Chapin describes is ill constrained, and the mixture of science and entertainment at its core would seem no less applicable to the late eighteenth century or, for that matter, the late twentieth. Still more central to his argument is Kane's ambivalence over his fame that results from his participation in this culture, an observation that is not without ambiguity. As Mark Sawin has shown in an excellent dissertation, Kane had been a skillful self-promoter since at least the time of the Mexican War (to which Chapin devotes too little commentary) in ways that had little to do with being an entrepreneur of the exotic. Perhaps, though, these quibbles are a mark of Chapin's ultimate success: his book opens avenues for research and commentary that will engage scholars for some time to come.

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*Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War.* By MICHAEL J. BENNETT. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. xv, 337p. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

American naval life has always been a culture apart, and in *Union Jacks* Michael Bennett fully explores the nuances of that culture as it participated in the Civil War. Bennett describes characteristics that identified a Yankee sailor, reveal that life in the Union Navy proved as much of a challenge as fighting the Confederates, and examines the frequently contentious relationship between sailors and officers. The result is a thorough social history of a little documented and underappreciated facet of the Civil War.

Bennett provides a vivid description of the life the average sailor lived, and the culture that sailors created. Sailors lived a hard life, and the work attracted rough men; they were tough, profane, and prone to drink. Because the sailors came from the margins of society, their attitudes regarding the war defied the societal norm, becoming, as Bennett labels them in chapter 1, "dissenters from the American