

cients and other methods to limit fertility, such as prolonging breast feeding, through informal networks. The cumulative weight of this new evidence is convincing. Clearly, women in the early republic articulated a new idea of prudent, family limitation that challenged the earlier, pronatal culture of the colonial era.

If there is a failing of this admirable book it is in perhaps assuming that this shift in women's intentions and attitudes led to greater change in demographic behavior than the evidence supports. Although Klepp openly acknowledges potential biases and difficulties in interpreting her sources, she ultimately contends that women in the revolutionary era consciously created a revolution of their own by deliberately breaking from the high fertility practices of the colonial era. While this was certainly the case for some women in New England and the Mid-Atlantic regions, it remains unclear how common or how effective the practice of marital fertility control was before 1820. Contrary to Klepp's assertion, age-specific marital fertility rates do not indicate a significant presence of "stopping" behavior before the mid-nineteenth century. Increased spacing between births, while significant, is difficult to interpret as evidence of conscious behavior.

We should also bear in mind that American fertility rates were high in the colonial era and that the decline in fertility was modest before the mid-nineteenth century. It took less than a decade to make a political break from England; it took nearly a century before American women bore fewer children than their English counterparts. If revolutionary-era women instigated the practice of limited childbearing within marriage, it was not until their granddaughters' generation that the practice was extensive or effective enough to have had a significant impact on national birth rates.

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The Liberty Bell. By GARY NASH. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. 256 pp., Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.)

On April 1, 1996, Americans across the nation woke to the shocking news that the National Park Service had sold the Liberty Bell to the fast-food chain Taco Bell. Phone calls flooded into Independence National Historical Park, and by lunchtime the park service had to convene a press conference. No, the Bell had not been sold. It was all an elaborate—and beautifully executed—April Fool's joke by Taco Bell.

Gary Nash opens the final chapter of this breezy and thoroughly entertaining history of America's most beloved bell with this story. He does so to underscore that the Liberty Bell, in any number of commercialized forms from teapots to bourbon bottles, from t-shirts to naughty knickers, has been bought and sold since the nineteenth century. In this sense, the Liberty Bell has become that most

perfect American combination of the sacred and the profane.

Nash writes the history of the Liberty Bell in five chronologically arranged chapters. As a bell, it proved something of a dud. Cast in England, damaged almost immediately after its arrival in Philadelphia, and then recast in Philadelphia, it finally and famously cracked by the early nineteenth century. By that time, however, the Bell was well on its way from utilitarian instrument to national icon.

While the Bell no longer rang, the inscription around its top has proved to have enduring resonance: "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof." With the Bell's clapper stilled, those words became the focus of the Bell's significance and the means through which all kinds of Americans linked their own causes and concerns with it.

In the antebellum period, abolitionists found the Bell a powerful symbol for their crusade to end slavery. At virtually the same moment, journalist George Lippard invented the story that the Bell rang out on July 4, 1776. And for many Americans, I suspect, that story still hasn't died.

After the Civil War, the Bell was used at the 1876 Centennial Exposition as a symbol of national unity and as a device for healing a fractured nation. During the great age of American industrial expansion, the Bell went on the road to be a featured attraction at several of the enormous world's fairs that celebrated that growth. During both world wars, the Bell was pressed into service to sell bonds. Philadelphia's mayor tapped out a Morse-code "Liberty," which was played to the first wave of soldiers before they hit the beaches of Normandy. With fascism defeated, the Bell got little rest before it was used as an anticommunist symbol during the cold war. Nash closes with a discussion of the most recent fights over how the Bell will be used in its new interpretive center to acknowledge the centrality of slavery at the founding of the nation.

In short, it has been a busy bell indeed. In this fine and readable book, Nash not only gives us a terrific biography of this one-ton piece of metal, but he reminds us that, perhaps more than anything else in American life, the Liberty Bell has served as a touchstone for us to contemplate the complicated and contested meaning of the very notion of liberty.

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STEVEN CONN

The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown: Radical History and the Early Republic. By MARK L. KAMRATH. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010. 352 pp., Illustrations, notes, index. \$65.)

Mark L. Kamrath's new book, *The Historicism of Charles Brockden Brown: Radical History and the Early Republic*, confirms what I have long believed: