The state's Italian, Slavic, and Hungarian immigrants, who arrived later to take industrial jobs in Cleveland and other northeastern Ohio cities, became Ohioans even though the urgency of economic survival kept them from participating fully in civic life.

Race, class, and to a lesser extent gender are discussed throughout the book. Whites and African Americans argued about who was a citizen of the state and, later, about how the state’s citizens would be treated. In spite of Ohio’s current celebration of the Underground Railroad, Cayton questions whether white citizens have been willing throughout the state’s history to acknowledge blacks as their equals. He also discusses the firm grasp that the middle class had on the state’s economic and social agenda until well into the twentieth century, when labor unions became a powerful collective voice for working-class people.

Cayton describes the book as “a chronicle of tales of American life” (p. vii) that are anchored in one place. Ohio is not just a gathering of stories that happen to take place in Ohio, however. The stories are carefully chosen to make a larger historical point about “the transformation of a radical imperative to do good into a conservative desire to live well” (p. vii). How Ohio’s citizens changed over two hundred years from a society with a strong interest in self-improvement and social improvement to an individualistic, consumer society is the larger tale told here.

Although the book needs a map showing the cities, towns, rivers, and other landscape features mentioned, it should stimulate lively discussion among students and general readers in Ohio and throughout the Midwest.


Iowa-born evangelist Billy Sunday apparently preached to one hundred million Americans in thirty-nine years of revival work ending in 1935, reducing the population of hell by more than a million in the process. Robert F. Martin, a history professor at the University of Northern Iowa, argues that the acrobatic apostle from Ames
appealed to those who shared his embrace of “the national myth of success” (p. xv) in their uncertain encounter with modernity.

Martin writes that the heartland may have been a land of opportunity for some, but for Sunday’s family it was a place of acute disappointment. Billy and his two older brothers lost their father in the Civil War. After their mother married an abusive alcoholic, the twelve-year-old Billy was sent to an orphanage. “Recurring feelings of loss and loneliness” (p. 15) gave Sunday a lifelong “sense of insecurity and inadequacy” while intensifying his “drive to succeed” (p. 23).

In 1883 Sunday became a second-string outfielder on Albert Spalding’s Chicago White Stockings in baseball’s newly organized National League. Sunday could not hit, but Manager Cap Anson admired the way he “ran the bases liked a scared deer” (p. 29). Sunday became a Christian at a meeting of the Pacific Garden Mission in 1886 and married the solidly middle-class Helen Thompson two years later. He was celebrated in the press as the poster boy of the great American pastime who “never utters a cuss word, nor dallies with red liquor, nor knows the taste of the weed” (p. 40).

Sunday quit baseball in 1891 at the age of twenty-eight to go into full-time religious work. Soon he followed the “kerosene circuit” (p. 47) “preaching plainly” (p. 48), while “putting the cookies and jam on the lower shelf” (p. 53) so audiences would understand his message. Sunday’s showmanship built attendance and appealed to the press. By the first decade of the twentieth century he had a national following; by the second, he was the best-known evangelist in the English-speaking world. He dined with millionaires and became one. During the twenties he was past his peak, living in semi-retirement at Winona Lake, Indiana, while exhorting ever-diminishing audiences to oppose the increasing secularism of their society.

Martin claims that Sunday’s “entrepreneurial evangelism” (p. 45) combined the powers of prayer and publicity with “the sophisticated business practices of his day” (p. 63). His “Progressive orthodoxy” (p. 101) embraced women’s suffrage and Prohibition in hopes of creating a more righteous nation. All this, Martin argues, made Sunday very much a man of his time and a “hero of the heartland” (p. 121).

The most intriguing part of Martin’s analysis is his summary of Sunday’s troubled childhood and lifelong allegiance to “a faith that helped him to integrate his life” (p. 23). Martin’s scene-setting is less satisfying. The reader is told that Sunday found Chicago’s “Protestants, Catholics, and Jews alike worried they were failing to stay abreast of the change swirling around them” (p. 31). Equally vague and unsubstantiated is “the roar of the machine and cacophony of the stockyards [that] threatened to drown out the voices of the disinherited” (p. 31). More perturbing to Martin is Sunday’s failure to challenge “the dominant economic, social, or political assumptions of the day” and his inability to grasp what Martin sees as “the reality of collective [and] institutional evil” (p. 139). Sunday was in the salvation business
but we learn little of those moved by his message. Martin dismisses many of them as "disoriented and disenfranchised" (p. 133). The author acknowledges that "few religious figures have had a greater impact on American popular culture" (p. xiii), but Sunday as an adult or in sustained action rarely emerges in these pages. Instead, Martin simply asserts that Sunday "oversimplified the complexities of human nature and of economic and social relationships" (p. 139), leaving this reader still wondering how one man's life and ministry could mean so much to so many for so long.

Tona J. Hangen traces the community created through the "golden age" of revival radio (p. 2). The careers of radio pioneers Paul Rader, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Charles Fuller, as Hangen sees it, helped to lift conservative Christianity from a defensive sideshow to "a vital and growing subculture" (p. 157) guided by "an irrepressible evangelical spirit" (p. 158). The author's primary interest is the audience that "read radio" (p. 4) as part "popular entertainment" (p. 78) and as a means of ameliorating rural isolation. Hangen's careful reading of Depression-era letters reveals "a thread of desperation" (p. 104) by many who felt personally comforted through their "radio midwife" (p. 155). For these listeners, Hangen argues, "radio prevented the decline of old-fashioned religious belief" (p. 8) because it "resonated with nostalgic longing for better times" (p. 11).

Fundamentalists were among the first to appreciate radio's reach. Seventy-one religious stations were on the air by 1925. McPherson praised radio as "a miraculous conveyance for the message" (p. 66). By 1943, Fuller's nationally syndicated "Old-Fashioned Revival Hour" was giving the Mutual Broadcasting System a quarter of its operating revenue. The National Religious Broadcasters Association was formed the following year to help keep "crackpots, racketeers and ranters" off the air (p. 113). The Federal Council of Churches went even further, exploiting their cozy relationship with the networks to limit evangelical access to the airwaves. By the time Billy Graham's "Hour of Decision" debuted on ABC in 1950, 1,600 fundamentalist programs aired weekly on radio, and religious conservatives were well on the way to penetrating the American mainstream. The "good news" was easy listening in an era of Cold War warnings.

Hangen captures the power of the spoken word in the lives "of people who felt singled out for personal attention" (p. 6). Radio made it possible to "rethink entirely what church was and where worship could take place" (p. 4). Whether it was "music to milk by" (p. 100) or "the guiding light of our life" (p. 109), the first quarter-century of revival radio made a difference in the world of the faithful. One listener wrote, "what that radio means to us no one will ever know" (p. 101). Thanks to Hangen, we get a glimpse into that world.