

*Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life*, by Fran Grace. Religion in North America Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. xiv, 366 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, appendix, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Kathleen M. Green is professor of history at Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa. She teaches courses in twentieth-century America, American women, and American politics. Her M.A. thesis is "The Demise of John Barleycorn: The Sioux City Campaign against the Liquor Traffic, 1909-1917."

*Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Story* is the first scholarly biography and cultural history using recently available diaries and letters to begin to recover "a more historically accurate Carry Nation" (279). Fran Grace, a professor of religious studies, argues convincingly that Nation "translated her tragedies into triumphs by making them part of a divinely directed drama" (281). Grace acknowledges "the power of tragedy in the formation of a crusading identity," but, for her, divine mission is the key to understanding Carry Nation's life (281). Religion proves to be a catalyst for social activism. By placing her actions in the historical, cultural, and religious context of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Midwest, Grace portrays Nation as a comprehensible, deeply religious personality with a coercive and authoritarian bent. This is a fine addition to the Religion in North America series edited by Catherine L. Albanese and Stephen J. Stein.

Grace organizes her biography chronologically and geographically. Carry Moore learned two competing religious traditions as a child: "a subversive, emotional slave religion and a strict, cognitive Campbellism" (18). Her short marriage to Charles Gloyd, an alcoholic physician, and his premature death left her a destitute widowed single mother in her early twenties. She experienced a spiritual crisis and began a life-long struggle to refashion "an image of God that made sense of her own experiences, since the Campbellite God of her parents failed to relieve her sorrow" (51). For financial security she married older David Nation, a widowed Campbellite preacher. Grace argues, "Nation spent most of her twenties and thirties trying [and failing] to conform to her mother's notion of ornamental 'true womanhood'" (205). Nation was a poor provider who forced his family to move frequently. Marital problems began when Carry became a successful hotel proprietor, because she violated "the most sacrosanct law of true womanhood by engaging in public business to support the family" (80). Nation's baptism by the Holy Ghost in 1884 gave her self-confidence and became the catalyst for her lifelong interest in benevolence. After the Nations moved to Medicine Lodge, Kansas, in 1890 to escape vigilante violence in Texas, Carrie became a non-conforming minister's wife, joined the local WCTU, and supported woman suffrage.

Nation's career as a saloon-smashing folk heroine and celebrity began in June 1900. After a vision, she went to nearby Kiowa, Kansas, and attacked a number of saloons with brickbats. According to her autobiography, God commanded her to enter the male sphere of saloons and politics. The saloon-smashing campaign was popular with some populists because the saloon had become a symbol of industrial encroachment and exploitation by eastern money interests. Grace relates Nation's violent smashing methods to her background in the volatile, bloodletting environments of Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Oklahoma. Grace also contends that Nation chose violence because women lacked political power. The 1901 Topeka Crusade provides the most sustained excitement in the narrative. In a fluent and clear style, Grace describes the vigilante mayhem unleashed by saloon smashing. Eventually, Nation took her show on the road and became a controversial speaker and vaudeville celebrity. Before her death in 1911, Nation was arrested and jailed more than 30 times, was attacked by prostitutes, and was almost lynched in New York City.

This biography will be of particular interest to readers of the *Annals of Iowa* because Nation is a regional personality. Midwestern readers will appreciate Grace's identification of the strong negative bias in the "northeastern pressrooms where she [Nation] was caricatured as a crank, a virago, and possibly a lunatic" (5). Grace concludes that "both the middle-aged woman and the rural state were on the economic and cultural margins of the country when the narratives about them were generated" (280). Grace explains that regional differences in the definition of ideal female behavior harmed Nation's reputation. She argues that, in contrast to the genteel ideal of "true womanhood," midwesterners at the turn of the century admired a "new 'good womanhood' characterized by moral robustness, good works, and austere appearance" (206). This work enhances our knowledge of midwestern religious culture.

Grace effectively interweaves the concerns of religion, region, race, class, and gender into the narrative. Although she found little evidence for an insanity charge against Nation, Grace confesses that she did find Nation's "insistence upon imposing her moral values on others to be arrogant and dangerous" (xii). Grace has done her job as Nation's biographer, because the reader comes to understand the crusading passion and moral values that compelled Nation to act in an arrogant and dangerous way. A revision of the caricature of the man-hating, hysterical, Puritan killjoy is long overdue. Grace has done an admirable job of restoring the historical reputation of Carry A. Nation. Another woman's voice has been recovered, and her story has been told.

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