

*Sacred Circles, Public Squares: The Multicentering of American Religion*, by Arthur E. Farnsley II, N. J. Demerath III, Etan Diamond, Mary L. Mapes, and Elfriede Wedam. The Polis Center Series on Religion and Urban Culture. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004. x, 239 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Marvin Bergman is editor of the *Annals of Iowa*. He is a longstanding student of the relationship between American religion and public life.

*Sacred Circles, Public Squares* adds welcome depth and specificity to often banal or superficial discussions of religious pluralism and multiculturalism. This book about the "multicentering of American religion" has a multicentered impetus. One is the lively public discussion about the appropriateness and potential effectiveness of "faith-based initiatives," in which the public sector helps to finance social services provided by religious groups. Another is the longstanding debate about the explanatory power of the "secularization" thesis—that religion is gradually being displaced from its once dominant role in culture. A perhaps related impetus is the notion that Americans are becoming increasingly isolated from their neighbors and the institutions that bind them together, a notion of the loss of "social capital" brought most prominently into the public eye by Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*. Finally, the most important impetus for this particular book, but probably the least public and most academic of them, is the shifting focus of scholarship on American religion from large, overarching themes and institutions, captured most prominently by the preoccupation some years ago with "civil religion," to the smallest unit of American religious life: congregations. This shift has been aided by significant backing from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Foundation, which has financed efforts to enhance the life of religious congregations as well as scholarly studies of congregations, including this one. There are other themes as well, such as the effects of suburbanization and the rise of consumerism. This book makes significant contributions to all of these debates. It is probably true that the book's major contribution is sociological, but the team of authors includes two historians, who apparently ensured that every issue was set in its appropriate historical context.

Focusing specifically on the midwestern city of Indianapolis, Indiana (home of the Lilly Foundation, remember) from the mid-twentieth century to the present, the authors trace the evolving relationships between religious congregations and the city as a whole and between those congregations and the narrower urban or suburban neighborhoods within which they exist. At the beginning of that period, a set of

downtown mainline Protestant churches dominated the religious life of the city and played a shaping role in the city's culture; and the pastors of those churches were key players in the city's public and political life (it was not unusual for one of them to be mayor). Gradually, "religion lost a good deal of its pride of public place," as "the city's 'sacred' unifiers gradually shifted toward civic commitments" focused on "a new civic infrastructure of sports arenas, museums, and performance venues linked to downtown shopping" rather than "the clutch of tall-steepled churches clustered around the city's center circle" that previously dominated the downtown landscape. Meanwhile, the mainline denominations could no longer assume a "presumptive civic control" as black churches, white evangelical Protestant groups, Catholics, and even the small Jewish community made their voices heard (188-89).

The authors are careful to point out that this evolution was not all "loss," as religious communities are all too quick to assume. Especially in two long chapters that categorize and describe the various ways specific congregations relate to specific neighborhoods, they highlight the rich new ways that congregations have found to continue to contribute to public life. Using sociological "ideal types" along two sets of two axes that are too complicated to describe in this space, these chapters offer potential for congregations seeking to identify or re-identify their primary mission in changing environments, if only these discussions had been presented more accessibly. For historians, this richly nuanced book suggests that there is much potential in studying continuity and change in how religious congregations have related to their communities, whether in the large cities of the Midwest or the smaller cities, small towns, and rural communities of Iowa.

*Flood Stage and Rising*, by Jane Varley. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 128 pp. \$20.00 cloth.

Reviewer Kimberly K. Porter is professor of history at the University of North Dakota. She conducted an oral history of the Grand Forks flood of 1997, which resulted in *Uncommon Heroes: The City of Grand Forks' Flood Fight, 1996-97* (2001).

From Dubuque, Iowa, where Jane Varley played in her childhood on the banks of the meandering Mississippi River, to falling in love and marrying along the banks of Virginia's cool, rushing streams, life for Varley has, to some extent, been defined by her relationships not only to water, but to the landscape.

In 1995 Varley, husband Gary Atkins, and Sam the dog moved to Grand Forks, North Dakota, to pursue not only an education at the

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