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Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era

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separating rumors, exaggerations, and honest misunderstandings from lies? And what is the value of talking to contemporary indigenous community leaders and scholars about the reliability of the historical record? Indigenous scholars have unique perspectives and knowledge about their histories, ancestors, languages, and homelands, as well as about the archival record and secondary literature. Collaborative engagement between indigenous and nonindigenous scholars can only enrich our collective understanding of the past.

Free Spirits: Spiritualism, Republicanism, and Radicalism in the Civil War Era, by Mark A. Lause. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016. viii, 223 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$95 hardcover, \$30 paperback.

Reviewer Mark S. Schantz is professor of history at Birmingham-Southern College. He is the author of *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (2008).

Spiritualists in nineteenth-century America were more than a fringe group of sketchy characters obsessed with mysterious rappings on floor boards and the exciting lure of communicating with the dead around the séance table. Mark A. Lause argues that spiritualists numbered as many as 5 to 6 million Americans when the Civil War broke out and not only could be found in New England but also maintained a strong presence in the Midwest, from Michigan to Wisconsin and Iowa (14). Students of Iowa's history will be particularly interested to learn that spiritualists there included Chief Justice Joseph Williams of the Iowa Supreme Court and that they published their own newspaper, the *Rising Tide* (33, 50–51). More broadly, Lause contends that spiritualists pushed a robust earthly agenda, including support for abolitionism, women's rights, free love, Fourierism, and the protection of Native American rights. Key in this agenda of individual freedom was support for the Republican Party, particularly in its most radical expressions. Indeed, Lause counts the spiritualists as among the Republicans' most ardent supporters. "Spiritualism," he writes, "exploded onto the scene simultaneously with a mass Republican Party and in the same regions" (43). For Lause, the emergence of the Republican Party and the rise of the spiritualist movement in America are inextricably intertwined.

The cornerstone of Lause's contention that spiritualism and Republicanism formed part of the same intellectual current is his treatment of Abraham Lincoln. His chapter on Lincoln demonstrates beyond doubt that the president was more than a dabbler in the spiritual arts; he made multiple personal connections with those in the spiritualist community.

One does not have to buy the story of Lincoln being levitated on a grand piano to grasp why spiritualists saw in the president a kindred spirit. "Lincoln actually retained a vast residue of folk beliefs," Lause concludes, "sharing many of the fundamental assumptions of spiritualism" (146). Spiritualists viewed Lincoln himself as a mediator—a medium in the political sphere—positioned between the founders of the nation and the struggle of the Civil War. When Lincoln invoked "the mystic chords of memory" in his First Inaugural Address, spiritualists perceived a friend. As he faced the election of 1864, "Spiritualists pulled out all the stops in campaigning for Lincoln's reelection" (83). Whether he fully understood it or not, Abraham Lincoln became the avatar for the political interests of American spiritualists.

After the war, spiritualists pursued an ambitious political agenda of "Liberty"—an emancipation for all people; "Equality"—freedom for women, children, and Native Americans; and "Fraternity"—a communitarian impulse that would unite all Americans in the face of capitalist greed. "War," writes Lause, "had pointed spiritualists to the possibility that a Radical Republican government could serve to abolish institutional injustices of all sorts" (130). Despite such lofty ambitions, "the war's end proved to be the unmaking of spiritualism as a mass, pervasive preoccupation of people in the North, as it had of the kind of Republicanism that had seen the country through to victory" (148). As the flame of Radical Republicanism flickered out, spirit voices became whispers. Still, in his final chapter Lause traces the subterranean survival of elements of the spiritualist impulse in the organization of the "Order of Eternal Progress," in the Theosophical Society, in Victoria Woodhull's following, and even in Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*.

The chief contribution of Lause's volume is its rehabilitation of the spiritualists as a pervasive and dynamic force during the Civil War era. Yet the strength of the book is also its weakness. Lause sees the imprint of spiritualism in so many places that one wonders about the depth and dedication of its various adherents. Moreover, in identifying the spiritualists with the Republican Party, Lause does not address how the strong free-labor ideology it espoused could be reconciled with the cooperative Fourierism that many spiritualists followed. As Carl Guarneri reminded us in his still splendid volume, *The Utopian Alternative* (1994), cooperative labor was a clear alternative to the free-labor ideology of Abraham Lincoln, the rail-splitter and ultimate self-made man. It may well be that Republicans differed with spiritualists in profound ways that Lause's rendering does not acknowledge. Whatever its limits, Lause's book resurrects nineteenth-century spiritualists as historical and political actors we have not adequately recognized.