

Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

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differences between his work and conventional historical analysis. He briefly cites Roger Bruns's biography but not William G. McLoughlin's classic study or more recent works by Robert Martin and Margaret Bendroth. This newer scholarship has benefited from access to Sunday family papers, but Bishop instead cites a Wikipedia article about Sunday's wife. He does not contextualize Billy Sunday within broader social changes such as urbanization, twentieth-century evangelical culture, or (despite the book's title and cover photo of Sunday in his baseball uniform) the creation of sports celebrity culture. The citations are sparse and somewhat disorganized (one footnote number is used twice), some of the items listed in the bibliography are not in the citations, and there are spelling and grammatical errors.

Those interested in facts, newspaper quotes, and photographs about the most famous Iowan of the early 1900s will find them in *The Baseball Evangelist*. The book may also be appreciated by those who share the author's values and would use Billy Sunday's life as a meditation on those values. Those who desire a more scholarly analysis or just a thorough and meticulous description, on the other hand, should look to one of the other works mentioned in this review.

Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, by Kenneth Whyte. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. xvii, 728 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Kendrick A. Clements is Distinguished Professor of History emeritus at the University of South Carolina, Columbia. He is the author of *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Imperfect Visionary, 1918–1928* (2010).

Kenneth Whyte's *Hoover* is a thoughtful, well-researched, and well-written one-volume biography intended especially for the general reader. If it should miraculously emerge as the best seller it deserves to be, it could transform the reputation of the 31st president.

Written in brisk, vigorous language enlivened with flashes of wit, *Hoover* is downright fun to read. Colorful biographical sketches introduce major figures, and concise background summaries of important issues make following the story easy. Whyte is skillful in presenting both sides of issues fully and impartially, making it easy to understand why there was disagreement. Although the author is clearly sympathetic to Hoover's critique of big government, this is as near an impartial biography of this controversial figure as is likely to be written. And interestingly, impartiality serves Hoover well. Few if any other Americans can match his remarkable contributions to the nation and the world over a half-century of public service.

Yet as we all know, Hoover has never had the popular admiration that his career would seem to merit. One basic reason for that seeming paradox, Whyte argues, is that Hoover “carried through his days the scars of his miserable childhood” (xii). Orphaned before the age of 10 and sent to Oregon to live with an aunt and uncle who sustained him physically but treated him as cheap labor and offered little love, the boy grew up shy, withdrawn, hypersensitive to criticism, and awkward around others. He concluded that “money and success” were the “antidotes to vulnerability, a means of escape, and necessary to controlling one’s destiny” (30). After fleeing Oregon, he set out to make his fortune as a mining engineer and mine speculator in Australia, China, and London. “His path,” writes Whyte, “was littered with dry holes, lawsuits, and ruined investors, some of them the inevitable outcomes of an inherently risky business, others the special products of Hoover’s ways” (116), but by the age of 40 he had achieved the financial security he craved. There was not much about the robber baron Hoover of 1914 to draw public admiration.

Privately, however, Hoover was always generous to family and friends, even as he was clawing his way to wealth, and by the time World War I began he had already decided to give up business for public service. The war provided him the opportunity to use the same skills that had made him rich to undertake Belgian relief, mobilize American food production, and rehabilitate Europe’s postwar economy, in the process saving millions of lives. He had at least as good a case as Woodrow Wilson to receive the 1920 Nobel Peace Prize.

After serving as an innovative Secretary of Commerce under Presidents Harding and Coolidge, Hoover was elected president in 1928 just in time to face the Great Depression. Despite his modern reputation as a conservative, he threw the full resources of the federal government into fighting the collapse, working furiously to stabilize the international economic situation, and then introducing unprecedented legislation to rescue banking and industry. By the autumn of 1932, Whyte contends, Hoover “had in fact stopped the depression in its tracks and by most relevant measures forced its retreat” (506).

Unfortunately, whatever Hoover’s skill as chief executive, his personality made him a dreadful politician. Franklin Roosevelt, whom Whyte dismisses as “a man of second-rate intellect and questionable character” (497), ran a brilliant presidential campaign in 1932 that forever branded Hoover as an insensitive technocrat who had done nothing to relieve economic suffering. During the period between the election and Roosevelt’s inauguration, Democratic obstructionism in Congress and international doubts about the new president’s intentions toward the

gold standard led to a run on U.S. gold reserves and new bank failures, thus undoing most of what Hoover had accomplished.

Hoover found Americans' embrace of FDR incomprehensible. The New Deal, he would argue for the rest of his life, had failed to end the depression and at the same time made Americans "dependent on government" (541). As "an antidote to the New Deal" (557), in 1937 he called for government to confine itself to safeguarding equality of opportunity and individual enterprise. "Ideals, invention, initiative, enterprise, and leadership spring best from free men and women," he said, and "the only economic system which will not limit or destroy these forces of progress is private enterprise" (quoted, 556). That statement, Whyte declares, is the basis of "modern American conservatism" (557).

Perhaps so, but in recent years the widening gulf between the rich and poor suggests that Hoover's party has shifted its focus from maximizing opportunities for ordinary Americans to protecting the interests of the wealthiest. We may wonder whether the man who wanted the government to "stamp out predatory business practices" (205) and endorsed strong labor unions and the inheritance tax would be comfortable with his party's current policies.

Patriotism, Courage, & Sacrifice: Warren County's Response to WW II, by Jerry K. Beatty. Indianola: Warren County Historical Society, 2017. 401 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 paperback.

Reviewer Terrence J. Lindell is professor of history at Wartburg College. His research interests include the World War II home front.

Jerry K. Beatty, former president of the Warren County Historical Society, dedicates this richly illustrated book to the county's 102 men lost in World War II and tells the story of its residents on battle front and home front. The work is divided into three chapters: the first deals with the military side of the conflict; the second recounts the home front; and the third—and by far the longest—provides biographical data on more than 3,200 service personnel who lived in Warren County, including those who attended Simpson College at some point either before or after the war. Beatty makes extensive use of local newspapers and interviews, but also relies on a variety of internet sources, including Wikipedia.

The chapter on military events is episodic because it focuses on the county's participants, especially casualties, although the inclusion of the Russian Front is odd. The section on the home front is a useful overview of the activities that took place in an Iowa county; anyone contemplating research on the Iowa home front would benefit from perusing it. The sections on relief efforts, war brides, and the repatriation of military