

context of an important chapter in the history of American traditional music and dance.

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A. J. Tomlinson: *Plainfolk Modernist*. By R. G. Robins. Religion in America. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. x, 316. \$45.00, ISBN 0-19-516591-8.)

R. G. Robins has written an intriguing, insightful, and thoroughly researched revisionist interpretation of the radical holiness and early pentecostal movements. In this biography of Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson, founder of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Robins argues that late-Victorian radical holiness was not, as many historians have argued, an antimodernist movement. It was instead “directly related to vital currents within” the mainstream of American Protestantism and, when “viewed from the perspective of their times and in relation to their cultures of origin,” the leaders of this movement were quite progressive (pp. 25, 24). Radical saints, as he calls them, did not reject modernity per se, but they adapted it to fit their worldview and couched it in language that fit their particular religious culture.

The final three-fourths of the book examines the life and career of Tomlinson—his Quaker pedigree; his farmer-capitalist background; his foray into Populist politics; his failed missionary efforts into western North Carolina; and finally the building of lasting institutions in and around Cleveland, Tennessee, that by the end of the twentieth century had produced six denominations and six million adherents worldwide. Robins does an excellent job of placing Tomlinson into a proper historical context, weaving together the social, political, religious, and economic aspects of his narrative. He aptly proves that Tomlinson was a masterful religious entrepreneur who effectively marketed his wares to a target audience, learned from his mistakes, and built his legacy by building institutions.

More importantly, Robins suggests a new way to look at radical holiness and early pentecostalism. Building on the interpretations of Timothy L. Smith, Grant Wacker, David Harrell, and others, the first four chapters identify radical saints as both plainfolk and modernist. Robins examines how these people on the margins of American society viewed themselves, how others viewed them, and where they fit into American society at large. Plainfolk people saw themselves as ordinary Americans who identified with the poor and downtrodden. They rejected the genteel cultural world of upwardly mobile evangelicals who rejected as “random hysteria” the religious enthusiasm that was a central part of the radical saints’ worship experience (p. 33). These plainfolk Christians focused their often biting criticism on the excessive gentility of the cultural elite, and they questioned the commitment of this elite to the faith. Doctrinal issues were certainly an important part of their critique but not its centerpiece.

Robins convincingly asserts that because radical holiness, like much of modern America, was influenced by the marketplace, the study of this movement should focus on the intersection of religion, modernization, and the marketplace. Radical holiness flourished in the entrepreneurial and thoroughly modern environment by preserving “key elements of traditional spirituality by

repackaging them as mass-consumable products capable of thriving in the modern world" (p. 24). Much of Tomlinson's success, Robins maintains, lay in his ability to market that traditional spirituality to an eager audience of radical saints. His Quaker upbringing in a small, progressive Indiana town where he "drew on those ambient currents of piety, pragmatism, and promotion" allowed him to create a lasting legacy for himself and the religious institutions he established (p. 64).

A key component of Robins's argument is his call for a fresh look at the accepted definition of religious modernism. He contends that mainline Protestants at the turn of the century were not the only modernists in America, but they *wanted* to be. And they tried to create a definition of religious modernism that would exclude all others. Most twentieth-century historians accepted this flawed definition because they had been influenced by mainstream Protestants. This acceptance led to biased interpretations of radical holiness and early pentecostalism. Robins maintains that historians need to see these plainfolk as they saw themselves, not as mainstream Protestants or earlier historians saw them. Robins offers us a great deal to think about, and, I believe, this will become a seminal work in the expanding discussion of plainfolk religion.

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*The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City.* By Gregory Mixon. Foreword by Stanley Harrold and Randall M. Miller. Southern Dissent. (Gainesville and other cities: University Press of Florida, c. 2005. Pp. xvi, 197. \$59.95, ISBN 0-8130-2787-X.)

As historians increasingly use discrete events, like trials, to see a broader world context, the study of riots is emerging as an important vehicle for analysis. Gregory Mixon's bold and succinct history of the Atlanta riot of 1906 reveals much about the event itself and about larger themes in race relations. We see how the riot developed out of a complex matrix of factors: the emergence of white supremacy supported by law, the increasing anger of whites against blacks seeking so-called social equality, white men's views of progress through racial control, and white male paternalism toward women and blacks.

*The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* argues that the business leaders—those concerned with economic development and who are often credited with bringing reluctant southerners toward modernity—sometimes employed Jim Crow to maintain control of their workforces. In their appeals to Jim Crow, Atlanta's reformers (Progressive politicians, business leaders, and newspaper editors) created an environment that encouraged racial violence. This argument extends the traditional story, which holds that the riot was caused by the environment of racial hatred promulgated in newspapers and pulpits and by the average white Georgians. Mixon sees the leaders of New South Atlanta as the ones who set the tone of racism—particularly through their disenfranchisement of African Americans—that enflamed passions and led to the riot. As the historiographical pendulum swings toward sympathetic portrayals of business—depicting business as improving our lives by providing cheaper and better products, integrating the national

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