

A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars. By Andrew Hartman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Pp. 342. Cloth, \$30.00.

In this comprehensive history, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, intellectual historian Andrew Hartman dissects the 1960's manifestation of social change and how it came to redefine American identity. Relying on the framework of the culture wars themselves, Hartman interprets the religious, political, and social transformations that initiated the dramatic sea change in American culture. Utilizing a variety of source material from political speeches, popular culture, and newspapers to an array of scholarly secondary sources, Hartman successfully reveals the private beliefs and feelings that came to transform and define American public life, namely the political upheaval among Christian conservatives. Hartman's work adds a personalized interpretation of the varied perspectives and alliances within the 'religious versus the secular' debates, portraying classic works, like James Davidson Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, as highly relevant, yet overly divisive and polarizing. Hartman's work expands these religious and secular divisions into a complex arena of allegiances and identities. However, while providing a compelling and fascinating overview of America's division during the 1960s, it remains lacking. Hartman does little to contextualize these dramatic changes with respect to the previous internal conservative debates of the 1940s and 1950s. Despite this shortcoming, Hartman's topically-based overview adds a valuable contribution to the scholarship by providing a critical understanding of the enflamed conservative movement's opposition to the social revolutions of the sixties, and how such conflict came to redefine American culture and identity.

The prospect for America's future and its perceived devolution into moral decay has defined the cultural wars for nearly fifty years. The social movements to create a more equal and inclusive society have dually manifested themselves as progress to liberals and immorality to conservatives. Issues like abortion, homosexuality, feminism, and affirmative action prominently emerged like never before during the 1960s. Such trends forced many Americans to reconsider the very fabric of what it meant to be American, both as a nation and as individuals. Hartman explains, "The sixties gave birth to a new America... [and] Americans split over how to think about [it]" (2) and what it meant for the future "soul of America." Expanding upon recent works like Robert Self's *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* and Daniel Rodgers's *Age of Fracture*, Hartman's book systematically examines Americans grappling with national identity in the wake of great social change.

Hartman's work is divided into nine chapters analyzing historical events, impassioned debates, and the varied perceptions of our own American history. His introduction and beginning chapters offer an exceptional understanding of the historical perspectives of the culture wars. By focusing on the social movements and countercultural sentiments of the 1960s, he emphasizes the transformation that occurred within American political culture. While the 1960s cannot claim full responsibility for this transformation, the cornucopia of intellectual authorities, decline of tradition, rising resistance against mainstream ideology, and growing confidence and

organization among minority groups demanding equal rights definitely led to an upheaval of American identity. Furthermore, the very resistance that ensued was built upon the legacy of an imagined normative America – “the postwar years... [when] a cluster of powerful conservative norms set the parameters of American culture” (5). The American public’s need for conformity, Hartman argues, reflected the desire during the Cold War to “suspend disbelief” about the internal “threats” among Americans themselves. By the 1960s, conservatives saw these internal threats begin to manifest themselves as social movements that challenged the conformist mentality of the previous generations.

The remaining chapters focus on the specific issues that defined the culture wars including gender, race, religion, and education. The rise of the religious right came to dominate the conservative position in the culture wars and positions on other issues were largely extensions of this perspective. Conservatives believed, for example, gender was a critical cornerstone for maintaining an ordered society (135). Education also became a central focus, more specifically curriculum content, for the agenda of the conservative movement. Public elementary and high schools quickly became battlegrounds for the culture war conflicts during the 1970s and 1980s. Supreme Court cases like the 1962 *Engale v. Vitale* decision, deeming teacher led school prayer unconstitutional, became a conservative rallying cry proclaiming the secular infestation of the public school system. Ultimately, these social movements presented steps further away from the idyllic normative conservative values of previous decades.

Hartman’s text provides a strong overview of the debates that emerged during the 1960s, but his book is titled a “history” of the culture wars. His history begins in the 1960s, with only brief references to previous decades, and thus fails to explain the already existing cultural debates within the conservative movement. As many felt their world being overrun with immorality, the 1960s saw these debates escalate rapidly. But it is impossible to fully understand the events, debates, and divisive rhetoric of the 1960s without understanding the underlying internal debates of church leaders and parishioners, already debating the proper relationship between religion and politics. Without this contextualization from the early twentieth century, Hartman’s book goes wanting. Despite this shortcoming, however, Hartman’s book provides a compelling examination of the rise of the culture wars and the identity crises that came to transform American political culture.

Hartman argues that the period of the late twentieth century and the culture wars should be understood as an adjustment period, in which Americans were struggling to adapt to a changing culture (285). This first comprehensive text on the cultural wars reveals why American identity so violently fractured in the wake of the 1960s. By the twenty-first century, most Americans have accepted and embraced the social changes that America has experienced. Cultural conflict continues, of course, but in a different fashion than the identity crisis of previous decades. The 1960s debates were radical departures from previous decades. Over fifty years later, many conservative Christians continue to see a culture war at play where secularism dominates mainstream culture; however, the anxiety and fear of the 1960s was unprecedented among Christian conservatives. Understanding and contextualizing the social and cultural changes from the 1960s explains America’s evolving identity and the recurring modern debates between traditional values and social progress. Hartman’s book provides a well-researched and

informative work on the period of the culture wars and what it meant for American identity. Additionally, it adds an essential comprehensive history to the literature of the culture wars and is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the polarized political climate of modern America. While this work requires further historical contextualization, it, nevertheless, successfully illuminates an important dimension of the transformation of American political culture that continues to impact us today.

Elizabeth Neuman

Texas A&M University Central Texas