*Bounds of Their Habitation* is engaging and easy to read. It succeeds in bringing together multiple lines of scholarship that are often operating in parallel universes. Scholars, students, and the general interested reader will find much to value in this book, and it deserves a wide audience.

**Craig R. Prentiss**
Rockhurst University

doi:10.1017/S0009640718000525


“Hell mattered” in nineteenth-century America (232), declares Kathryn Gin Lum in this expansive, carefully argued, deeply researched, and beautifully written monograph. In contrast to earlier studies suggesting that the democratization and feminization of American Christianity precipitated the decline of Calvinist concepts of salvation and divine judgment, *Damned Nation* forcefully argues that debates over the meaning of hell “remained vital” in a young nation “founded on the premise of republican virtue where different religious bodies competed for converts, interest groups vied for sociopolitical influence, and oppressed peoples called for ultimate justice” (232). From evangelical revivals to separate spheres, Mormonism to Transcendentalism, urban reform to global missions, southern slavery to the [Oregon Trail](https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms) — the volatile and hotly contested Christian doctrine of hell fueled an aggressively expanding American society during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Gin Lum organizes her story of “hell’s survival and significance” (8) into three parts that move sequentially from the 1790s through the Civil War. More than an arcane theological squabble, controversies over “predestination, human nature, and the character of God” shaped political discourse in the early republic as ministers and intellectuals struggled to define whether the traditional threat of divine vengeance or an emerging belief in a benevolent deity provided the “best moral glue for the new nation” (14). Promulgated through a diverse array of media, from sermons and tracts to poetry, novels, hymns, maps and charts, folk art, and even board games, ideas about hell dominated the conversion experiences of early evangelicals, forged an “imagined community of the saved” (7), and lent a sense of urgency to missionary work at home and abroad. But they also generated opposition among sentimental novelists, native
American prophets, spiritualists, westering pioneers, and liberal freethinkers who showed little patience for the Calvinist notion of an “eternal ‘in’ crowd” (45), as Gin Lum argues in part 2. The concluding section of the book examines the deployment of hell discourses during an era of growing sectional strife over the question of slavery. Proslavery apologists and proponents of gradual emancipation drew upon the “perishing soul” (169) motif in exhortations to evangelize the enslaved. African American activists, such as the incendiary David Walker, and ultraists, from William Lloyd Garrison to Theodore Parker, condemned this paternalistic rhetoric, labeled slavery a hell on earth, and envisioned heaven as an “everlasting progression of the human race” toward freedom and moral perfection (188). Contentious theological debates over the meaning of hell persisted into the Civil War as chaplains vacillated between castigating the nation for its original sin of slavery and comforting the grieving families of dead soldiers.

Gin Lum occasionally minimizes differences that other scholars might wish to highlight with greater specificity, as in her use of the encompassing term “evangelical” to denote “denominational commonality” (57). Yet this is a book that resists easy linear arguments and simple binaries in favor of subtle shifts, unintended consequences, persistent conflict, and enormous creativity. Where historians once associated the Second Great Awakening with either social control or democratic release, Gin Lum carefully recovers the multivalent work of the revivals associated with Charles Grandison Finney. Where other scholars have traced the devolution of post-Revolutionary religious optimism to the dour outlook of an 1850s America plagued by economic volatility, urban unrest, sectional violence, and impending Civil War, Gin Lum reminds readers that Protestants of all stripes remained profoundly ambivalent about the moral character of the young nation—even during the heady days of the earliest global missionary societies. Where recent studies of religion and the Civil War accent the emergence of a hopeful theology of heaven as a place of bodily restoration and reunion with loved ones, Gin Lum reveals a more complex story in which ministers worried that the war endangered the salvation of gambling, swearing, and hard-drinking soldiers. “Hell permeated the cultural landscape,” she concludes, “and there is no single timeline in its American evolution between the Revolution and Reconstruction” (8).

Gin Lum offers a fascinating conceptual alternative to an older historiographical tradition of grand narrative. Although she envisions the book as a “synthetic survey” (241n16), her most important contribution perhaps lies in its pioneering innovative interpretive method, which assembles a stunning array of seemingly unrelated religious texts, individuals, and movements and persuasively demonstrates how they contributed to the central social and political concerns of the period. For scholars concerned with the fragmentation of the field of
North American religious history in a postmodern, pluralistic, transnational, and global age, Gin Lum provides what might best be described as an itinerary for navigating the diverse, fractious, and rapidly-expanding religious world of the pre-Civil War United States.

_Damned Nation_ is an extraordinary mashup of a book, a raucous ride through the rough religious country of the early American republic. Where else can readers encounter the Seneca Prophet Handsome Lake, transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, Mormon apostle Parley Pratt, and spiritual mystic Emanuel Swedenborg all in the same chapter? Written for a broad audience, Gin Lum’s provocative book succeeds as a graceful work of synthesis and a compelling new reading of nineteenth-century American attitudes toward religion, race, and reform.

Douglas L. Winiarski

University of Richmond

doi:10.1017/S0009640718000537


New York City is not usually a place where God walks. It has, as Kyle Roberts acknowledges in his compelling study of urban evangelical religion in the early American republic, “a greater reputation for sin than piety” (251). In the twenty-first century, when New York is a hub of global finance, our histories are more attuned to the development of Commercial Gotham, but Roberts tells a different tale, one in which evangelical Protestants were at the center, not the margins, of the city’s radical growth and transformation. Roberts does not claim that Evangelical Gotham is the only Gotham, nor even that evangelicals were ever more than a minority of the city (about 15 percent by 1850). But their churches abounded in its built environment, they set their moral causes at the center of its civic life, and they turned the city’s commercial resources to godly ends. “ Evangelicals did not just live in New York,” he writes; “they lived through it” (7).

_Evangelical Gotham_ challenges the notion that evangelical religion was a primarily rural phenomenon opposed to an emerging urban modernity. Through personal journals and autobiographical narratives, religious magazines and newspapers, and church records and published histories, Roberts finds that evangelicalism thrived in a modernizing world because of
Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction. Kathryn Gin Lum. Shows the deep and long-lasting effects of the fear of hell in American history. Challenges the common view of America as a "redeemer nation," revealing early Americans' fears that they and their nation might be headed for damnation. Kathryn Gin Lum. Reviews and Awards. "Damned Nation is a heavenly book. It is beautifully written, deeply researched, and clearly argued. Kathryn Gin Lum meticulously examines one of the least noticed yet most pervasive and powerful forces in the culture: the conviction that people who died outside the faith would endure everlasting damnation in hell. [R]ich with insight and scholarly achievement." - Journal of American History. Her book, Damned. Moore: In what ways were some Americans beginning to rethink their belief in hell? Gin Lum: Some Americans turned to Universalism in the eighteenth century, certain that a just God could never condemn any of His creatures to eternal hell. Universalism continued to persuade some in the nineteenth century, but a host of compromise positions also arose to nuance the starkness of eternal hell without going as far as complete rejection. See more of Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction on Facebook. Log In. or Create New Account. See more of Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction on Facebook. Log In. Forgotten account? Hell is alive and well in American culture. The Westboro Baptist Church and other groups are well known for presenting laundry lists of sins that are damnation-worthy. Such groups are often met with laughter or outrage today, depending on the severity of the behavior, but these voices aren’t out of place: this kind of fire-and-brimstone language has a long history in the United States. As one attendee asked, why learn about this? Gin Lum, whose book Damned Nation will be published in September 2014, cautioned against oversimplifying the history of hell in America. Antebellum America can’t just be seen as a cultural backwater, lagging behind the other side of the Atlantic. Something else was and still is going on with metaphors of hell in Americans’ cultural vocabulary. Book Reviews. Americans against the City: Anti-urbanism in the Twentieth Century by Steven Conn. Americans against the City: Anti-urbanism in the Twentieth Century by Steven Conn (pp. 505-506). Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction by Kathryn Gin Lum (pp. 514-515). Review by: Grant Wacker. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44286831.