Books: review/commentary

Temperance and Racism: John Bull, Johnny Reb, and the Good Templars, by David M. Fahey (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1996), 209 pp., illustrated, $39.95 (cloth only).

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David M. Fahey's *Temperance and Racism* describes the efforts of the International Order of the Good Templars (IOGT) to sustain a fraternal organization dedicated to eradicating the "scourge" of alcohol and, in the author's words, to "search for a new, universal, reformed world order based on human equality of race, gender and class" (p. 151). While Fahey's universalist claims for the Templars seem somewhat inflated, it is nonetheless the case that the order was shaped by the post-Emancipation Atlantic world and bore the marks of a new, albeit limited, internationalism.

Fahey certainly provides new insights into this fraternal order, which has received very little attention from historians. In the second half of the 19th century the Good Templars grew rapidly worldwide, beginning in the United States, spreading to the British Isles, and then quickly spanning the vast British Empire. By the end of the century its most ardent adherents were often to be found in Scandinavia. Fahey reaches into archives on both sides of the Atlantic to reveal the order's full diversity and complexity. Although the Templars varied from region to region, country to country, and generation to generation, Fahey asserts that a few characteristics seem clear: "In the nineteenth century most Templars were young and remained members of the Order for only a short time. Most were of modest circumstances, although officers tended to be middle class. Perhaps a third of the rank and file were women, and nearly all were devout Protestants" (pp. 151–52). Members were often motivated as much by the possibilities for socializing (particularly when they might be living in sparsely populated rural areas) as they were for

engagement in political activism on behalf of prohibition, though this too varied according to region and country. In many areas membership turnover was considerable, again indicating that sociability rather than political activism was an important motivator for members.

Perhaps associated with the middling, status-anxious social position of many of the order's members, concerns over manhood and masculinity were crucial (p. 21). Templar analysis of the drink problem, according to Fahey, "taking for granted that men did the drinking, called for manliness. Alcohol 'robbed [the drunkard) of his manhood,' and in reclaiming him the IOGT endeavored 'to make him a MAN' " (p. 11). The author's appreciation of the gender aspects of lodge membership, among both men and women, is one of the strengths of this book, though its significance might have been carried over into the discussion of race and racism with advantage.

Fahey also provides considerable insight into the extent of black membership within the organization on both sides of the Atlantic, the significance of black contributions to IOGT, and the importance of race and racism to its history. Like membership among whites, black membership varied also. On the British side of the Atlantic black members were found in seaports, providing further suggestive material for Paul Gilroy's descriptions of the "Black Atlantic."[1] On the American side, black members seem to have been oriented by a number of post-Emancipation influences. Freedmen and -women, Fahey argues, saw connections between slavery and alcohol, freedom and sobriety, and so were often responsive to the missionary work of Templars in the South. In northern cities black Templars shared the same combination of concerns for social interaction and political activism to combat alcohol as their white counterparts. In the process of describing these contributions, Fahey brings to our awareness some almost forgotten African American leaders, such as James Walker Hood, and reveals little-known aspects of prominent

leaders' lives, men such as William Wells Brown and Bishop Benjamin Tanner.

In describing black membership, however, the author under-emphasizes the class composition of African American Templars. He notes correctly that scholars of African American history have paid insufficient attention to black membership in fraternities and other organizations like the Templars, an involvement that no doubt influenced other aspects of their lives, including their political activism. But Fahey seems to devote less attention than is warranted to the work undertaken on churches and religion among African Americans both during and after Reconstruction.[2] He notes on several occasions that most African American members of the order were Methodists, but he does not explore the implications of this fact, to the detriment of his analysis of race and racism.

As the book's title indicates, the central story here is the conjuncture of temperance and racism. Fahey makes the Templars' belief in universalism his focus because, he feels, the divisions over how to deal with black members need to be understood within this context. The universalism Fahey reaches for, however, seems to have eluded many of the members he describes. While many of them "regarded a welcome to African Americans as indispensable to Templar universalism," for others, he maintains, "it was irrelevant or, in the case of white southerners, unacceptable. There was never a consensus on the role of blacks in the new social order created by the War between the States and by nearly two generations of transatlantic, evangelically inspired moral reformers" (p. 152). But if there was no consensus on the issue of race, one wonders about the commitment among members to the credo of universalism beyond the idea that drink should be universally deplored.

Fahey builds his narrative around the schism lasting from 1876 to 1887, which divided English Templars from their North American brethren. The conflict is told through the

confrontation of two men: the "charismatic" John J. Hickman, a farmer turned insurance agent, head of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and later of the international order, and the "tenacious" Joseph Malins, a former furniture painter who after a short spell of living in Philadelphia was almost single-handedly responsible for increasing the order's popularity throughout England. Fahey implicitly casts Malins, as John Bull and Hickman as Johnny Reb, the former seeking inclusion of blacks and the latter their exclusion. John Bull is portrayed as a largely non-racist man inclined toward universalist understandings of the movement; Johnny Reb is described in ways that highlight his particularism and racism. Fahey thus tends to give the schism that emerged a racial aspect that, he notes, was complicated by other, more bureaucratic considerations. Some English Templars, for example, opposed segregated organizations for African Americans because they did not want their own representation diminished in the international order by the creation of so many new lodges in the United States.

Moreover, as Fahey notes, the split was not merely between Johnny Reb and John Bull. A substantial minority of English Templars, including well-known and wealthy members, enlisted in the Hickmanite party. Consequently "England was the site of the most sustained and acrimonious battle in the Templar world" over racial inclusion (p. 93), which leads one to wonder about the adherence to universalism among English Templars at this time. Both the Malinites and the Hickmanites in England argued that they were committed to black membership but disagreed about the means to this end. Fahey asserts that the English Hickmanites, for all their attempts to do otherwise, "inevitably ended up justifying the racial policies in the American South," but their position seems a little more complex than this. They had a point, after all—as Southerners surely did when they criticized Yankees for practicing class exploitation—when they questioned whether the "proletariat of England" could be mixed with "the nobility." At one level this may have been proposing

slow change because they wanted no real change, but at another level it may also have been pointing to the hypocrisy of some advocates of racial inclusion who effectively excluded from their lodges people whom they would have considered their racial inferiors (or the equivalent). The benefits of sociability do not accrue from socializing with one's inferiors.

In addition to divisions among the English Templars, most of the orders from outside the British Isles—Canada, India, Australia and so forth—seemed to side with the Hickmanites, while those from the urban northern American states more frequently sided with the Malinites. Were the schism to be framed in light of a split between metropole and periphery, then it might take on less of the flavor of a battle over universalism. This is particularly so because the end to the schism occurred at the same time that the Scramble for Africa was at its height and urbanites were confronting the "problem" of immigrants bringing their "inferior" habits from the periphery to the center. Inasmuch as the Malinite protest resulted from a commitment to universality, it perhaps represented a looking backward to ideas already found problematic among anti-slavery advocates at mid-century rather than a search for a reformed world order. Malins's support for the arch-imperialist Joseph Chamberlain and his opposition to Gladstone's Irish Home Rule also seem significant. As a vehemently anti-Catholic Orangeman, Malins's universalism was severely compromised. Indeed, the crucial difference that emerged between Hickmanites and Malinites may be that between a populist, frontier imperialist (Hickman) and an urban, progressive imperialist (Malins)—and both sides claimed to speak in universalist tongues.

Even if the schism had been precipitated by the issue of race with the reassertion among white Southerners of their opposition to Radical Reconstruction in all social spheres, the manner in which the Malinites and the Hickmanites were reconciled suggests that the two sides were not so far apart in

terms of their racial practices. Malins's concessions to Hickmanite demands is seen by Fahey, no doubt correctly, as the English leader's and his supporters' awakening to the realities of the situation in the American South and the desire for conciliation. But this again surely casts doubt on the significance of universalism in shaping the original split. Malins admitted that the division had not been over the principle of racial inclusion: "Those who split from the Grand Lodge in England were as fully in favour of equal rights for the negro as we were, but they dissented from the methods we adopted in relation to the matter" (p. 145).

Owing to the paucity of sources available, African Americans are actually largely omitted from the schism narrative, so their role in the rift is left undertheorized. Here is where the discussion of African Methodism might have been most profitable, for the assumption that African American Templars wanted integrated lodges at a time when they were busily creating their own churches in their own denominations may be erroneous. The True Reformers, as the segregated orders within the Templars were called, may have been in the process of developing a similar relationship to the parent organization that African Methodists and Colored Methodists had with white Methodists. Some leaders, like William Wells Brown, did indeed compare the True Reformers to "the negro pew" in the slaveowner's church (p. 75), but Brown himself "filed a notice for an amendment to add race to language as a basis for creating duplicate Grand Lodges" (p. 77). Bishop James Walker Hood declared that "in the present state of feeling in [North Carolina] nothing else than a separate Subordinate Lodge [for blacks] and a Grand Lodge [for whites] is suitable." Another leader agreed on the grounds that blacks "haven't any confidence in the white men of the South" (pp. 142-143). While these are points that Fahey himself makes well, it does seem to cast doubt on the efficacy of employing the dichotomy of racist Hickmanites and less racist Malinites to explain the divisions within the order.

Indeed, African Methodists' positions on inclusion within the order seem to have been complicated and inconsistent. Bishop Benjamin T. Tanner, a guiding light for African Methodist leaders at this time and an occasional member of the order, argued on one occasion that "if there had to be separate lodges, the separation should be on the basis of condition, with the ignorant and uncultivated blacks in one category and the whites and educated blacks such as himself in the other" (p. 141). Since Tanner would probably have questioned the label "white" for the immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe arriving at American ports at this time, we can see the class dimensions of racism fully exposed. Tanner, like some English Templars, could not abide the thought of mixing with the proletariat. They did not mind others doing so, but for them such mingling would defeat one of the purposes behind membership—sociability.

The implications of this may be made apparent when it is remembered that, as David Montgomery has shown, growing class conflict in the northern United States (corresponding to similar divisions in England) would help persuade northern Republicans that their interests lay with the southern elites and not with the southern black workers.[3] In light of the Anglo-American retreat from universalism that had been occurring in different ways since the 1840s, and that was evident in the emergence of new forms of unfree labor to replace slavery, in the revolutions of 1848 and the growing fear of social anarchy later embodied in the Paris Commune and the Haymarket, in the aftermath of the so-called Mutiny of 1857, the Morant Bay uprising of 1865, and the "redemption" of the South in Jim Crow, the Malinite stand on racial equality seems more of an anomalous and brief aberration than a major battle over principle between John Bull and Johnny Reb. The impact of Reconstruction, war with American Indians, the emerging suffrage movement, the struggle for Irish Home Rule, campaigns for Catholic rights in the United States and Canada, the scramble for Africa—all would weigh

heavily on Anglo-American pretensions to universalism, however loudly these might be proclaimed.

Fahey's study moves adeptly between a social and an intellectual history of this intriguing order, revealing both the social composition of the membership and its theoretical underpinnings. In the end, it is the work's strengths, deriving from the author's appreciation of the world dimensions of this organization, that lead the reader to want increased attention for the social and political context in which the IOGT was taking shape.

Notes

1.   Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

2.   W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books, [1903] 1989) and *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schocken Books, [1899] 1967); Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1921); Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Robert Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890–1940* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

3.   David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality; Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967).