

Through their strongly related contributions, they show just how important Old World theories of the body were in shaping the new continent and settler attitudes towards it. If more of the articles had such a direct connection to each other's themes then the entire volume would have made an argument.

Overall, however, the essays in *A Centre of Wonders* are generally persuasive and well written, illustrating the cultural significance of the body to early Americans. White, male authority during this period rested on notions of bodily difference, and without this the social, economic and political structure of colonial and early national America would have been much different. Black, female, and Indian bodies were essential to a society characterised by slavery, patriarchy and expansion. A history that fails to acknowledge this risks being too simplistic. In this sense, *A Centre of Wonders* is a worthy addition to the historiography of early America, and will serve as a useful introduction to the theories of embodiment relevant to the period. Its detailed bibliography and index are essential reference guides.

Finally, the historical interpretations contained in *A Centre of Wonders* are, on the whole, sound, but they are not particularly innovative. None of them pushes early American cultural studies in new directions. Instead, they mull over the same concepts found throughout most of the literature dealing with this period. To state, as Lindman and Tarter boldly do, that 'their diverse methodologies and insights offer a starting point for an enhanced and sophisticated exchange of ideas' (5) is rhetorical flourish. Certainly societies can view bodies through the lens of race, gender, or ethnicity, and frequently they do, but they can also be defined by other factors such as disability or age. Only when scholars of early American studies begin to realise this and look beyond the field's current conceptual framework can we start talking about 'a starting point for an enhanced and sophisticated exchange of ideas.'

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Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. xi + 325 pages, 22 black and white illustration, index; \$49.95 cloth (ISBN: 0-8078-2550-6); \$19.95 paper (ISBN: 0-8078-4862-X).

In recent years the scholarly study of American popular music has been well-served. From Cecelia Tichi's *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (1994) and Robert Cantwell's *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (1996) via Greil Marcus's *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (1997) to Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (1998) and Richard and Joanne Reuss's *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (2000), new studies of its diverse genres, movements, businesses, groups and individuals have added richly to the theoretical, biographical and documentary work of distinguished

critics such as Simon Frith, Bill Malone, Peter Guralnick, Archie Green, Sam Charters, Neil Rosenberg and Paul Oliver. The publication of Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* suggests that this recent rich crop has by no means been exhausted.

Filene's subject is the nature and development of what has become known (to music executives, performers, reviewers, and audiences alike) as 'roots music,' meaning 'musical genres that ... have been glorified as the 'pure' sources out of which the twentieth century's commercial popular music was created.' Since terminology, here as elsewhere, is something of a minefield, in characterizing this music Filene avoids such semantically overburdened terms as 'folk' in favour of 'vernacular' ('songs employing a musical language that is current, familiar, and manipulable by ordinary people'), a realm which he understands to include 'not only Appalachian mountain music or blues but also 'pop' music' (the latter signifying 'the Tin Pan Alley song tradition' which 'held sway from roughly the 1890s into the 1950s'). Filene's vernacular thus includes not only Muddy Waters and Pete Seeger but also Bob Dylan *after* he had 'gone electric' and even (though only mentioned in passing here) 'hip-hop, grunge, and techno' (4).

That such stylistic diversity can be accommodated within one conceptual framework owes much, as the subtitle of the book indicates, to the integral role of public memory and perceptions in the making of American roots music. 'Roots,' Filene argues, is 'a retrospective term' (4), and any sense of the nature and growth of 'roots music' depends on an understanding of 'how Americans have remembered their country's musical past, how these memories have been transmitted, and how these conceptions have both reflected and shaped Americans' cultural outlook' (5). In setting out his objectives and theoretical assumptions, Filene makes clear that his scholarly ground has been well-prepared and his concerns and methods are up-to-date, however superficial or 'old-timey' his subject matter might appear. The emphasis upon the role of 'public memory,' for example, suggests that *Romancing the Folk* is informed by the prominent position the concept has occupied in American Studies over the past ten to fifteen years. Similarly, and notwithstanding the use of such terms as *pure*, *natural* and *authentic* in connection with roots music, the book shares with much recent scholarly work in the field a sensitivity to the *constructedness* of things: in this case, the ways in which such terms and their implied opposites 'have been constructed and how they have shaped the way American music has been understood' (3).

The construction work that Filene is particularly interested in concerns the activities of those 'cultural middlemen' – 'folklorists, record company executives, producers, radio programmers and publicists' – who mediated between the musicians themselves, the industry and the public, and who in the process 'made judgements about what constituted America's true musical tradition [and] helped shape what 'mainstream' audiences recognized as authentic' (5). As the series of case studies which make up the book shows, these mediators not only 'transformed the music' that the performers offered; they also 'romanced' the folk, in the sense both of wooing them as intimates and sentimentalizing them as Other' (5). Filene's choice of middlemen and musicians makes *Romancing the*



*Folk* a work of considerable scope, not only chronologically and stylistically but also in terms of the many domains (private and public, elite and popular, political, commercial and bureaucratic) within which such cultural work took place. Beginning with reviews of the careers of well-known folklorists such as Francis James Child and Cecil Sharp, Filene focuses on the relationships between blues artist Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly) and folklorists John and Alan Lomax in the 1930s and 1940s; record boss Leonard Chess, producer Willie Dixon and rhythm and blues guitar player Muddy Waters in the 1940s and 1950s; folklorists Charles Seeger, Alan Lomax (again), Richard Dorson and B.A. Botkin and the Federal Government from the 1930s onwards; and musicians Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan (two key figures who, as both cultural middlemen and artists, are termed 'folk stylists') during the 1960s.

Filene shows that at times many of these relationships were fractious, that some were exploitative, and that virtually all ended in disappointment for one or more of the parties. Lead Belly felt himself short-changed literally and metaphorically by the Lomaxes, who on occasion promoted him (less than sentimentally) as an animal – at best exotic, at worst violent – and who sought to retune his performances to what their cults of primitivism and 'outsider populism' encouraged them to value. Leonard Chess saw himself, romantically, as a pioneering tribune for rare African-American treasures with whom he shared a special empathy, but he was neither 'in the memory business' nor committed to any racial or cultural cause: one employee recalled Chess remarking 'if shit is gold, we'll sell shit' (90). Nor was it simply a matter of art versus money. As Filene makes clear in a fine discussion of post-war cultural politics, the development of our understandings of what constitutes 'folk' derive in part from conflicts *between* cultural middlemen, exemplified here through the intermittent academic trench warfare between the 'purist' Dorson and the 'popularizer' Botkin.

At the same time and more importantly, however, Filene's case studies also show that many of these cultural middlemen (and occasionally women) were absolutely vital in bringing then-marginal vernacular music to mass public attention, in making the nation conscious of little recognized aspects of its culture, and in giving opportunities and recognition to musicians who might otherwise never have enjoyed them. One of the many attractive features of the book is, indeed, the attention paid to some less well-known names whose efforts have helped transmit or create the roots music and institutions without which the musical explorations of the twentieth century's second half would not have been possible: from folk song collector Robert Winslow Gordon to Chicago talent scout and record producer Lester Melrose. If market considerations were integral to the work of some of these middlemen, then Filene's study also demonstrates in detail what Greil Marcus inferred in 1996 about Harry Smith's decision to base his 1951 *Anthology of American Folk Music* solely on commercially-available, rather than field, recordings: that the marketplace was not *solely* a monetary benchmark, and that this was 'music to which people really had responded; records put on sale that at least somebody thought were worth paying for.'<sup>2</sup>

2. Greil Marcus, *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (London: Picador, 1996), 102.

For all its attention to the go-betweens, *Romancing the Folk* does not adapt solely a contextual – social, cultural and historical – approach to its subject matter. Filene also shows himself to be a fine explicator and interpreter of the words and music of the artists whose work provided the raw material for his middlemen. Particularly impressive, for this reviewer, were the readings of songs by Muddy Waters ('I Feel Like Going Home,' 'Hoochie Coochie Man') and Bob Dylan ('Outlaw Blues,' 'Highway 61 Revisited'). Through lyrical, musical and generic readings of these and other works, Filene shows how they in part derive from and embody the cultural, social and musical construction work with which the book engages more broadly. In the process, and to pick but one example, he also offers an illuminating reading of the mid-1960s tensions between Dylan and Pete Seeger. Having suggested that the nature of their rift had to do less with amplification than with relationships between audiences and artists, Filene goes on to make a good case for his arresting argument that, if anything, Dylan became more of a vernacular artist *after* he 'went electric' in 1965 than he had been during his so-called 'folkie' days.

That *Romancing the Folk* manages to balance and integrate its approaches to such great effect is an index not only of the author's skills as critic and writer (this is a very readable volume); it is also a function of the research he has carried out in archival and other primary sources, notably among the papers, files and boxes of the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture and the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies. The result is a book which, among many other things, adds a welcome and valuable new dimension to our understanding of what Marshall Fishwick in 1967 dubbed 'poplore,' complementing on the one hand folklorist Gene Bluestein's study of the formal aspects of the phenomenon, *Poplore: Rock and Pop in American Culture* (1994); and on the other cultural historian W.T. Lhamon's historical analysis of the 'lore cycle,' *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (1990). If the cover picture is reminiscent of the 'creepy naturalist' *Watchtower* drawings that one would rather forget, then this book itself is well worth keeping in mind: in addition to its splendid collection of illustrations, what lies inside *Romancing the Folk* enables us to see close up the manufacturing of musical poplore – nuts and bolts, roots and branches, folk and vernacular, rhythm and blues – well under (its memorable) way.

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Peter C. Mancall and James H Merrell (eds), *American Encounters, Natives and New-comers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 594 pp., ISBN: 0-415-92375-1; \$29.99 paper.

Until recent decades, the place of Native Americans in American History has been merely incidental. Most American histories begin with Columbus, and treat the so-called new world as virgin territory. In this extensive compendium of articles, an attempt is made to give voice to those who occupied the continent prior to European settlement. The twenty-five articles span a period from the pre-Columbian period until the middle of the nine-