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## R E V I E W S

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### *Sons of Wichita: How the Koch Brothers Became America's Most Powerful and Private Dynasty*

by Daniel Schulman

424 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

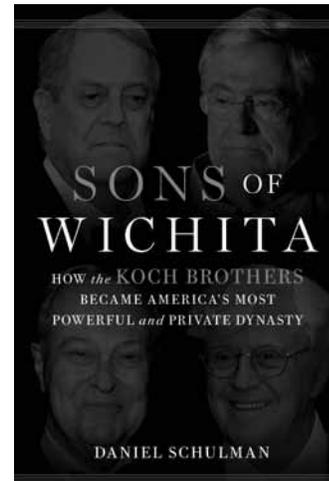
New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014, cloth, \$30.00.

In the last fifty years, academics and journalists have written much about the rise to influence of the American conservative movement. Books and articles have considered the evolution of the Old Right into the New, national leaders like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, and organizational mobilization across the country and down to the county level. There is a gap, however, in this body of work. Little has appeared on the financial underpinnings of the movement. Daniel Schulman's *Sons of Wichita: How the Koch Brothers Became America's Most Powerful and Private Dynasty* helps close this gap. This is a necessary service, especially in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* decision, and more recently, the heavy spending of "dark money" during the 2014 midterm congressional elections.

Schulman, a senior editor for *Mother Jones* magazine, offers a narrative biography of a family that blends the personal, corporate, and political. Founding father Fred Koch built a private company centered on oil refining, engineering, and ranching. As he groomed his sons in business, he also strictly schooled them politically in a far-right agenda of anticommunism, anti-taxes, and small government. Colored by detailed conspiracy theories, Fred Koch's ideology resonated with the beliefs of Robert Welch's John Birch Society, and he joined that organization's National Council. Eldest son Charles even operated a Birch Society bookstore in Wichita not far from the family compound.

With Charles and brother David at the helm, the family-owned business grew spectacularly and expanded into the nation's second largest private corporation, today enjoying \$115 billion in annual revenues and more than one hundred thousand employees in sixty countries. Earnings from their petrochemical, food, and building and agricultural materials operation made the brothers very wealthy, ranking them sixth among the world's richest men.

The Koch brothers plowed profits back into the company and philanthropic activities. At the same time, they planned a political agenda that would not only advance their corporate interests but also move a nation. The men embraced the libertarian cause in the 1970s and advocated lower taxes and reducing the federal bureaucracy. If a philosophical position, this also reflected their conflicts with the IRS, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, and Justice Department that spawned criminal prosecutions and civil penalties over the flouting of government regulations.



Koch brothers' funding created "Kochtopus," as their critics began referring to their sprawling network and efforts. They provided seed money and operating funds for a libertarian infrastructure of think tanks, advocacy groups, and educational programs to develop theoretical constructs and convert these into policy recommendations for lawmakers. Koch money built such organizations as Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, the Mercatus Center, and the Institute for Humane Studies, among others. In addition, the Kochs contributed millions of dollars to universities to endow professorships and sponsor conferences and lectures. The result was a professional packaging of a platform that called for free market economics, privatizing Social Security, slashing welfare spending, and debunking climate change.

In mainstreaming libertarianism, they created a base to broker the rightward drift of the Republican Party. Key to this more recently was the mobilization of the grassroots Tea Party movement, with significant funding from Koch-front organizations. The Koch brothers also organized a donor network of like-minded members of the corporate elite in support of Republican Party establishmentarians. Observes Schulman: the Kochs had created an operation that "had evolved over the years into a kind of shadow party, occupying its own center of gravity within the GOP universe" (p. 308).

Daniel Schulman has written an important book that reveals the hidden influence of the wealthiest individuals on American politics. It is a cautionary tale written in a straightforward manner without florid prose or the hyperbole of the exposé. Schulman's portrayal is well supported with interviews, legal documents, and archival materials forming the bulk of his sources. Sometimes, however, the book tries to do too much and loses its edge. Gossipy details and accounts of internecine legal conflicts are distracting and dull the thrust of this essential, if disturbing story.

*Reviewed by Robert A. Goldberg, professor of history, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.*

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## *The Rural Midwest since World War II*

edited by J. L. Anderson

xiii + 323 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014, paper \$28.95.

For many Americans, mention of the rural Midwest evokes images of traditional families working small farms. However, twentieth-century developments such as agricultural consolidation, the rise of a mass consumption culture, and rural depopulation have made this image an anachronism. As Joe L. Anderson points out in the introduction, the popular association of the Midwest with the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal causes many scholars to think of modern midwestern history in terms of decline. Nevertheless, Anderson and the other contributors demonstrate that, for the Midwest, there is life after the family farm.

Anderson has assembled nine mostly native midwestern authors to synthesize the largely neglected history of the rural Midwest since 1945. He contends that scholars deny a midwestern regional identity by using it as “the standard by which other regions’ distinctiveness has been measured” (p. 7). However, he also concedes that capturing the region’s identity is tricky. Taken as a whole, the volume demonstrates that a “commitment to modernity and progress . . . made the Midwest in general and the rural Midwest in particular the most American region in the nation” (p. 10).

*The Rural Midwest* scraps the notion of decay and recasts the post-World War II period in the Midwest as a time of “leadership, essentialness, and vitality” (p. 4) while still addressing the significant social, ecological, and economic changes in the region. Each essay describes, from different perspectives, “what happened in and to this place to transform it so significantly” (p. 6). In a brief forward, R. Douglas Hurt muses on the national persistence of the Midwest’s agrarian ideal stereotype. James Pritchard’s essay focuses on environmental history and demonstrates how technology, policy, and market forces led to “simplification and homogenization of the landscape” (p. 12). Three essays focus on the region’s economic dynamism and prosperity—“Ecology, Economy, and Labor,” “Beyond the Rust Belt,” and “Midwestern Rural Communities in the Post-WWII Era to 2000,” by Kendra Smith-Howard, Wilson Warren, and Cornelia and Jan Flora respectively. Howard illustrates the region’s dynamism and prosperity through its “shift from labor-intensive to capital-intensive agriculture” (p. 65), Warren through rural industrialization, and the Floras by demonstrating the adaptability of rural communities. Viewing economic prosperity from a different angle, Anderson’s essay, “Uneasy Dependency,” outlines the indispensable role of state and federal policy in rural midwestern resurgence.

The final five essays deal with the region’s social history. In “Farm Women in the Midwest since 1945” and “Childhood in



the Rural Midwest since 1945,” Jenny Barker Devine and Pamela Riney-Kehrberg trace the egalitarian gains of rural women and reveal the increasing convergence of rural and urban childhoods. Debra Reid’s “‘The Whitest of Occupations?’” and Jim Norris’s “Hispanics in the Midwest since World War II” recount the increasing diversity of the rural Midwest. Reid illustrates how African Americans experienced a “tempered” racism even as they “forged mutually dependent relationships [with whites] to survive” (p. 205), and Norris traces Hispanic midwestern presence from primarily migratory workers to permanent residents. Moreover, Steven Reschly reveals how even the extremely conservative Amish, who most closely fit the agrarian ideal, ironically flourish through innovation. Lastly, in a brief conclusion, David Danbom considers the “indistinct distinctiveness” of the Midwest (p. 296).

*Kansas History* readers will find the Sunflower State fairly well-represented in *The Rural Midwest*. Indeed, for a work on the broader region, the volume details a surprising number of Kansas places. For instance, Oberlin, Kansas, serves as a case study of a postwar community coping with agricultural job loss; Garden City’s postwar conversion from sugar beet farming to feed lots and meat processing plants demonstrates the shift from labor-intensive to capital-intensive agriculture; and Sublette, the tiny hamlet in Haskell County, serves as an illustration of the “positive remaking of [a] rural communit[y]” (p. 120).

The collection provides only a cursory treatment of Native Americans. A paragraph on federal relocation, one on the 1970s American Indian Movement, and one highlighting the poverty of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota—and a few mentions elsewhere—is the extent of Native American coverage in this volume. Yet on the whole, the coverage is impressive, and *The Rural Midwest* marks a significant contribution to the revival of midwestern regional history. Anderson’s work is sure to spark greater interest in and more research into this region’s recent history.

*Reviewed by Daniel T. Gresham, PhD student, Kansas State University, Manhattan.*

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## *When the Wolf Came: The Civil War and the Indian Territory*

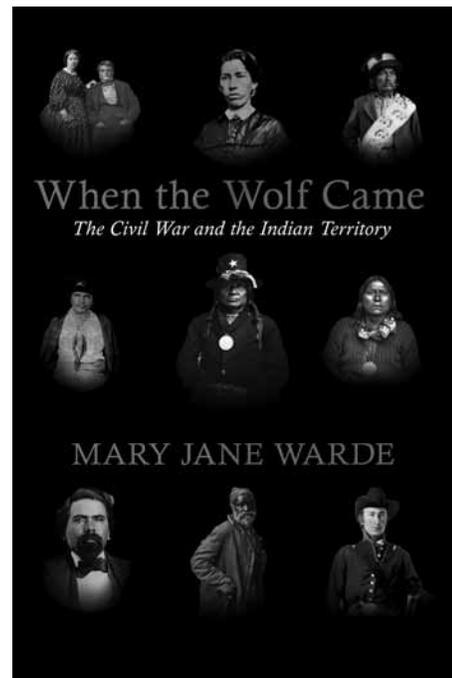
by Mary Jane Warde

xi + 404 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.  
Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2013, paper  
\$34.95.

Academic and general interest in the American Civil War appears inexhaustible. Scholars continue to produce volumes on the causes of the war, the political and social repercussions of the Union's victory, and the sources and meaning of emancipation, to name just a few topics. Mary Jane Warde observes, however, that "Too often, histories of that Civil War either ignore or skim over events and conditions west of the Mississippi River" (p. 3). In part, the omission of the Trans-Mississippi West in traditional Civil War narratives reflects the location of the largest battles and campaigns in the eastern United States. If the events in the West did not determine the course of the war, one might ask, why study this region in relation to the Civil War? Warde points to two dramatic consequences of the conflict to answer this kind of question: the war made it possible for the federal government to force land cessions on tribes that had joined the Confederacy, a development that radically diminished the sovereign authority of many native groups; and second, the federal government then relocated other native groups to this ceded land, opening up millions of acres for white settlement (p. 299).

Warde begins by overviewing the creation of Indian Territory. Focusing largely on the so-called "five civilized tribes," she describes conditions among the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Muscogee peoples of the southeastern United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; their interactions with European traders; their exposure to and adoption of African slavery; and the crisis of removal, when southeastern Indian nations were relocated to the newly formed Indian Territory by the federal government. By the mid-nineteenth century, members of native groups in Indian Territory paid close attention to statements from federal officials about Indian sovereignty and wondered if Abraham Lincoln and his administration would honor treaty stipulations about native landholdings and property including slaves (pp. 38–39). Native groups had fractured internally over the issue of removal in the 1820s and 1830s, and those "hard feelings were still simmering when the Civil War fanned the coals back into flames" (p. 20).

The four middle chapters provide a detailed and thorough history of the war years in Indian Territory. Through a careful reading of a variety of sources, including the personal papers of native leaders, interviews from the Indian Pioneer History collection, slave narratives, and government correspondence, Warde captures battlefield action; political machinations within tribal groups, between tribal groups, and between tribal groups and federal and Confederate officials; and the war's impact



on civilians. Warde's summary of Opothle Yahola's flight to Kansas demonstrates all of these elements. A wealthy member of Muscogee Nation, Opothle Yahola opposed a Confederate–Muscogee treaty. He and leading chief Ootarharsars Harjo wrote to President Lincoln to ask for protection from Confederate agitators. Other loyalists, including members of other Indian nations, slaves, and former slaves, joined them. As their pro-Union numbers grew, Opothle Yahola's group drew the attention of Indians fighting for the Confederacy, including Muscogees, Choctaws, Cherokees, and Seminoles. Eventually Opothle Yahola and his fugitives, a large number of whom were women and children, fled to Kansas and engaged in the first battle of the Civil War in Indian Territory along the way, as well as several other battles and skirmishes (pp. 64–87). In describing this episode and whenever possible, Warde incorporates the words of the people who experienced these events into her narrative.

Warde's final chapter concerns the war's aftermath. She details the treaty stipulations that re-established relations between tribal governments and federal authorities and the land cessions made by native groups in the decades after the Civil War. The question of the legal status of the former slaves of Indian masters remained a vexing problem in Indian Territory as some native groups accepted, albeit reluctantly, their former slaves as citizens of their respective nations and others delayed or refused doing so altogether. In the end, Warde asserts that even if Indian Territory did not have a determining impact on the outcome of the Civil War, the war profoundly remade Indian Territory and the peoples living there.

*Reviewed by Fay A. Yarbrough, associate professor of history, Rice University, Houston, Texas.*