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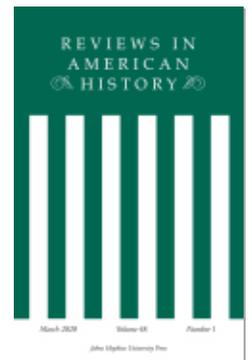
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Thomas G. Andrews

Darren Dochuk, *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America*. New York: Basic Books, 2019. 672 pp. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00.

Not long after the publication of my first book, the Huntington Library invited me to give a talk as part of a larger symposium on the history of the U.S. West. I no longer recall whether it was their idea or mine, but the subject I endeavored to explore in my 2010 remarks seemed straightforward enough: a big-picture take on the West's tumultuous energy history. I had devoted most of the preceding decade to researching the social and environmental history of the Colorado coalfields in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, so I already had plenty to say about the West's critical transition from water, wind, wood, and muscle power to fossil fuels. Having wearied of coal and its gritty past, I looked forward to the chance the Huntington gig offered to get myself up to speed on a different but ostensibly related historiography, the literature examining petroleum's place in the U.S. past.

The oil industry beckoned to me, as it had before to so many other westerners. But instead of lighting out for fresh strikes in the oil patches of Texas, California, or Oklahoma, I headed instead to the calmer confines of my university's library. The stacks, to my surprise, held only a smattering of titles on oil history, so I had no choice but to order up additional books through my regional library consortium. My haul of books grew by the day. Yet in historiographical research, as in so many other things, quantity offers no guarantee of quality.

The historiography of the American petroleum industry, I was learning, mostly hewed to a couple of well-worn and overlapping grooves: corporate histories, especially of Standard Oil and other monster firms; economic and political studies of regulation and policy at the state and federal levels; and neo-muckraking exposés of Big Oil's outsized influence over everything from U.S. foreign policy to the emissions standards enacted in response to the oil crises of the 1970s. I found much of this work impressive, with beefy but accessible tomes like Dan Yergin's *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (1990) and Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (2004)

joining more specialized treatises such as Brian Black's *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (2000), Diana Davis Oliens and Roger M. Oliens's *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895–1945* (2002), and Paul Sabin's *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market, 1900–1940* (2004). Overall, though, I found the historiography on petroleum in the U.S. underdeveloped—often narrow in scope, technical in focus, and disconnected from broader themes and questions in historical studies.

Darren Dochuk's *Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America* shows just how big a difference a decade can make. A huge outpouring of recent work, including influential books by Andrew Needham, Christopher Jones, Peter Shulman, Timothy Mitchell, and many others, has signaled the emergence of energy history and energy humanities as full-fledged scholarly fields. Petroleum historiography has developed apace. *Anointed with Oil* is at once firmly rooted in the older literature on oil history, and productively engaged with new work in energy history. Far more important, though, Dochuk's book makes a massively original contribution by revealing the shared history of religion, politics, and the oil industry in the U.S. from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Dochuk's interpretation is sweeping, forceful, and nuanced. Premised upon sleuthing from archives ranging from the obvious (e.g., the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York) to the out-of-the-way (e.g., the Cameron Townsend Archives in Waxhaw, North Carolina), and written in prose so mellifluous that it buoys the reader through more than 150 years and 560 pages with consummate ease, *Anointed with Oil* lays out a compelling argument in response to a pair of incisive and consequential questions: How have two notable divides—the internal struggle between the U.S. oil industry's biggest firms and the smaller upstarts who repeatedly challenged larger companies' dominance, and the competition that has pitted liberal mainline denominations against fundamentalist rivals—shaped each other from 1859, when Edwin Drake plunged his drill into the depths beneath the previously isolated reach of western Pennsylvania that swiftly became known as Petrolia, to the present day? And how have the reverberations from this schism shaped American politics both at home and abroad?

Dochuk's central claim is that these internecine conflicts actually reinforced each other across the course of a long and tangled history that rippled outward from Petrolia, first to the western states of Texas and California, then to far-flung missionary fields, markets for American oil, and extractive hinterlands across the globe. *Anointed with Oil* seeks to demonstrate that we can better understand domestic U.S. politics, the nation's international affairs, and the impact of non-governmental organizations (particularly missionary groups, philanthropies, development groups, and lobbying outfits) if we treat crude and Christianity together rather than in isolation.

If substantiating these claims sounds like a tall order, it is, for it requires Dochuk to work across several subfields, particularly business history, religious history, diplomatic history, American political development, and the post-war Right's revolt against the New Deal order. *Anointed with Oil* also makes more sporadic forays into subjects ranging from labor history to environmental and cultural history. The result is a book that is remarkably convincing for most of its length—and that owes its significance not just to the interpretation it advances, but also to the questions it raises without fully answering.

Dochuk's introduction presents his thesis with admirable dispatch. At its core, Dochuk argues, the history of oil and religion in American life limns a tale of fracture: of a foundational, vicious conflict waged over the past 160 years by two contending power blocs. Dochuk roots each bloc in the oil industry, then tracks the economic, political, social, and religious power that each warring faction came to wield as liquid fossil fuels became the *sine qua non* of modern life. The first of these blocs to emerge, and logically the one with which Dochuk begins, hinges on so-called "major" oil firms, particularly Standard Oil and its descendants. Dochuk treats the Rockefeller family as, well, the standard-bearers for this strand of religio-capitalistic influence, which he terms "the civil religion of crude." *Anointed with Oil* proceeds to elucidate the Rockefellers' pivotal role in mainline Protestantism; centrist philanthropies, including the Rockefeller Foundation; and the Republican Party's patrician mainstream across three generations, from the rise of John D. Rockefeller Sr. in the grit of Gilded-Age Cleveland to the filial rivalry waged between Nelson Rockefeller, John III, and their brothers in the 1960s and 1970s.

From the nineteenth century through the present day, Standard and other majors have squared off against a panoply of smaller but still formidable firms. Most scholars of the oil industry prefer to draw finer distinctions among such companies, but Dochuk elects to lump them together as "independents."¹ Most of the independent firms on which Dochuk focuses rose to prominence on the strength of fresh petroleum discoveries in the U.S. West, beyond the reach of the near-total monopoly that John D. Rockefeller Sr. had assembled by hook and by crook in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and other parts of America's first oil-producing hinterlands. Independents first emerged as serious challengers to the Rockefeller empire on the strength of the epochal 1901 gusher in the Spindletop field near Beaumont, Texas. In Dochuk's re-telling, the Moses leading the way to Texas's enduring association with black gold was a reformed ne'er-do-well named Patillo Higgins. Higgins, like many of the other independent oilmen whose stories Dochuk explores, was moved by the post-millenarian, evangelical faith that Dochuk terms "wildcat religion."

For most of *Anointed with Oil*, Dochuk hitches his analysis of the wildcatting evangelical independents who squared off against the Rockefellers, the Standard family of firms, and the Rockefeller's philanthropic empire to just

two families—the Stewarts and the Pews, both of which had begun chasing dreams of oil-fueled wealth and salvation in Petrolia during the Civil War era. The brothers Lyman and Milton Stewart, though, sold out to Rockefeller as he tightened his grip over western Pennsylvania's oilfields in the 1870s. Convinced that the Lord could not have confined his subterranean blessings to Petrolia alone, the Stewarts headed to California. After more than a decade of largely fruitless quests, they finally hit it big and made a fortune as the patriarchs of Union Oil. In 1908, Lyman Stewart used some of this fortune to found the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University). With growing zeal, he continued to divert his proceeds to religious causes. Most notably, Dochuk identifies Stewart as the anonymous donor who paid for the publication of hundreds of thousands of copies of *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915). This multi-volume tract soon lent its name to “fundamentalism,” the branch of evangelical Christianity that the Stewarts and other practitioners of Dochuk's “wildcat religion” have vigorously championed ever since.

During these same years, J. Edgar Pew and his cousin J. Howard Pew had jumped into the Texas oil game with both feet. The Pews, like the Stewarts, came west licking Rockefeller-inflicted wounds. Standard Oil's “cutthroat tactics” (p. 124) had brought an older generation of the family to ruin's brink. In the 1890s, the Pews relocated the center of operations for their Sun Oil Company from Ohio to east Texas. Soon after Patillo Higgins hit the first of Spindletop's many gushers in 1901, J. Edgar Pew closed on a 42-acre parcel of land outside of Beaumont. This foothold, together with the refinery that Sun built outside of Philadelphia and the transformation of a Great Lakes iron ore ship into the first tanker in the Sun fleet, gave the Pews an early lead in the race to provide storage and transportation services for what was swiftly becoming the most productive oilfield anywhere in the nation. Already by 1903, Sun commanded about one-tenth of the petroleum shipped out of east Texas—a propitious development, since Americans were also relying on oil not just for lubrication and lighting, but increasingly for motive power, too. Having carved out a durable niche for themselves in the oil industry, the Pews, like the Stewarts before them, began to pour money from Sun into fundamentalist churches. They also added a page to the Stewarts' playbook by diverting a growing share of their proceeds into conservative political causes.

The plot of *Anointed with Oil* tracks the epic battles that majors and independents, proponents of the civil religion of crude, and enthusiasts for wildcat religion subsequently waged against one another across economic, religious, and political realms. By the early twentieth century, this struggle was rippling beyond American borders. Abroad as at home, Dochuk's main players understood the contest between them in expansive terms, with stakes that ran all the way from the worldly to the cosmic. The sweep of Dochuk's analysis eventually encompasses everything from missionary work (especially

in East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America) to international development campaigns (particularly through the Rockefeller Foundation and other large philanthropies funded by petro-dollars—the original NGOs). *Anointed with Oil* also makes extended forays into overseas initiatives ranging from *fin-de-siècle* China to twenty-first-century Iraq and Syria.

That Dochuk devotes so much attention to the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel, comes as no surprise. His rationale for delving into the rise of petroleum extraction in Alberta's tar sands is less predictable but understandable nonetheless, given the pivotal role that J. Howard Pew and Sun played there (besides, Dochuk explains in his book's introduction that the questions he explores in *Anointed with Oil* grew out of his own experiences as a young Albertan constantly confronted with the confluences of petroleum, evangelicalism, and conservatism in his native province). More puzzling is Mexico's near-total absence from the book, despite the leading role that U.S. firms played in launching that nation's petroleum sector.² Then again, Dochuk's neglect of several of the more important and influential independent oilmen (J. Paul Getty and Armand Hammer come to mind) together with the limited attention he devotes to major oil companies beyond Standard's ken, shows that his main interest is really the protagonists on which *Anointed with Oil* pivots rather than the two larger categories of operators that he takes these protagonists to represent.³

Dochuk's wide-ranging research and his incisive integration of previously disconnected strands of historical scholarship nonetheless insure that *Anointed with Oil* mostly delivers on the seemingly extravagant promise of its subtitle, "How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America." This is, above all, a useful book: useful because it works so hard and so well to arm its readers with a cogent but nuanced grasp of how a latticework of economic, cultural, religious, and political divides rooted in the oil industry have deepened and spread between the late nineteenth century and the present day.

That a book as long, intricate, and rich as this one eludes summary is at once a testament to the scope of Dochuk's accomplishment, and a direct result of his historical approach. From start to finish, *Anointed with Oil* remains ceaselessly biographical, humanistic, and tethered to the tight timescale of traditional political history. Virtually every page hinges either on a single character or, more rarely, on two or more conflicting or conspiring characters. Dochuk's nose for interesting people, his grasp of the secondary literature, and his zest for archival research enable him to eke plenty of mileage from this approach. In addition to the Rockefellers, Stewarts, and Pews, Ida Tarbell and Rachel Carson—muckraking birds of a feather who grew up several generations apart in western Pennsylvania—make extended appearances, as do the Arabist William Eddy, the evangelist Billy Graham, King Ibn Saud, and a whole succession of presidents, senators, premieres, and other politicians.

For my money, though, the most interesting figure among the hundreds who populate *Anointed with Oil* is Jake Simmons, Jr. Texas-born and Tuskegee-trained, Simmons carved out a fascinating entrepreneurial niche for himself. As he hustled through east Texas, rounding up oil leases from black farmers, he noticed a keen desire among these “nouveau riche black Texans” for a “better quality of life,” so Simmons bought land in Muskogee County, in Oklahoma’s Creek Nation, then began touting it as a refuge from the “lynching and disenfranchisement” that bedeviled African American communities in east Texas (p. 242). In 1938, Simmons would file what Dochuk claims was “the first court case against segregated schools,” (p. 243), *Simmons v. Muskogee Board of Education*. A quarter century later, with the Kennedy Administration intent on extending the U.S. oil industry’s reach to the newly created nations of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, Simmons announced: “I am going to Africa to get me an oil concession” (p. 393). In the years that followed, the oilman—who had cut his teeth brokering deals between black landowners and white wildcaters in east Texas—gained a well-deserved reputation for sealing agreements between African governments and Phillips Petroleum. Thanks to Simmons, the Oklahoma-based firm led the way in tapping into the incredibly lucrative reserves beneath several million acres of oil concessions Simmons secured in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Dochuk’s narrative and analytical reliance on biography bears ample fruit. *Anointed with Oil* holds the reader’s interest because its author has a knack not just for telling people’s stories, but for using these individual human lives to embody and vitalize historical arguments that easily could have become abstruse had he instead depended on institutions, organizations, ideas, or other larger formulations to carry his story. By the time I reached the last of *Anointed with Oil*’s four parts, however, the costs of Dochuk’s methodology became harder to overlook. Abstractions such as energy, other-than-human forces such as anthropogenic greenhouse warming, and even institutions such as the huge, hierarchically organized firms, globe-spanning philanthropic organizations, and churchly networks that might justifiably occupied center stage in this study all get short shrift. When they appear at all, they invariably do so only through the experiences, ideas, or machinations of one of Dochuk’s characters.

As *Anointed with Oil* reaches the 1970s, the author’s approach starts to undermine his otherwise-admirable efforts to track the long-running struggle between wildcatting independents and mainline majors. The problem is that *Anointed with Oil*’s emphasis on biography—its insistence on harnessing its story and its argument to human individuals rather than to collectives, assemblages, systems, or more-than-human entities such as climates or ecologies—unintentionally succumbs to a premise shared by libertarians and evangelicals both: that the unfettered individual figures as the sole agent of

historical change (excepting, of course, the Almighty Himself) on a planet that the Creator expressly placed at humankind's disposal.⁴

Dochuk's cast of individual human characters moves through *Anointed with Oil* along a temporal scale not just shaped but largely dictated by political time as scholars have long conceptualized it. This tendency, though typically latent in the book's first five chapters, becomes increasingly dominant across the book's final seven chapters and its epilogue, which are organized around the presidential administrations, party realignments, and "long" decadal rhythms that characterize the structure of so much post-war historiography. Within the constraints he sets himself, Dochuk works masterfully. He introduces new characters with crisp flashbacks, helps readers glimpse why the most important of these figures matter to his larger story by providing clear signposts to the roles each would subsequently play, and reconciles other timelines—particularly those pivoting on Arab nationalism, Israeli state-building, and Islamic fundamentalism—into his overarching structure with hardly a seam left showing.

This way of treating chronology makes *Anointed with Oil* a must-read for anyone looking to infuse petro-Christianity into their U.S. survey lectures; it even makes the book an intriguing alternative to a traditional textbook on the post-Civil War era. Yet for all its benefits, Dochuk's approach to chronology ends up narrowing the insights the book offers on the recent past—and hence on the present and impending future, too. This is because *Anointed with Oil* operates almost entirely on the tight timescales of "*histoire événementielle*"—"event-centered," "episodic" or "instantaneous" history, the limitations of which were most famously critiqued by the French *Annaliste*, Fernand Braudel.⁵ The book's accomplishments in the register of event-centered history are massive in scope and convincing in quality. Yet together with the mode of human biography that constitutes *Anointed with Oil's* primary methodology, the book's central concern with political parties and electoral politics eventually hems in Dochuk's analysis in two key respects.

While earlier portions of *Anointed with Oil* often feature an illuminatingly long view on matters of change and causation, the book's final portions begin to adopt the under-analyzed, one-thing-after-another approach of a chronicle. Braudel acknowledged that episodic history was necessary, but he took pains to explain why he found it insufficient. Events, he argued in his enormously influential criticism of "instantaneous history," could generate plenty of heat but little light. He went on to decry how the "deceptive smoke" produced as event followed upon event "fills the conscious domain of today's people, but it doesn't last long, disappearing almost as soon as one sees its flame."⁶ Lost in the smoke or overlooked in the all-too-human propensity to turn our gaze toward the flame was what Braudel called "the whole thick reality of history," a history that he saw as unfolding along multiple and intertwined timescales.⁷

A small example hints at the problems that arise as Dochuk jettisons the attentiveness toward longer views and deeper histories that he deploys so compellingly before reaching the 1960s and '70s. Consistent with his emphasis on political time, as well as with his biographical humanism, Dochuk does not introduce anthropogenic climate change until page 540, in the conclusion to his final chapter. His vehicle for finally broaching the subject is Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989), published more than a century after carbon dioxide, methane, and other products of American petroleum extraction and consumption began reinforcing greenhouse gases that had accumulated in the atmosphere over the preceding centuries and millennia due to livestock production, deforestation, and—most important of all—coal combustion.

The common, perhaps even inevitable tendency among scholars writing recent history to lose sight of what Braudel eloquently described as “the multiple and contradictory temporalities of human lives” leads Dochuk into a second problem.⁸ For most of the book, he succeeds marvelously at showing, as his subtitle promises, “How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America.” Toward the end, though, the arrows of causation increasingly begin to switch direction; by and by, the important argument about Christianity and crude as determining factors in American domestic and international politics that Dochuk advances so winningly up through the 1970s begins to peter out.

Part of the problem is that in carrying his story through 2017, Dochuk essentially cuts himself off from the types of archival sources that he employs to such effect in the book's analytical and narrative heart. On the strength of such documents, *Anointed with Oil* manages to portray the Stewarts, Pews, and Rockefellers with depth, nuance, and empathy. Without analogous sources, the modern-day proponents of “wildcat religion” seem especially shadowy and underdeveloped. By the epilogue, moreover, Dochuk's perspective on crude and Christianity proceeds almost entirely from the top downward, in contrast to the interludes of history-from-the-bottom-up that complement his treatment of majors and independents in Petrolia in the 1870s and 1880s and east Texas in the 1900s-1930s. More and more focused on elite actors to the exclusion of workers, laypeople, and voters; hampered by the discretion that these elites continue to exert over their own archives as well as the records of the oil companies, lobbying organizations, and philanthropies they have controlled; and constrained to the 24-hour news cycle's relentless pace in which event follows upon event, the end of *Anointed with Oil* comes close to treating petro-religiosity as object rather than subject: as a by-product or beneficiary of other developments rather than a driving force in contemporary politics and political culture.

It is a testament to Dochuk's ambition, the lengths to which he goes to fulfill it, and the overall persuasiveness of this important new book that *Anointed with Oil* will undoubtedly leave many other readers in a questioning state of

mind, too. Its many strengths show just how much the scholarship on oil history has matured in the decade since that talk at the Huntington first led me to survey the literature on the subject. No less important, the book reminds us of a point that Braudel advanced so influentially more than six decades ago: we need both the blow-by-blow of episodic history, and the slow burn of the *longue durée*.

The challenge is to simultaneously balance and integrate our study of the conscious actions undertaken by individual human beings in the course of hours, days, and months with research that takes into account a fuller context of agents and forces—singular and collective, human and more-than-human—that have made and remade the world across an array of timescales. This insight, born of Braudel's impulse to root historical studies in the solace of continuity, becomes more urgent still in this fracturing age of rupture, with the Earth and its inhabitants hurtling through the fraught transition into a new geological age.⁹ Although *Anointed with Oil* sidesteps the enormously daunting task of historical remagination that petroleum's past and present are urging upon our planet's collective future, Darren Dochuk's path-breaking study of the unfolding entanglements between crude and Christianity nonetheless does vitally important work by illuminating the histories that have led adherents of wildcat religion to resist the inconvenient truths that we must confront together, if at all.

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1. Dochuk's typology here differs from the norm; confusingly, *Anointed with Oil* extends the latter label to Texaco and Gulf, which Dochuk acknowledges swiftly became "majors" because of their size and vertical integration, as well Sun, which is usually considered a "mid-major." See 130.

2. Dochuk offers a succinct summary of oil development in Mexico from the 1900s to the 1930s on p. 190; thereafter, though, Mexico appears in only two instances: the interactions between Lazaro Cárdenas and the missionary Cameron Townsend on pp. 254–255, and those between Nelson Rockefeller and the same Mexican president on pp. 298–299.

3. Hammer and Occidental appear in a handful of sentences on pp. 396 and 475. Getty does not appear in the book's index.

4. Part of my critique here builds upon Walter Johnson's discussion of the "liberal individual" in slavery studies in "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003), 113–124. The rest is inspired by several decades of scholarship in environmental history, animal history, and the history of science and technology, including Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 197–222.

5. Braudel, in turn, attributed his use of the term to Francois Simiand—and, ultimately, to Paul Lacombe. "Event-centered" is my attempt at literally translating the term; the other two variants come from Immanuel Wallerstein's recent translation of the essay in which Braudel offered his fullest meditation on temporality in historical thought. Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*," trans. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Fernand*

Braudel Center Review 32 (2009), 174 (first published as "Histoire et sciences sociales," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13 [1958], 725–753).

6. *Ibid.*, 174.

7. *Ibid.*, 175.

8. *Ibid.*, 173.

9. For a political, cultural, and intellectual—but not an environmental or materialist—take on this broader development, see Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (2012). For Chakrabarty's explication of the necessity for so transformative an historical vision, see "Climate of History." Braudel directly addressed the mutually constitutive relationship between continuity and rupture when he remarked that placing "the upheavals of the eighteenth century and of the industrial revolution in which we still find ourselves" in the context of the preceding "four or five centuries." Across these stretches of time, he continued, "some characteristics were constant and remained unchanged while all around them, amidst other continuities, a thousand ruptures and upheavals were transforming the face of the world." Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences," 181.