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## Review of *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* by Jon F. Sensbach

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their own paranoid fantasies, conjuring up the equivalent of a “missile gap” in psychological warfare, a literalization of the “battle for men’s minds.”

Proceeding via a mixture of extended analysis and one-page potted summaries of a very wide range of popular and literary texts, Seed documents how all kinds of everyday social processes such as advertising and psychotherapy came to be seen as coercive indoctrination akin to brainwashing. The chapter on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *The Bell Jar*, for example, is particularly strong, offering a clear account of the use of brainwashing metaphors in those novels, a dimension of these and other books that now seems obvious (until you realize that few critics have called attention to it in any detailed way before). Drawing on Timothy Melley’s *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (2000), Seed shows how the American ideology of possessive individualism provides the fuel for the repeated panics about any erosion of individual agency and identity that litter postwar popular and literary culture. Like Taylor, Seed concludes that even if brainwashing never actually existed in quite the way it was imagined, then faith in an inviolable self is also a fantasy.

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Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005, £14.95). Pp. 302. ISBN 0 674 01689 0.

In what may be viewed as a prequel to Jon Sensbach’s first study of Afro-Moravians (*A Separate Canaan*, 1998), *Rebecca’s Revival* is an illuminating book that traces the embryonic beginnings of black Christianity. Sensbach’s title figure, Rebecca, was the product of mixed parentage and began her life in Antigua as a slave. She learned to read, was granted her freedom, and became a Moravian missionary to the slave community of St. Thomas, which had experienced a prolonged but unsuccessful uprising of Amina slaves only a few years before her work began. She later traveled with her first husband on a pilgrimage to Germany. After his death, Rebecca and her second husband established a mission on Africa’s Gold Coast, where they both died under the shadow of Fort Christiansborg.

Moravian missionaries were openly critical of the slaveholding class when they first arrived in St. Thomas, and they encouraged converted slaves to use Christianity to invert the existing power relationship on the plantations. However, imprisonment and mob violence forced them to tone down their rhetoric, and missionaries like Rebecca refused to attack the institution of slavery because they believed that it was ordained by God. They emphasized the redeeming power of Christ’s word rather than the liberating implications of universal spiritual equality. While Moravians were the first and most effective evangelizers of slaves, they were reluctant to become involved in the international movement against slavery and the slave trade. However, Moravian emphasis on spiritual equality also offered black women like Rebecca access to spiritual power and authority. Women had their own meetings and leadership core, and they served as evangelicals to other women. Rebecca may

have even been the first black woman ordained in Western Christianity when she was made a deaconess in 1746.

Some readers may be surprised at the lack of African influence on black Christianity. Though Sensbach discusses the centrality of African systems of mentorship and kinship to the incorporation of new Africans into the black church, he does not examine how African cosmological or eschatological beliefs fared when exposed to Moravian Christianity. Nevertheless, this is both a thoroughly researched and elegantly written book. Sensbach marshals manuscript sources from Pennsylvania, Denmark, Germany, and the West Indies, navigating the same multilingual challenges that Rebecca and other missionaries faced in the Atlantic world. *Rebecca's Revival* demonstrates that the most important actors in the spread of black Christianity were not white missionaries, but black evangelicals themselves.

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Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004, £16.50 paper). Pp. 320. ISBN 0 8223 3394 5.

Frank Capra had a motto he quoted many times in his career and later in his memoirs. “The audience is always right,” he said, suggesting that individuals (he meant critics) were no replacement for the reactions of a crowd when watching a movie. Capra’s faith in his audience was such that he maintained literally hundreds of letters from fans throughout his life. As well as the usual plaudits and requests, however, this fan mail offered many alternative perspectives on his films, and showed the way images and values were transposed onto an audience that for the most part regarded the director as the last word in 1930s social and cultural commentary.

Capra deposited the letters with the rest of his papers at the Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and in his new book, *Regarding Frank Capra*, Eric Smoodin has done a remarkable job of exhuming a huge chunk of this correspondence. Smoodin demonstrates the worth of the exploration not only for a re-examination of Capra, but as material that contributes to an evaluation of American cinema in the first half of the twentieth century, and the state of film studies as an academic discipline thereafter. In previous work the author has alluded to the connections audiences had with specific Capra films, notably *Mr. Smitib Goes to Washington* and *Meet John Doe*. But in this book Smoodin widens his gaze to consider, in a broader sense, the impact of society upon Capra in particular and cinema in general. He addresses questions of social space, of gendered publicity emanating from stars and texts, and overall constructs a persuasive theoretical framework for “the architecture of reception.”

Implicit within this argument is the relationship between the corporate and the artistic, between the pressure for commercial product and the need to establish oneself as a creative force, a dilemma Capra never quite shook off in his career. More explicitly Smoodin asserts that Capra’s films, and the assessments they invited