

All that said, textbooks offer entry points to broader and deeper discussions. Generations of guitarists heard first the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, then worked backward to Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson, discovering the sources of what they initially admired. Today we are overwhelmed with carefully crafted visuals, on PDAs and computer screens and newsstands. This volume helps us to understand what they mean and where they came from.

GRANT ALDEN was the founding coeditor and the art director of *No Depression* magazine. He lives in Morehead, Kentucky.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Broomsticks and Politics

Reviewed by A. J. Loftin

IF WITCHES EXISTED, JOHN Demos would have found them.

He has been hunting them for the better part of five decades, first as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Harvard in the 1960s, then as a professor of early American history at Yale. In 1982 Demos published a long scholarly book, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*, intended to be his last word on the subject. Yet he could hardly refuse the talk-show invitations that came every Halloween, nor those 3 AM calls from people fearing demonic possession. So when editors at Viking asked him to write another book on witch-hunting, this time aimed at a general readership, Demos took the bait.

The result is a text of admirable if breakneck concision, slowed only by the gratuitous insertion of italics in certain sections (as if to warn: *scholarly analysis ahead*) and clunky headings such as “*Mentality*. How did witchcraft reflect, and contribute to, the prevailing worldview of its time?” Demos briefly considers the early Christian martyrs, tortured and killed by their countrymen, then races through the next 1,500 years of witch-hunting in Europe, only slowing down when he revisits his

THE ENEMY WITHIN:
2,000 Years of
Witch-Hunting in
the Western World.

By John Demos. Viking.
318 pp. \$25.95

area of expertise, colonial America. He reviews the last three decades of Salem witch trials scholarship, which has tried to explain the bizarre behaviors of accused and accuser by looking to science and medicine: Poisoning by ergot (a fungus hosted by cereal grains) could have caused hallucinations in the accused; epidemic encephalitis might have caused convulsions and other symptoms in the “victims.” But mostly such theories have failed the test of time, Demos says. He speculates instead that economic and religious challenges to the Puritan way of life, combined with the constant threat of Indian warfare, created “an overwhelming and highly toxic climate of fear.”

At last Demos ventures somewhat timidly into more recent centuries, to discuss the Chicago union-organized Haymarket riots of 1886, the “Red Scare”—era of Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, and the daycare “abuse” cases of the last 30 years. He zooms in on the sensational Fells Acres Day School case of the mid-1980s, in which child-care providers in Malden, Massachusetts, were accused and ultimately convicted of sexually abusing their young charges, though many believed they were innocent. “Malden to Salem is barely a dozen miles,” Demos observes, as he considers the characteristics common to both witch hunts: “A panic atmosphere builds. . . . A sense of the demonic . . . serves as the animating core. The judicial system is immediately and fully engaged. . . . Intense, prolonged interrogation assumes central importance. . . . Legal and moral precedents are tossed aside. . . . Children are centrally positioned [to] play a role that has, in effect, been assigned them by their elders.” He concludes: “And now I believe that I truly *have* said my last word on witchcraft history.”

Certainly Demos is entitled to stop writing about witchcraft. But this book, far from putting the matter to rest, simply invites more speculation. In treating modern instances, Demos repeatedly asks, “Was it a witch-hunt?” bringing the intellectual scruples and caution of a scholar to bear on his answer. But a general reader doesn’t need to be convinced. Hell, yeah—close enough. What we want to know is why we are still hunting for witches, whether at daycare centers or union meet-

ings or mosques. Why, given all our liberal education and supposed psychological literacy, do we continue to project our fears onto other people? If we can't help ourselves, can't some safeguards be put into place to protect society's scapegoats? Or does society need the ritual—the threat, the war on terror, the bloody retribution and fleeting absolution?

A much scarier book could have been written—a book only a witch might enjoy.

A. J. LOFTIN is a writer and editor living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Showdown at Dry Gulch

Reviewed by Geoff Manaugh

ANY BOOK ABOUT DAMS AND water politics in the American West risks comparison to a daunting predecessor: Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (1986), the standard reference for an unusually complex field. Indeed, the breadth and moral conviction of Reisner's argument against the irrational excesses of western water use has yet to be matched. Nonetheless, in *Dead Pool*, James Lawrence Powell achieves something that Reisner did not: force of concentration.

Powell, executive director of the National Physical Science Consortium, focuses on just one dam: northern Arizona's Glen Canyon Dam, constructed starting in 1956 on a remote stretch of the Colorado River. *Dead Pool* zeroes in on the astonishing complication of factors—legislative, topographic, and meteorological—that shaped the dam's creation. While the bulk of the book describes the rapid growth of the Bureau of Reclamation, a branch of the U.S. Department of the Interior founded in 1902 to help irrigate the desert West, it also reminds us of the strangeness of the water-world in which the western states now thrive.

DEAD POOL:

Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West.

By James Lawrence Powell. Univ. of California Press. 283 pp. \$27.50

In the 1950s, the Colorado River, flowing from the Rockies to the Gulf of California, presented an irresistible target for industry lobbyists, politicians, and federal hydrologists inspired as much by the experience of the Dust Bowl as by the electrical and agricultural needs of a westward-moving population. Hoover Dam, née Boulder Dam, had proved, upon completion in 1935, that the canyons of the West could be dammed; the Grand Canyon itself, incredibly, had only barely missed being flooded in the early 1950s.

The upper basin states—Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming—needed their own reservoir to help protect against the future thirst of California, and the federal government responded by building Glen Canyon Dam. Behind it is Lake Powell, an artificial sea capable of storing 27 million acre-feet of water and, after spinning through the dam's eight 155,000-horsepower turbines, generating more than four billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year.

The construction of Glen Canyon Dam was not an act of collaborative hydrology. The Colorado River states are, in fact, in stiff competition with one another, and Powell forecasts dire consequences for their inability to agree on future water rights. "As the hydrologic system falters," he suggests, outlining a scenario in which long-term severe drought returns to the West, "how might the legal system respond?" His short answer: It won't. A regulatory labyrinth of unbelievable proportions has emerged, functioning, like all true bureaucracies, at the precise intersection of illogic and inertia, and helping to produce absurd irrigation schemes worthy of a Monty Python sketch. (As Powell understatedly points out, "Reclaimed lands had often proved to be worth less than the money it took to irrigate them.")

While *Dead Pool's* environmental politics are relatively easy to parse, it's unclear what Powell advocates. Radical conservation of local water resources? Wholesale abandonment of the West? Central—that is, federal—control over the rivers of the western states? Or a states-based approach to water management? These are fundamental questions involving water rights, taxation, agricultural