microcosm of one site, Murphy takes us to many sites. New York, Miami, of course; but also (to name but a few) Alexandria, Virginia; Washington D.C.; New Britain, Connecticut; Oakland, California; even my city, Austin, Texas. This multi-sited approach suits the study of the botánica universe, which elides political, temporal and religious boundaries. At the same time, Murphy allows his subjects to reveal, at length and in depth, the role of botánicas in their lives. Through their words, we are given intimate glimpses into their struggles, their personal relationships with protective spirits, their understandings of the cosmos—in short, their lived experience of African diaspora spirituality.

Murphy weaves these informants’ statements into a clear and comprehensive account of the extraordinarily complex and diverse spiritual world of the botánicas. His account makes this world understandable; one gets the sense of it all as a system of symbols, flexible and dynamic. Equally important, his account is evocative, vivid. Mostly this is attributable to the prose; Murphy writes with empathy, sensitivity, and a deep sense of the poetics of African diaspora religion. But credit also must be given to the numerous photographs, almost all taken by Murphy himself. They give visual referents for the places and people, and they speak in a language of color, form, and shape that words cannot capture but is essential to the world of the botánicas. Murphy’s photographs provide wonderful documentation, as well, of the visual creativity and aesthetic sense of practitioners.

This meticulously researched book will speak to a variety of audiences. For specialists, it makes a singular contribution to the rich literature on African diaspora religion in the New World. Botánicas are crucial sites for healing in these communities; public health experts, medical practitioners, and medical anthropologists will find this book most interesting, and useful. Murphy’s book would be germane to any number of undergraduate and graduate courses in anthropology, religious studies, and cultural studies. Most of all, this book should appeal to anyone who wishes to take a vivid, poetic journey into the world of the botánicas.

Lindsay Hale, The University of Texas at Austin


Jennifer Snook’s book is the first sociological study that surveys the eponymous religious group, American Heathens, through the methods of ethnographic fieldwork. American Heathens provides both an overview of the various discourses, practices, and social networks that constitute
the Heathen current in the United States, as well as analyses of that current in terms of social constructivist theory.

The book examines five areas which are pertinent and topical to any scholars seeking to research Heathenry in America: the issue of boundary maintenance between American Heathens and competing mainstream religions and new religious movements; the dialectics of personal revelation and textual authority which manifest as the competing polarities of the reconstructionist discourse within the Heathen current; the challenges posed by the rising dominance of computer-mediated communication in the formation and maintenance of Heathen communities; the problems faced by American Heathens in navigating questions of gender identity between pluralities of competing historical and modern discourses; and the question of racial and ethnic identity in the construction of modern Heathenry as an “ethnic folkway.” In general, these topics are all treated with great care and nuance — yielding insightful analyses of facets of a new religious movement of increasing global importance that has not previously been explored by any within academia.

Of special value are Snook’s discussions of the patterns of conversion in Heathenry, particularly insofar as it concerns the formative nature of anti-Christian and anti-Wiccan discourses in Heathen identity formation and boundary maintenance. Additionally, both issues surrounding the competing discourses around Heathen notions of “unique personal gnosis” and “the Lore”; as well as the aforementioned sections on CMC and gender make significant contributions to the body of knowledge concerning the academic study of Heathenry. Although Snook herself identifies as Heathen—a fact that results in the book’s methodology being partly autoethnographic—she generally maintains sufficient critical distance and methodological agnosticism such that the resulting work is largely free of the insider biases that such methods sometimes display.

There is one principal area where American Heathens falls short: the genealogy of the folkish discourse within contemporary American Heathenry. In this regard, Snook analyzes the folkish discourse on metagenetics that Heathen leader Stephen McNallen developed during the 1980s and 1990s—“in which he argues that religion is not merely ancestral and inherited as a cultural system but genetic and therefore unique to each ‘people.’” She asserts that heathenry is genealogically rooted in the “loss of privilege and dominance” and “loss of cultural identity” experienced by white Americans during the latter half of the twentieth century (16). Later in the book, Snook expands this argument, stating that the folkish discourse “reflects white American resentment of a perceived loss of status and privilege in modern, multicultural society, in particular, divisive political times” (151).

The problem with this analysis is that it seems to ignore the genealogical history of the folkish discourse in eighteenth and nineteenth century German Naturphilosophie. It was Johann Gottfried von Herder
who is credited with originating the concept of the *volksgeist* (folk spirit) or *volksseele* (folk-soul) as a phylogenetic soul shared in common by members of an ethnic group. This discourse flourished among successive *Naturphilosophen* who followed in Herder’s wake. Perhaps the most important link in this genealogical chain is Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), through whose writings—in particular, his “Wotan” (1936) essay—nineteenth-century *völkisch* discourses were transferred into their contemporary American context to form Heathenry’s folkish discourse. However, the book’s endnotes do not reference key nineteenth and twentieth-century primary references, nor any of the relevant secondary authorities. The sole reference relating to the *völkisch* current given by Snook (163, ff. 88) is a portion of the introduction to Mattias Gardell’s *Gods of the Blood* (2003), which itself is not a study of the original late nineteenth and early twentieth-century *völkisch* movement but rather the late twentieth century neo-*völkisch* movements.

Snook does provide a brief, and entirely unsourced, overview of the *völkisch* movement’s history early on, noting that it “set the stage for a second wave of interest in Germanic antiquity during the countercultural activities of the late 1960s and early 1970s” (7). Nevertheless, the consequences of this relationship go undeveloped throughout the remainder of the book. Had the author explored these genealogical histories of the *völkisch* movement, this reviewer feels that her conclusions regarding both the origin and present context of the folkish discourse in American Heathenry would have been significantly different—insofar as it appears that the discourse’s genealogical roots in eighteenth-century Germany preclude it being reduced to a reactionary response against perceived losses in status and privilege by white Americans in the post-war period.

A remaining criticism that this reviewer had with *American Heathens* was the lack of a bibliography. Although bibliographic details are provided for individual citations in the “Notes” section at the book’s end, there is no enumerative bibliography of the consulted materials provided within the book—which makes it difficult for readers to check individual citations (as the citation method used provides partial citations for all instances of a given work after its initial occurrence), to discern if a particular reference was included, and to get a holistic overview of the consulted references which form the book’s foundation. This reviewer hopes that a second edition of *American Heathens* would address both the more complex criticism regarding the genealogy of the folkish discourse as well as the simpler formal matter of adding a bibliography.

These issues aside, the academic merits and complete novelty in terms of the subject of *American Heathens* makes it required reading for any scholars engaging with contemporary Neopaganism in general or with Heathenry in particular. Moreover, the book will likely appeal to scholars of new religious movements and contemporary esoteric
currents that either intersect or run parallel to the currents treated in *American Heathens*. Furthermore, the volume will likely have a degree of cross-over appeal among Heathens themselves. Any university libraries with holdings in these areas would do well to acquire this volume, and the release of a reasonably priced paperback edition by the publisher puts it well within the grasp of individual scholars as well.

Christopher A. Plaisance, University of Groningen


The constituent parts of the Religious Right have been a hot topic of conversation in academic circles, and Julie Ingersoll’s latest book tackles the theological contributions of a little known but very active group—Christian Reconstructionists. Often mentioned in conjunction with the various forms of Christian fundamentalism, the Reconstructionist movement has a very different worldview, and Ingersoll carefully teases apart its complexities. While fundamentalists are often characterized as pessimistic about current events and the fate of the world, Reconstructionists instead look forward to a time when, once people become convinced of their interpretation of the gospel, the state will all but wither away and society will embrace a notion of theonomy—rule by God’s law. Combining this theological optimism with a healthy dose of American exceptionalism, Reconstructionists anticipate a United States in which Americans understand themselves as having made the choice in favor of Dominionism—“bringing all areas of life under the lordship of Jesus through the application of biblical law” (28)—rather than secularism. Indeed, the originator of Reconstructionism, Rousas John Rushdoony, and many of his successors maintain a strict dichotomy: one either lives under the Christian god’s directives, including those prohibitions and punishments listed in both Testaments, or one rejects the Christian god altogether and lives in a secular world. No middle ground exists for them.

Ingersoll, who married into and divorced out of “one of the Reconstructionist families” (x), is at her strongest explaining the reasons why Reconstructionists are not fundamentalists and pointing out when their ideas have spread beyond their own community. She has done considerable research into Rushdoony’s writings and those of his heirs, including Gary North, Doug Phillips, and Gary DeMar, offering a rich picture of the ways in which Reconstructionists have defined themselves and how they seek to reshape society. Her methodology combines history, religious studies, and sociology, and her familiarity with Rushdoony’s