“Diddy In A Buggy”: A Rapper, The Amish, and The Fresh Air Fund

Posted on August 9, 2018 by tobinms

Tobin Miller Shearer

Hip-hop artist, rapper, and producer Sean “Diddy” Combs reminisced about his experience with the Fresh Air Fund (FAF) during an interview with talk show host Jimmy Kimmel on August 1, 2018. Combs described his time among the Plain people as a “beautiful” experience that formed his identity. He recalled milking cows, picking berries, riding buggies, and eating large Amish meals, all of which – in the absence of electronics – “taught him how to just relate with each other.” He concluded his reminiscence with a “shout-out to the Fresh Air Fund.”

Combs sounds nostalgic in the interview despite Kimmel’s repeated attempts to poke fun at the experience. Rather than a means to obtain cheap child labor – Kimmel suggested that the Amish had “somehow bamboozled this charity into sending you there to work” – Combs mentioned how often he thought about his host family and how they had contributed to his life. When Kimmel joked that Combs should hitch a horse to his Bentley to recreate the buggy rides of his youth, the rap star and actor stayed serious, emphasizing that he “truly appreciated” his summer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Combs’s memory holds only positive associations with his summer hosting venture.

The juxtaposition of a world-wise, very wealthy, hip-hop artist with the world-wary, frugal, hymn-singing Amish captured the media’s attention. In addition to dozens of accounts on entertainment portals ranging from People magazine to Billboard.com, the venerable BBC News also reported on the exchange five days after the interview appeared. Always media savvy in their fundraising efforts, the FAF tweeted out a link to the Kimmel interview within forty-eight hours.

The story told by Combs echoes the prevailing narrative about the Fresh Air Fund. It is a tale composed with nostalgia, sung without discord, resonate with racial harmony. Since its founding in 1877, the Fund has brought city children to the country for summer stays – most of them of the one- to two-week variety. Combs purported two-month stay is much rarer. Beginning in the 1940s and 50s as white flight resulted in increasingly black and brown urban centers, the Fund shifted from sending white ethnic children from the city to white rural hosts to sending African-American and Latinx children from the city to white rural hosts. As told in thousands of glowing newspaper accounts generated by the Fund for distribution to regional newspapers, happy hosts welcomed happy children to rural and suburban communities invariably happy to host them.

There was no room for another narrative in the Fund’s accounts. Nostalgia from public figures like tennis champion Arthur Ashe, crooner Bing Crosby, comedian Jimmy Durante, actor Lauren Bacall, and singer Ethel Merman only offered positive testimonies.
And the Amish and Mennonites frequently starred in those accounts. A 1958 press release praised the Mennonite family who hosted a family of five fresh air boys from New York City for an off-season Christmas visit replete with a feast of turkey and stuffing, sweet pickles, peas, carrots, cranberry sauce, plum pudding, fruit cake and ice cream for dessert. *Summer’s Children*, a 1964 promotional film produced by the Fund, featured Mennonite and Amish families. In 1976, the Fund’s executive director Lisa Pulling noted that Mennonites made Pennsylvania the “most popular place to go” other than New York itself. That same year, newspapers across the country featured a column by popular writer George Will in which he praised the Amish for their Fresh Air hosting in glowing terms every bit as nostalgic as those offered by Combs. After describing the “creak and jingle of harnesses, and the clippity-clop of hooves on pavement,” Will described the family of Benuel Smucker in Ronks, Pennsylvania, who “have no truck with modernity, including electricity, a fact which does not bother their guests from the Big Apple — twin eight-year-old black boys.” Combs was far from the only African-American child to have discovered the appeal of rustic, rural havens.

As the burst of interest in Combs’s story makes evident, the prospect of placing urban children of color with pristine symbols of the nation’s agrarian past – scholar and poet Julia Kasdorf refers to the Amish as “whiter than white: innocent, pure, plain—Puritans but without their unhappy edge” – has mass appeal. When placing innocents with innocents, everybody wins. There is no racial loser; no antagonist; only the celebration of borders crossed and friendships won.

However, that formula of doubled innocence did not always balance. Children grew homesick and begged to return to the city. Busloads cheered upon crossing back over into New York City. Neighbors, townspeople, and sometimes hosts used racial epithets to refer to their charges. Accusations of theft abounded. Administrators had to remind the hosts that they were not just getting free labor. Assured that they were getting a vacation, some guests balked at the demands of chores and refused to toil without compensation. Up until the mid-1980s, the Fresh Air Fund paid little attention to screening hosts for a history of sexual abuse even while intensively screening the children for STDs and other communicable diseases. The narrative related by Combs is, at the very least, more complex than he suggested.

As much as I was fascinated to hear Combs talk about his Fresh Air experience, it was not the content of the narrative itself that drew my attention. While my research suggests a far more problematic story than the one he told – particularly when the model itself continues to be one-way, short-term, urban-negative, and racially paternalistic – it was the nostalgic way he told the story that I found most gripping.

No matter how hard Kimmel tried to make light of Combs’s reminiscences, he stayed sincere and focused on the positive memories that he held of his time with the Amish. Here was a highly successful entrepreneur whose personal worth tops $800 million, a man who lavishes expensive gifts on his children, a philanthropist who has founded his own program to assist urban youth – one that includes a summer camp each year – and who has given generously to both victims of Hurricane Katrina and students at Howard University. Amid that material success, he harkened back to his time with the Plain people, a group whose lifestyle and commitments seem light years from his own.

But through nostalgia – an emotion defined by sentimental longing and a wistful yearning for better times gone by – Combs made a connection. He saw in his life some measure of charity, hard-work, care for children, and simplicity.
He claimed to have learned those values, at least in part, from the Amish; the experience "helped to make me what I am," he explained in his interview with Kimmel.

Nostalgia is a powerful emotion. Our current president used its appeal to great effect in his most recent campaign. Yet, as was the case with Combs and the Fresh Air Fund, nostalgic appeals often cover over the complexities and underside of history and, in so doing, create a past that never really existed. That’s why the writing and research of history are so critical at this moment. Without a grounding in as much evidence as can be mustered, we risk basing our decisions on fanciful and false presentations of the past.

Combs said in the interview that he would love to know if his host family realized what he grew up to become. Apparently they do, since his sister, who also stayed with the same Amish family in eastern Lancaster County, recently contacted them.

Should Combs talk with his former hosts, I wonder what they would discuss. As is the case in the vast majority of Fresh Air exchanges, long-term relationships are rare, difficult to sustain, and often end when the children enter adolescence. A great deal of evidence shows that white host families are much more reluctant to host teenagers due to the possibility of interracial romance blossoming. Nonetheless, perhaps they would discuss Combs’s efforts to better the lives of other children from the city. Perhaps they would chat about additional memories Combs carries from his sojourn. They might even talk over the ways in which Combs life remains so far from their own.

But, if I had to guess, I would venture that they would spend at least some small measure of their time simply reminiscing about, in the words of Kimmel, the now incongruous image of “Diddy in a buggy.”

Works Cited


“Lancaster Holds Film Premier.” *What’s In the Air*, Fall 1964, 1-2.


[^2]: “Lancaster Holds Film Premier,” *What’s In the Air*, Fall 1964.


Annual Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies Mini-Conference
Posted on April 9, 2018 by JoelHNofziger

APASA mini-conferences are low-key events that provide an opportunity to share your work and get feedback, meet colleagues who have similar focuses, and discover potential collaborators.

THE 2018 ANNUAL MINI-CONFERENCE
Holmes County, OH: June 1, 2018

At the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center (“Behalt”)

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: Friday, April 13th. CLICK HERE TO SUBMIT.

We invite abstracts and proposals for posters, paper presentations, organized sessions, or panels / round-tables.

AFFORDABILITY
In addition to being within closer reach of most plain Anabaptist scholars, the Holmes County location also allows us to substantially reduce the registration fee to $15 for APASA members (and $35 for non-members).

EXPLORE NEW RESOURCES
If you have not had a chance to visit the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center’s new library wing, this mini-conference will give you the opportunity to get acquainted with its materials and research resources. And if you have not seen the Center’s main attraction—the magnificent 360-degree “Behalt” painting of Amish and Mennonite history—this will be your chance.

Registration: Members-$15; Non-members-$35 (payable on-site)

Meals: Meals will be held at local restaurants. Registration fee does not include meals, which is estimated at $10-$20
Lodging: Attendees are responsible for arranging their own lodging if needed. Hotels are available in Berlin, Millersburg, Walnut Creek, Sugarcreek, New Philadelphia / Dover, and Wooster, and advance reservations are suggested due to this being the late spring tourist season.

Will the Amish Vote for Donald Trump?

Posted on October 13, 2016 by JavanLapp

Javan Lapp

As the 2016 Presidential election heads into its final stretch, Americans are once again debating the merits of different candidates. Deeply held beliefs and perceptions of national identity and priorities are spilling out into everyday conversations wherever people meet or work. As the media and citizenry alike watch the political landscape for clues of emerging trends, the Amish have been featured in occasional speculation about electoral allegiances. Because “Anabaptist Historians” probes Anabaptist histories in an effort to connect the contemporary issues to the past, this post will attempt to provide historical context for the question: “Will the Amish vote for Trump?”

Media Interest

Media interest in the question of Amish support for Trump began in May when the Lancaster, Pennsylvania newspaper LNP first ran an article reporting on the creation of Amish PAC, a political action committee run by professional political operatives whose goal was to drive up Amish turnout and support for the GOP ticket. The article noted that this new group was an entirely new innovation "because it is being run by political professionals from inside the Washington Beltway instead of by local party workers or campaigns.” The creation of Amish PAC did not go unnoticed by other media, and several weeks later Politico carried an article entitled “Amish for Trump.” The premise for the article was spelled out rather clearly in the subtitle/explanation line: “Can Ben Carson and Newt Gingrich allies convince this anti-divorce, tech-shunning group to back the boasting billionaire?”

Media attention continued to follow the activities of Amish PAC. In July, LNP reported on the Amish PAC’s launching of newspaper ads and billboards. These ads have been placed in publications read by the Amish and have explicitly targeted Amish and other Plain group participation in the 2016 election. The strategy of these Amish PAC ads was to introduce Donald Trump as a successful businessman who would stand up to political corruption. In August, The Philadelphia Inquirer took notice of the activities of Amish PAC, and US News and World Report carried an article by Kyle Kopko entitled, “Will the Amish turnout for Trump? Don’t Bet the Farm.” Kopko’s article reviewed the research he did with Donald Kraybill analyzing the effort to convince the Amish to turnout for George W. Bush in the 2004 election.

Media attention to Amish support of Donald Trump intensified after Trump held a large rally in western Lancaster County. On September 30, 2016, Trump made held a rally at the Spooky Nook Sports Complex in Manheim, Pennsylvania. The crowd size was estimated at 6,000 people. Although there wasn’t a specific Amish outreach component to the rally in this strong GOP stronghold, Trump was clearly aware that he was in Amish Country as he made note of the tenth anniversary of the Nickel Mines Amish school shooting. Numerous media reports after the rally took note of Amish attendance at the rally, including LNP and Al Jazeera.

Historical Precedent – 2004

Donald Kraybill and Kyle Kopko’s previously cited analysis of the participation of Lancaster County Amish in the 2004 election is a thorough review of a very aggressive effort to use the Amish as a new electoral tool to help boost Republican support in swing state Pennsylvania. The below points are a few summary points from their research:

1. While voting is not anathema to all Amish or forbidden by the Ordnung that governs Amish life, there is a strong reluctance to political participation. This reluctance is tied to communal and theological values and is hard to overcome.
2. The Republican outreach attempts of 2004 were bolstered by strong community advocates and three separate visits Bush made to the area that included direct meetings with the Amish. In these meetings Bush impressed the Amish with humble and folksy demeanor they could relate to and trust.
3. Many Amish identified with key item’s in Bush’s 2004 platform, especially related to traditional values and opposition to abortion and gay marriage.
4. In the fall of 2004 approximately 20.6% of voting-age Amish in Lancaster County were registered to vote. The 2,134 Lancaster County Amish that were registered to vote in 2004 represented a large jump from the 598 who were registered to vote in 2000. Nearly all of them (92.6%) were registered as Republicans. Amish voter turnout in
2004 was 62.9%, meaning approximately 13% of voting-age Lancaster County Amish cast a ballot in 2004. Despite the pre-election rhetoric about the role the Amish could play in a swing state like Pennsylvania, the 1,342 Lancaster County Amish who voted in 2004 was a statistically small number compared to the 144,248 vote margin by which Bush lost Pennsylvania to Kerry.

Kraybill and Kopko also noted that Amish voter registration and turnout percentages were more than double that of Old Order Mennonite groups in the county.

If the historical precedent of 2004 has much relevance to the question of whether Amish will vote for Donald Trump on November 8, we can expect the Amish PAC and politically active Amish to provide the backdrop for interesting conversations in Lancaster County. To expect a large shift in Amish voter participation, however, would be to expect Trump to have far greater appeal to the larger Amish community than Bush did. Now there's a question that history won't be able to answer until November 9.


Posted in Essays | Tagged 2016 Election, Amish | 1 Reply

Shoofly Pie, Pennsylvania Dutch, and the Mennonites

Posted on October 6, 2016 by JoelHNofziger

As American as Shoofly Pie: The Foodlore and Fakelore of Pennsylvania Dutch Cuisine ¹ by William Woys Weaver is many things: it is a detailed look at the foodways among the Pennsylvania Dutch, a commentary on modern culture, and a cookbook. It is scholarly and snarky. It purposely does not focus on Anabaptists, though it does deal extensively with the Amish in popular imagination. Weaver states in his introduction: “In terms of the larger culinary story, the Amish are mostly marginal anyway because the real centers of creative Pennsylvania Dutch cookery were in the towns and not to be found among the outlying Amish or Mennonite communities, even though today the Mennonites have attempted to preempt the Amish as their cultural public-relations handlers in their Amish and Mennonite cookbooks to press for ‘Christian’ culinary values—whatever that may mean” (7). He is also clear that one of his major criteria for the recipes he highlights in the book was to contrast against the “artificial portrait” created by Amish tourism (8).
What Weaver sets about doing in *As American as Shoofly Pie* is to take food as the avenue into Pennsylvania Dutch culture to discuss its identity markers—historic and current—as well as the class dynamics involved, portrayals in popular culture, and the commercially driven conflation of the Amish and Pennsylvania Dutch. He details cooking implements, the “cabbage wall” of sauerkraut defining the borders of Pennsylvania Dutch country, how the Amish imagery became normative for Pennsylvania Dutch tourism, and how the culture is renewing itself. It is an excellent read, both informative and engagingly written.

I use here the term “Pennsylvania Dutch” instead of “Pennsylvania German” for two reasons: first, because that is the terminology of Weaver, and second, because the “Pennsylvania Dutch” have no connection to the nation-state of Germany, past or present. On the second point, I will offer a story from my wife’s family history:

*When Pop-Pop Riegle was a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II, the camp taught German to the POWs. The guards doubled over in laughter to hear the POWs from New York City try to pronounce words with a New York accent. My grandfather, from what I understand, could converse with the guards easily, because he spoke Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch. The German guards asked him why he was fighting for the wrong side. To them, speaking German meant loyalty to Deutschland. For my grandfather, speaking a German dialect was part of his American culture.*

Furthermore, it seems this story is borne out in every ethnography of the Pennsylvania Dutch I have encountered. They all carry a variation of the following: A researcher walks up to some Pennsylvania Dutch women and asks them about how they describe themselves, only to be rebuffed with, “We’re not Pennsylvania Dutch, we’re American.” The Pennsylvania Dutch are an American cultural group consisting of a blend of German speakers, mostly Palatinate and Swiss, who settled together. The eponym “Dutch” has long roots going back into medieval Europe as a term for western German speakers. They can be divided into two broad categories, the Plain Dutch, such as the Amish and Mennonites, or the Gay (Fancy) Dutch, such as my wife’s Lutheran and Reformed forebears.

It is important for Mennonite scholars to remember that Mennonite fish were just one school swimming in Pennsylvania Dutch water. Even though they may have been marginal in shaping Pennsylvania Dutch culture, as Weaver notes, they were still shaped by it. Mennonites all across South Central Pennsylvania were surrounded by people who spoke, ate, and worked in the same ways they did—the majority of them Lutheran or Reformed, but also the Amish, Church of the Brethren, and other plain Anabaptists. As Felipe Hinojosa has noted, place matters—both in space and time, as well as culturally. The Swiss-German strain of the Mennonite experience practiced their faith and promulgated their beliefs not in ethnic colonies but surrounded by a shared culture that itself was distinctive from broader America. Surely this has led to a different way of knowing and living as Mennonites. For this reason, scholars dealing with Mennonite identity must familiarize themselves with Pennsylvania Dutch culture. For its insistence on placing the Pennsylvania Dutch culture within the broader national culture, and his disgust at the conflation of the Amish with the Pennsylvania Dutch, Weaver’s *As American as Shoofly Pie* is an excellent place to start.

2. This is not to say there are no points where I disagree with Weaver. For example, his repetition of Rufus Jones’ claim that the Amish adapted bonnets from Quakers as “common knowledge” (135) is uncritical at best. Moravians are one of the German groups that maintained a markedly different culture than that of the Pennsylvania Dutch.
On Exhibit: Contextualizing Amish Quilts

Posted on October 6, 2016 by Janneken Smucker

In the early 1970s, art enthusiasts began to display Amish quilts from the early twentieth century on the walls of apartments, galleries, antiques shops, and museums, noting how their strong graphics and minimalist designs resembled abstract paintings of the post-World War II period. Prior to the 1970s, no one really had paired the adjective Amish with the noun quilt. Yet with this cultural dislocation, Amish quilts shifted in status from special, heirloom bedcovers, kept folded in chests and treasured as gifts between family members, to cult objects in demand within the outside world. Amish families responded by selling their “old dark quilts,” happy to have extra money that could be split among descendants in a way a quilt could not be, and glad to remove objects now considered “status symbols” by outsiders from their homes. In turn, Amish entrepreneurs began making quilts to sell to consumers, creating a quilt industry that could capitalize on increasing tourism to settlements and the growing fascination with Amish-made bedcovers.

This intersection between the Old Order Amish and the worlds of art, fashion, and commerce is a central tension of my recent book, Amish Quilts: Crafting an American Icon (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013). As I worked on this book, I frequently imagined it as an exhibition, with the objects themselves serving as evidence and touchstones within the narrative. With this mindset, I was thrilled when the International Quilt Study Center & Museum at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln invited me to guest curate an exhibit of Amish quilts. This exhibit, Amish Quilts and the Crafting of Diverse Traditions opens October 7, running through January 25, 2017.

Since the 1971 landmark exhibition Abstract Design in American Quilts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the typical mode of display for quilts in museum settings has been on walls, hung vertically like the paintings to which Amish quilts in particular have often been compared. As I began work translating my research into an exhibition, I struggled to figure out how to simultaneously interrogate the de-contextualization of Amish quilts while participating in the process itself. I did not want to simply hang quilts on walls as they had been for the last 45 years, where too often they appear merely as great works of design, rather than as objects symbolic of the Amish emphasis on community, mutual aid, and Gelassenheit. But what could we do instead that would fulfill the museum’s dual mission of showcasing quilts’ artistry and cultural significance?
All public history requires careful and deliberate communication; it’s intended to translate complex ideas into meaningful and engaging forms. Working with the IQSCM staff, we’ve developed ways to communicate the multiple contexts of Amish quilts. When museum-goers enter the gallery, they will indeed still see quilts hanging on walls. But in the center of one gallery, there will be an object strangely foreign to most quilt exhibits, Amish or otherwise: a bed. My parents, who live in Goshen, Indiana, generously loaned the museum the £ size four-poster rope bed that descended in my mother’s family from our Amish-Mennonite ancestors. Made in the family of Solomon Beachy from Holmes County, Ohio, c. 1840-1860, the bed will be the perfect showcase for an early twentieth-century quilt made by Barbara Yoder.

But the Amish origins of these quilts are not the only context through which I interpret them. The lives of these objects since they left Amish homes are equally intriguing, and I explore them as influential within contexts of art, consumer culture, and fashion. The Esprit clothing company, well-known for its color block designs of the 1980s, was home to a significant corporate collection of Amish quilts which hung on the walls throughout its San Francisco headquarters. We will hang a quilt that Esprit once owned alongside a mannequin dressed in one of my personal favorite objects of material culture—this amazing Esprit vest that in my mind was clearly inspired by Amish quilts.
One Patch/Checkerboard, unknown Amish maker, circa 1900-1920, machine pieced, hand quilted. International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Ardis & Robert James Collection, 1997.007.0469

Espirit women’s vest, circa 1985, United States. Collection of Janneken Smucker
We will also display images of contemporary Amish quilt shops, along with two new quilts made for the consumer market, with designs in clear contrast to the “cult objects” with which art enthusiasts became enamored. I also had the pleasure of attending the Gap (Pennsylvania) Fire Company Sale last March, known locally as a mud sale. We include photographs from this event, which supports the local volunteer fire company, along with quilts I acquired on the museum’s behalf there (not a bad gig — bidding with someone else’s money). The quilts include a white and lavender Dahlia quilt from the mid-twentieth century, complete with intricate lavender hand quilting and ornate fringe—not what we expect from an Amish made quilt, but one of the many styles that have co-existed within Amish communities.

I have relished the challenge of translating my research into this physical form. I hope my thesis—that the craft of Amish quiltmaking has never fossilized, but has been a living, evolving, and diverse tradition, adapted by creative quiltmakers, capitalized upon by businesswomen eager to earn a livelihood, and embraced within both Amish communities and the broader artistic and consumer worlds—comes through. But even if my message is lost, the quilts look great, as they always have, both in and out of context.

I’ve just moved from Wisconsin back to Southeastern Pennsylvania, and one of the things I’d completely forgotten about was the use of a horse-and-buggy logo for regional shorthand. The silhouette, with or without a prominent wide-brimmed hat sticking out, seems like it’s everywhere. And just at the moment when I noticed it, Susan L. Trollinger’s *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia* was dropped into my hands. Trollinger opens with a short chapter for those readers unfamiliar with the religious and cultural history of the Amish, then moves on to frame her argument in Chapter 2. Drawing on precedents in cultural studies (such as Dean McCannell’s *The Tourist*) and those specifically about the phenomenon of Amish tourism (such as Thomas J. Meyers’ essay “Amish Tourism” in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*), Trollinger explains that places such as Shipshewana, Indiana...
and Intercourse, Pennsylvania become mediated spaces at which mainstream Americans (most of them middle-aged, middle-class, and white) can encounter the idea of the Amish.

It is in three such liminal places in Ohio that Trollinger explores in her next three chapters. In each town, she identifies a few larger themes of Amish tourism in general to focus on.

In Walnut Creek, the majority of tourist buildings embrace a Victorian aesthetic outside and in. In Berlin, the architecture is split between the old(e) frontier and the 1950s. Sugarcreek, Ohio, is known for its Swiss Cheese and its annual Swiss Festival in addition to its proximity to a large Amish population. Each of these themes offer an intermediary setting, a stylistic mid-point between the tourists who come and the Amish they come to see. The technology in the tea room in Walnut Creek and for sale in Berlin is not that different from that which the Amish utilize. Mainstream America sees the Amish as trapped in time and it takes entering simulacra of past mainstream Americas for tourists to not be too discomfited by the life of the Amish.

The irony is that it is just that life that they are coming to see in many cases. Trollinger suggests that Middle Americans facing a “time famine” are entranced by the slower pace of agrarian Amish life and that the retrograde gender roles of the Amish are comforting in a time of gender revolution. Tourists who have just been given iPads by their children find comfort in seeing an old apple peeler like the one they used in their youth.

On the whole, Trollinger succeeds in raising interesting questions about the commodification of members of the Amish church by tourism entrepreneurs. For instance, she complicates the idea that this practice is necessarily exploitative. Trollinger cites Roy C. Buck’s argument that Amish-themed tourism insulates the Amish community from mainstream society by directing tourists to a commercialized version of Amish life rather than the homesteads, farms, and schools in which the Amish actually live.

Furthermore, Trollinger opens and closes the book with a conversation she had with several New Order Amish men in Holmes County, Ohio. The men suggested that they pitied the tourists who toured their community because of the awful rushed lives they led. The men relished the opportunity they had to perform a witness to the tourists, to show them that life need not be lived in a frenzy. Thus while the Amish lifestyle is turned into a marketable brand, it also preserves its practitioners’ everyday activities and provides a stage on which they can share their truth with the mainstream.

Yet I wonder how much witness the tourists receive. Retail is at the forefront of Walnut Creek and Berlin, and Trollinger suggests that a large part of the appeal of these places is that visitors can take tools (cookbooks, décor, hand-planers) back to their mainstream lives to capture a little of the slow and simple life and work toward “fixing” their modern problems.

While I find this argument persuasive, I wish that Trollinger had applied the same visual close-reading to some more Amish-adjacent tourist attractions (buggy rides, barn tours, etc.) that she does to the Thomas Kinkade portraits and American-flag bunting on sale next to “hand-dipped” candles and other kitsch. Perhaps in these more “authentic” experiences (even though they are simulacra) there is more opportunity for witness?
As Trollinger described the appeal of the Amish: the slower pace, clear-cut gender-roles, and simple technology, I found myself waiting for her to get to the darker side of such a time-traveling yen. When she talks about the 1950s as evoking an “innocent” time, I think Trollinger soft-pedals a bit. It seems to me that the appeal of the 1950s (and Victorian America, and Ethnic Swiss pride) for middle-aged, middle-class, and white tourists is not “innocence” but “purity.” As in racial purity. Trollinger doesn’t fail to cite statistics that only 3% of tourists to Shipshewana, Indiana are non-white, but I think she fails to acknowledge that the appeal of an agrarian, patriarchal, Luddite existence on the frontier is inextricably tied up with racial homogeneity and a winding back of the clock past the civil rights movements. In the face of changing demographics, racial anxiety is surely just as prevalent in the minds of Middle Americans as any of the other lizard-brain impulses that drive them to Amish country.

Selling the Amish is certainly a contribution to a growing field of semiotic analysis of how the Amish are portrayed. I am confident that this volume will join David Weaver-Zercher’s The Amish in the American Imagination, Valerie Weaver-Zercher’s The Thrill of the Chaste (still the best title ever), and The Amish & the Media (which Trollinger contributed to as Susan Biesecker) as a foundational text.


Posted in Book Review, Uncategorized | Tagged Amish, Heritage Tourism | Leave a reply
First book in Ram chandra Series by amish tripathi (indian author). Scion-of-ikshvaku-English_Amish Tripathi.pdf. Item Preview. remove-circle. Share or Embed This Item. EMBED. Amish-inspired accessories. Dior Homme image. This girl’s bonnet is similar to the ones I saw in the embassy. The minimal side of Amish style. Looking at all the Amish-style photos I’ve now collected, I realise that while I might have my tomboy farm style down pat for the most part – functional trousers (usually from J Crew), my Grenson boots, my old Balmain military pea coat, and an Isabel Marant plaid flannel shirt – I haven’t quite figured out my way to look feminine on the.