

Eileen Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009. Pp. 269. Paper \$19.95.

Eileen Luhr's *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture* is a history of the Christianization of popular culture and suburbanization of evangelicalism during the Reagan-Bush era. Luhr argues that a new emphasis on family values transformed the American religious, political, and cultural landscape in the late twentieth century. This was possible because evangelicals broadened their appeal, which translated into political votes for Christian conservatives; both groups learned valuable lessons about popular culture from Christian heavy-metal bands' experiences with secular audiences. Fifty million white Christian conservatives (twenty to twenty-five percent of the electorate) helped get George Bush re-elected in 2004. During that time more conservative evangelicals held political office than ever before.

In four ambitious chapters, Luhr follows Christian conservative cultural activism from the 1970s through the 1990s. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, parents were encouraged to get involved with radio programming so their teenagers listened to and created their own Christian music. Evangelicals empowered youth leaders who saw themselves as "rebels with a cause" to lead youth groups and encourage

Christian-messaged music (including heavy metal), and fan magazines. Luhr outlines how between 1984 and 1994, Christian heavy metal bands widened their audience by appealing to secular audiences, embracing a theme of spiritual warfare. She relies on hard to find fan magazines or "zines," (photocopied do-it-yourself small circulations magazines) that allowed young people to express their own opinions, to uncover the little-known world of early Christian punk and heavy metal music. (See for example Florida High School students' *Thieves and Prostitutes*.)



The zines rallied the Christian youth around moral righteousness on issues such as school prayer and support for Bible study after school. Luhr then examines how the Jesus Movement in the 1960s and the 1972 Campus Crusade for Christ led to annual crusades, some of which continue today.

Luhr ends the book focusing on how Christian conservatives came to be a powerful political force in Orange County (O.C.), California. Luhr claims that O.C. conservatives in the early 1960s were “marginalized radical political novices.” But by emphasizing family values over specific religious doctrine, conservatives learned they could influence the moderates to vote with Christian conservatives on issues such as pornography, limiting property taxes, as well as fighting gay and abortion rights. In their opposition to gay rights and abortion rights, Christian conservatives masked the degree to which religious values influenced their political views by representing their position as the secular solid “traditional morality” of American individualism while portraying groups supporting gay and abortion rights as “special interests” demanding unfair advantages. In 1978, Christian conservatives were successful in deleting the clause that protected homosexuals from discrimination in housing, employment, and public services from an O.C. ordinance. Since 1990 Orange County’s four-day annual Harvest Crusade shows how evangelicals have utilized youth culture to reach young people and to politicize public spaces. Crusade organizers attracted young people to celebrate the family and the nation through worship, listening to Christian rock bands, and a remarkably large number respond to the nightly altar call to declare their belief in Jesus. At the 1998 event 37,000 people were at the Angels stadium in Anaheim, with an overflow crowd of 12,000 people in the parking lot.

Cultural and modern historians, political scientists and evangelicals will be interested in reading *Witnessing Suburbia*. Since the Christian conservatives’ message appears to be firmly locked on family values, this book will probably be meaningful for some time to come.

*Diana Clarke*

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