A Nation in Conflict attempts equal focus and attention to the various fronts — land, sea, and air — on which the wars were fought. There is much to commend in this. Public memory of the wars tends to focus on the armies fighting on the western front, the navy and air force appearing at strategic moments (the Battle of Britain, D-Day) in the narrative but otherwise rather neglected. It is nice to see a fuller discussion of these aspects of the war in a general history. But there are some difficulties too. The neglect of the other fronts is largely due to the differences in scale — far fewer Canadians were involved in the naval battles of WWI, for example, than in those on land in Europe, and this book’s decision to give equal space to both results in a skimming over of several battles that involved thousands of Canadians, and a detailed focus on the specifications of a single ship, or the boredom of its crew.

The book generally eschews controversy, putting forward limited, careful statements about censorship, the comparative effectiveness of Borden and King as wartime leaders, the Battle of Dieppe, and the aerial bombing campaign. This is fair, especially for a general, introductory text, and offers a good introduction to some of the issues historians debate in a way that should encourage discussion in an undergraduate classroom. At the same time the book does have some difficulties with laudatory language and little lapses into the cliché that stigmatizes military history. Do we really need to hear again about how soldiers “persevered against the odds … throughout the darkest hours of the war” (147). Nonetheless, the book’s comparative focus, wealth of accessible detail and statistics, and clear presentation means that it will be an interesting and useful addition to the classroom and the library of the general reader.

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Between the invention of 16 mm reversal film in 1923 and the 1950s, a diverse, eclectic amateur film culture thrived in North America. Ranging from teenage Tarzan movies to studious travelogues, amateur film developed into what Charles Tepperman calls “a twentieth-century vernacular aesthetic expression that developed at the intersection of popular culture, modernism,
and new technology” (9). In *Amateur Cinema*, Tepperman uses prodigious research in the archives and print culture of amateur filmmaking to mount a rousing defense of a culture too often derided by scholars for being a simple, artless offshoot of home movies. Instead, he frames amateur films as an embodiment of an American pragmatic spirit.

Tepperman breaks *Amateur Cinema* into two sections. The first covers the organization of amateur film culture from Hiram Percy Maxim’s founding of the Amateur Cinema League (*acl*) in 1926 through its dissolution in the mid-1950s. In the second half, he looks closely at an abundance of amateur films from that era, attending to their production, formal qualities, distribution, and more. It is an effectively streamlined approach, if occasionally a bit arid in the first half when the reader might desire a bit more fleshing-out of the films in question. According to Tepperman, the 1930s constituted the “the heyday of amateur film culture,” as *acl* clubs grew from thirteen in 1927 to 173 by 1930 (9). Even employees at Paramount and Columbia studios formed groups.

As technology evolved, including 8 mm in 1932 and then Kodachrome color 16 mm a few years later, amateur film provided fertile ground for experimentation unbound by the commercial imperatives of the Hollywood studio system, and such magazines as *Movie Maker* charted and encouraged this innovation. But ideas of amateur film as facilitating international communication and even peace were challenged by the Great Depression and World War II; as 16 mm film was increasingly enlisted in various aspects of the US war effort, amateur film culture began giving way to semiprofessional documentarians. By the 1950s, not even ambitious amateur experiments with widescreen and 3D could restore the cohesive optimism of earlier years; amateur filmmaking became increasingly perceived as a social rather than artistic activity, and the *acl* withered.

Tepperman tells a nuanced story, acknowledging that 16 mm’s democratization of filmmaking remained limited to the middle class, while the *acl* rested on a race-neutral position that allowed local segregation to persist. He cites a *Movie Maker* article on “Plantation Pictures” that made casual racist reference to “pickaninnies” (184). One assumes there was further evidence of unquestioned white supremacist perspectives operative in the culture that deserve a bit more attention, but in any case, Tepperman does not elide the tacit racial politics of amateur film.

When he delves into the films themselves in the book’s second half, Tepperman shows a consistently keen eye and well-chosen examples (amateur films have not been well preserved, and a filmography appendix of existing ones in archives and online is a wonderful complement to the book). He recovers and carefully analyzes such works as the teenaged F.R. “Budge” Crawley’s *At the Sandpits* (1933), a stylistically inventive
depiction of a family picnic, and the married Delores and Timothy Lawler’s *Duck Soup* (1952), in which domestic life is shown while “patriarchal order is gently mocked” (176). As Tepperman writes, “Moviemaking was understood as a habitual activity and an art form that was woven into quotidian experience” (174).

We see the intersection of recognized names with amateur film here, from experimental luminaries such as Maya Deren and the team of J.S. Watson and Melville Webber (whose landmarks *Fall of the House of Usher* {1928} and *Lot in Sodom* {1932} grew out of amateur film groups), to actor Charlton Heston, whose film debut occurred in a 1941 amateur adaptation of *Peer Gynt*. Yet Tepperman’s focus is rightly on the unsung amateurs who defined this culture, and he makes a point of inclusivity here. Although white men dominated amateur production, he nonetheless highlights ambitious white Chicago amateur Margaret Conneely and African American couple James and Eloyce Gist, makers of *Hell Bound Train* (1930) and two other religious narratives that were shown mostly at Baptist churches. My only complaint here is that a clear queer thread running from one of the earliest surviving amateur works, the all-female-cast *Mag the Hag* (1925), through Watson and Webber and beyond, goes a bit underdeveloped (for that matter, surely pornography, unmentioned here, played some role in amateur film). That said, it is a pleasure to read Tepperman’s thoughtful analyses of all of these understudied works that reflect a “more playful,” and more skillful, engagement with mass culture and the world than has traditionally been recognized (263).

Tepperman claims a particular mode of spectatorial pleasure for amateur cinema, which often reveals its own production but affords enjoyment in the inventive engagement with new technologies. Ultimately, we might read it as a “creative attempt to make everyday life more meaningful and thus to ameliorate the alienation associated with a modern and mass-media-oriented world” (274). It is a bold claim, but by the time Tepperman makes it, he has immersed us in this rich layer of overlooked film history, convincing us of its robust spirit and aesthetic rewards.

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