

GREETINGS FROM UTOPIA PARK
Surviving a Transcendent Childhood
By Claire Hoffman
288 pp. Harper, 2016.

Greetings from Utopia Park is Claire Hoffman's (1977–) painful memoir of growing up poor in a trailer park on the campus of Maharishi International University (est. 1974 Fairfield, OH), and a clear-eyed local history of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) Movement (est. 1957 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi). His Holiness touted to devotees in the midwestern rural intentional community "blissful nonattachment" (14) and "living 200 percent of life" (69), that is, 100 percent spiritual success and 100 percent material success. Group meditation would help usher in the Maharishi Effect. World Peace is within reach. Hoffman becomes a young skeptic, grappling with the divisions in her midst: townie / 'ru (short for guru); rough, free public schools / gentle, tuition-based Maharishi schools; ancient Vedic wisdom / trademarked Maharishi Jyotish with special gemstones and Maharishi Ayurveda with nectars too pricey for the Hoffmans. Feeling alienated yet enmeshed, Hoffman keeps meditating. She attends Columbia University School of Journalism and the University of Chicago Divinity School. With reverence, Hoffman uncloaks Maharishi's brief reign (he died in 2008) and rediscovers his deep spiritual import. To the author, the pomp and circumstance of the TM Movement during its countercultural heyday was a distraction from the TM technique's simplicity, ease, and ultimate gift: it works. TM relieves stress. Hoffman never relinquishes her mantra, only her self-doubt. —Lisa Thaler, 5 March 2022