Book review

Religion is Raced: Understanding American Religion in the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Grace Yukich and Penny Edgell. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2020. vi + 338pp. Softcover, $35 Paper.

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In the nineteenth century, French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville thoroughly discussed the prominent role of religion in American society in his famous book "Democracy in America." Today, Americans are far more religious than people living in other rich countries. Race has also been a crucial social institution in the United States, from the slavery of Africans and the genocide of Native Americans to Jim Crow and segregation all the way to the mass incarceration of Black and Brown people and police brutality. It is remarkable, then, that scholars have paid scant attention at how religion and race intersect in American society and, more specifically, in American politics. Grace Yukich and Penny Edgell have made an enormous contribution to fill this gap by editing a volume about "raced religion" in the United States.

Eight of the fourteen substantive chapters look at the intersection of race and religion in American politics. Their key argument is that "the religio-political landscape [of the United States] is and always has been racialized" (p. 314). The authors of individual chapters occasionally make connections between their findings and those presented in other chapters, which gives the volume an organic character that is often lacking in edited books.

The chapters by Omar McRoberts and Rhys Williams discuss the connections between civil religion and race. A central theme in the scholarship of religion and politics, civil religion has often been understood in normative terms as a set of religious beliefs, values, symbols and rituals

that are integral to how a nation understands itself. Civil religion is supposed to unify a diverse nation, giving it transcendent meaning and purpose and "uplifting its highest common values over particularistic interests and identities" (McRoberts, p. 41). By contrast, McRoberts and Williams argue for a historically-grounded concept of civil religion that allows for variations according to race. In this sense, there are progressive types of civil religion (such as the Black civil religion of the civil rights movement) and reactionary types of civil religion (such as White Christian nationalism). As Ryan O'Leary had pointed out, "American civil religion can incubate a sense of chosenness, which in turn can engender a sense of Christian and Anglo-Saxon (or, more broadly, white-European) nativism" (O'Leary, Ryan. 2016. "From Anglo-Saxon Nativism to Executive Order: Civil Religion and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric." *Politics and Religion*, 9, 771–793). In his study of Black church political mobilization, however, McRoberts does not explain how he selected certain sermons and speeches as representative of the discourse of Black civil religion. It is also unclear whether those discourses actually had the assumed effects of promoting or quelling the mobilization of Black people, something that other scholars might want to explore in future studies.

The chapter by Sikivu Hutchinson is in a way a mirror image of the chapter written by McRoberts. Hutchinson looks at the politics of people of color who identify as atheist, secularist or humanist. After showing how atheist politics has been dominated by White, Democrat-leaning and college-educated males, Hutchinson makes an important contribution by elevating the voices of movements and organizations like Black Atheists of America and the Hispanic Freethought Association. Women of color have played a prominent role in these groups but their participation is hindered by their reliance on social services provided by Black and Latino churches and by cultural notions that "good women" are supposed to be religious. Hutchinson's chapter, however,

falls short of demonstrating how the political mobilization of people of color based on atheism or humanism is different in process or outcomes from the political mobilization by Blacks and Latinos that is simply secular (for instance, trade unions or neighborhood organizations) or religious (such as the Black church). Does non-belief or even active opposition to religion make a difference in the struggle of racial minorities for social justice? Here too, the book opens an opportunity for future studies.

In a chapter about White Christian libertarianism and the Trump presidency, Gerardo Martí traces the lineages of contemporary American conservatism, showing how to "be a White, Republican, capitalist-friendly "Christian"" became "an all-encompassing personal identity sacredly charged as good, right, and true" (p. 29). Building up on previous scholarship on the conservative politics of White American Christians, Martí demonstrates the affinities between free market ideology, the prosperity gospel and White nationalism. His analysis will help readers understand that White Evangelical support to a president that has trespassed so many Christian principles is not so contradictory once you take race into account and that Trump, in their eyes, is a successful businessman who, like them, finds policies against structural racism unnecessary. Of course, the political ideology of White American Evangelicals is still marked by contradictions, such as advocating for limited government while asking the government to promote moral virtues through legal intervention (Lynerd, Benjamin. 2014. *Republican Theology: the Civil Religion of American Evangelicals*. Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press).

Political scientists will also find insightful contributions in the chapters about the social gospel movement, the mindfulness movement, the Asian-American vote, and community organizing by formerly incarcerated people. The chapters by Janine Giordano Drake and Jaime Kucinkas reveal how spiritual movements that are progressive in intentions can actually reproduce

White supremacy. Russel Jeung, John Jimenez and Eric Mar show that Asian Americans, despite being more religious than the average American, increasingly gravitate toward the Democratic Party. According to the authors, the double and intersectional minority status of Asian Buddhists and Asian Hindus helps explain this leftward shift of Asian-Americans over the past few decades. Edward Orozco Flores shows how faith-based community organizing – through the invocation of liberation theologies and public religious rituals like prayer services and music – can shift Black-Latino relations from antagonism to collaboration.

On the whole, those chapters demonstrate that religion and race can intersect in multiple ways in American politics. Depending on the context, religion can reinforce racial divisions, give meaning to struggles against racial oppression, or help bridge racial divides. Those chapters can serve as a springboard for comparative analyses of raced religion and politics. Future scholarship can explore some of the same themes in other national contexts, yielding interesting comparisons and testing the empirical reach of some arguments. In conclusion, the book makes a timely correction to White-centric perspectives on American religion and offers a broad yet in-depth account of an intersectional problem that lies at the crux of American politics.