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Introduction

The purpose of the Biennial Conferences on Religion and American Culture is to bring together scholars in the humanities, social sciences, seminaries, and professional schools who study religion in America in order to discuss the big questions and themes we face in our fields. In 2009 we spent considerable time talking about the promises and challenges of interdisciplinary research. In 2011 we moved on to discuss the changing definitions of religion and culture, and what this means for the types of work we do. Conversations about changes in our understanding of religion— informed by various disciplines—can promote greater cross-fertilization of ideas and best practices in several fields. Our third meeting, in 2013, presented us the opportunity to think anew about old topics, as well as consider new developments in the field. In 2015, we returned to the big questions that shape our work, no matter our disciplinary training—globalization, war’s effects on civil religion and our interpretation of new religions, and competing models of pluralism and secularism.

This year, the meeting highlighted challenges (rising “nones”) and opportunities (digital scholarship) for teaching about American religion, as well as the role of the state, diversity, and cultural production in shaping religion in America. As previously, you will see in these Proceedings, the speakers heeded our call to be provocative, to push further, to debate, to learn together. The highly-participatory audience again threw itself into each session with that same spirit. Sessions were spirited—animated by the shared desire to move the conversations that develop slowly in our books and journals to new levels of frankness and cross-disciplinarity.

We continue to believe that a biennial conference dedicated to new perspectives informed by various disciplines will reinvigorate the broader field of American religious studies. We can and should learn from one another. These meetings help to lay the groundwork for future conversations about how to break down the disciplinary walls that have been erected when cross-disciplinary work is clearly needed as well as to identify when the discrete disciplines offer better understandings of some topics. It is our hope that these conferences will aid serious and sustained conversations among the disciplines and that they help to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, we believe the annual meetings of the national disciplinary-based societies are enriched by this conversation.

The Fifth Conference on Religion and American Culture was held in Indianapolis in June 2017, consisting of a series of roundtable discussions through presentations by top scholars from a variety of perspectives. Nationally known scholars from different backgrounds participated in each session. The panelists sat, quite literally, at a round table in the center of the room, surrounded by scholars on risers so everyone could not only learn from the conversation but also participate in it.

These Proceedings include the papers that were read at the conference. What is always missing in these pages, however, are the lively conversations that marked each session. Indeed, the discussions continued over breaks, lunches, and dinners. As usual, new friends were made and fresh ideas were discovered. We look forward to continuing those conversations in 2019.

We wish to thank a number of people and institutions. First, we are grateful to the panelists who wrote such thoughtful pieces. We asked them to be direct and provocative, and they responded wonderfully. I am indebted to my colleague Art Farnsley, who helped put together the panels and moderate several of the discussions. Joseph Tucker Edmonds and Peter Thuesen also helped to facilitate the sessions. Nate Wynne assisted in each session, as well as between sessions, and posted photographs and updates on social media throughout the conference. Finally, Lauren Schmidt, the Center’s Program and Operations Manager planned and executed the entire conference, as well as the publication of these Proceedings. As with previous Biennial Conferences, we are deeply grateful for the support of Lilly Endowment Inc., which contributed generously toward the costs of the meeting and subvention of lodging costs, along with the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute.

Philip Goff
Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture

Studying and Teaching American Religion in the 21st Century

The Nones

Even casual observers of American religion know that the “None” category has grown rapidly in recent years. How has this measure of religious affiliation affected the study of religion more broadly? How has it changed our perception of the role played by traditional religious institutions? Is there evidence of similar shifts in the past? If it is true that our students are less religious, at least as measured by affiliation and tradition, what does this mean for our ability to teach them about religion?

Matthew Hedstrom
University of Virginia

“We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence.”¹ So proclaimed the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Swedish diplomat and economist Dag Hammarskjöld, as he dedicated the new United Nations Meditation Room in April 1957. Amid the din and bustle of the UN, Hammarskjöld declared, there should be one room, “dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense,” a place, in his words, “open to the infinite lands of thought and prayer.” Noting that the Meditation Room would be used by those of many religions and of none, he described the decorative sparseness of the room—an abstract painting, a large central stone table or altar, the play of light—as purposefully designed around, he said, “simple things which speak to us all with the same language.” In this way, he went on, “there is nothing to distract our attention or to break in on the stillness within ourselves.” Hammarskjöld concluded his brief remarks with a telling metaphor. “There is an ancient saying,” he noted, “that the sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void. So it is with this room. It is for those who come here to fill the void with what they find in their center of stillness.”

Hammarskjöld’s words and imagines—silence, stillness, void—are invocations of absence. Even the presences, the art and the light, are defensive, walls rather than windows. “When our eyes travel … to the front wall,” he said, referring to the interlocking blue and yellow and black and brown geometric forms painted by his fellow Swede, the artist Bo Beskow, “they meet a simple pattern opening up the room to the harmony, freedom and balance of space.” Beskow called his painting Infinity, as if the inner silence it aimed to render on canvas were as deep and dark and unknowable as the infinite void of outer space.

Hammarskjöld’s Meditation Room stands at the center of my current research on the history of the idea of the religion of humanity, especially as embodied in the religion of the United Nations, but also in the religious and political battles about the United Nations. Hammarskjöld himself is fascinating in this regard—he personally designed the Meditation Room in conjunction with an American advocacy group called the Laymen’s Movement for a Christian World, and wrote a spiritual memoir, translated into English as *Markings* and published posthumously in 1964, that became a bestseller in the United States. But for our purposes I hope Hammarskjöld’s account of the Meditation Room might serve as a useful focal point for reflections on the so-called religious Nones. As with the Meditation Room, after all, to speak of the Nones is to speak of an absence, a void, a silence.

And yet also like the Meditation Room, the emptiness of the Nones echoes with loud, haunting presences.

Hammarskjöld, in invoking the language and metaphors of absence, drew on a long and specific history, one he knew well. He was a deeply literate man, culturally and religiously. His call to emptiness, to the void, was not a denial of history but an embrace of it. In this case, the genealogy is quite clear—it begins with the *via negativa*, the apophatic theology of ancient and medieval mystics; Hammarskjöld himself was particularly influenced by the 13th-century German Meister Eckhart. Also in this lineage stand transcendentalist and romantic mysticism—he was an admirer of the wordy American mystic Walt Whitman, for example—but also the silence of Quaker meeting and of Hindu and Buddhist contemplative meditation. Hammarskjöld’s theories of art, like his theology, drew on antecedents, especially in this case the writings of the Russian Wassily Kandinsky, who in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* from 1912 had similarly rooted art’s deepest and therefore most universal spiritual power in pure color and pure form. In Hammarskjöld’s stillness and silence, in other words, we can hear, if we choose to listen, a chorus of history and culture bellowing, or at least murmuring, amid the soothing Scandinavian decor.

Like Hammarskjöld’s Meditation Room, the Nones of contemporary American religious demography are an absence marked by presences. In fact, I think in Hammarskjöld’s vision for the Meditation Room we see much of what characterizes the Nones today, in broad terms at least—both make welcome the spiritual, the secular, the pluralist, the cosmopolitan, the atheist and agnostic, the transient. When studied in the particular, in a concrete historical instantiations such as the UN Meditation Room, these abstractions can be limned, weighed and measured, historicized and narrated. But what are we as scholars, and especially as historians, to do with a generalization like “the Nones”?

Every talk about the Nones I have ever heard asserts, at some point, something like, “but of course the nones are not none—they are not nothing.” Yet we can only find the not-nothingness within the Nones when examining particular historical and cultural formations. There is no common nothingness, or common presence amid absence, that unites the Nones. So why do we still use the term, if all it classifies is absence?

The most obvious answer, it seems to me, is that “Nones”

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is a category of lament, a term rooted in what the historian David Hollinger has called Christian survivalism, which is his characterization of the usually implicit bias in American religion scholarship that evaluates all phenomena based on how they contribute to the health and well-being of institutional Christianity.² Seen in this light, what matters about the Nones is their usefulness as a kind of radioisotope, measuring with ominous Geiger-counter clicks the quickening decay of American Christianity. But if we are to think this way we must acknowledge that a None is a None only if we take religion to be something specific and knowable and historically solid—and, most importantly, something humanly and Americanly normative. Human beings are religious, according to this way of thinking, and American human beings are especially religious. To be a None is to be not those things—and therefore not fully American, or fully human.

For this reason, I am done with the Nones. In fact, if we are to take the Nones themselves seriously—and aren't we supposed to do that with our subjects?—we must dispense with the category that defines them only according to the very thing they reject. If the rapid religious disaffiliation of recent decades is to teach us anything as scholars of religion, it is that we cannot continue with business as usual, to normalize religion, or at least to normalize normal religion.

Of course, we must continue to talk about churches, past and present, and mosques and synagogues and temples and the people who care about what happens in those places. Religion has not disappeared and will not. But we need a richer affirmative vocabulary to describe our emerging reality and, especially, its historical antecedents. “Spirituality” and “secularism” are good starts, and these are the frameworks that most inform my project on the UN. Hammarskjöld regularly referred to the UN as a “secular church,” a term that nicely captures both presence and absence in historically sedimented layers. I hope to excavate these layers, digging down through the religion of the UN into its foundations in the liberal dream of a religion of humanity.

Recall again Hammarskjöld's words as he dedicated the Meditation Room. “The sense of a vessel,” he said, “is not in its shell but in the void... It is for those who come here to fill the void.” If the great growth of the Nones is to teach us as scholars anything, it is that the sense of American religion is to be found not only in the vessel but in the void, and it is our task to fill the void.

Luckily, I do not have answers to any of these questions,

even my own, but I look forward to the diagnostic possibilities in your conversation.

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2. See David Hollinger, “After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity,” in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18-55.

Ariela Keysar

Trinity College

The scientific study of religion has been altered by the increase in the share of Americans professing no religion. Scholars are grappling with the mounting evidence that the most religious Western population, that of the United States, has become less Christian and less religious. National data from different sources—the General Social Surveys (GSS), the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) series, and the Religious Landscape Surveys (Pew) -- have shown a major decline in Mainline Christian denominations and a rise in the number of Americans who distance themselves from religion (nones).

The rise of the nones has forced scholars to develop new theory as well as new tools of analysis. It has helped broaden the field by inducing researchers to draw on adjacent fields such as psychology. The topic has attracted a new generation of young scholars, who have contributed to a wave of books and articles on secularism, atheism, and the non-religious.

New Theory

Some scholars are not ready to declare an end to American exceptionalism, the theory that Americans are uniquely religious. They have proposed new theories attempting to explain why people are distancing themselves from organized religion. Briefly:

- Privatization of religion—the concept that Americans are as religious as ever but are less likely to express their religiosity in public;¹
- Secularization of all public school systems in the United States with the Supreme Court rulings in 1962 and 1963 that Bible readings and organized prayers in public schools were unconstitutional;²
- Rejection of religious authority linked to revulsion over church scandals;³
- Political distancing from the extreme religious right;⁴
- Pluralism--American religious diversity, it is claimed, undermines the vitality of religious communities.⁵ Religiously diverse states, such as Oregon and New Hampshire, are less religious as compared with Mississippi, the most religious and most religiously homogenous.⁶ The American free market of religion⁷ seemingly also creates a free market of no religion;

- The liminal phenomenon—standing on the threshold of organized religion. Liminals, when asked about their religion, either step in by declaring a religious preference or step out by opting for no religious preference.⁸ Lim et al. hypothesized that part of the explanation of the recent increase in the share of Americans with no religion is that people with a liminal orientation were more likely to choose

“no religion.”⁹

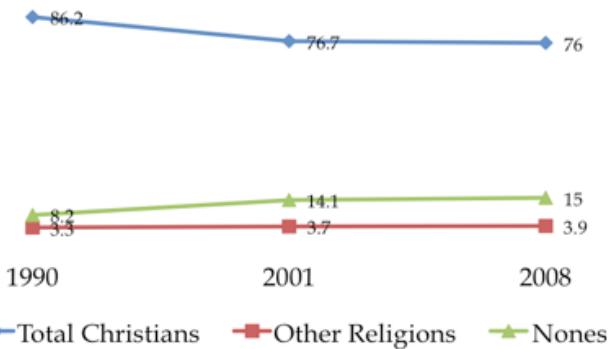
- Internal migration— mingling with other religious groups as people move out of their ethnic enclaves and homogenous neighborhoods into diverse communities in the suburbs;¹⁰

- Breaking of traditional religious boundaries resulting in inter-marriages.¹¹ Interfaith correlates with no faith¹² and with secular socialization and upbringing, as parents opt to raise their children with no religion to minimize family conflicts.¹³

New Data

It is not only the theoretical study of no religion that has expanded. Empirical research has taken new directions as well. The rise of the nones might remain a disputed trend even today were it not for representative national samples that were big enough to show conclusively the changes in religious identification. The studies were not conducted in order to detect secularization, but that in fact was one of their most important findings. Here is the value of the ARIS series with 113,713 adult respondents in 1990, 50,281 in 2001, and 54,461 in 2008.¹⁴

Religious Identification of the U.S. Adult Population (%)



Source: American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) series

Validation and corroboration by various sources are essential. Thus while the ARIS series demonstrated the rise of the nones in the 1990s, Pew corroborated these findings, showing an increase in the religiously unaffiliated from 16% of the adult population in 2007 to 23% in 2014.¹⁵

New data sources confirmed that self-reporting of religious behavior was strongly biased toward the socially desirable.¹⁶ In the United States, the percentage of people

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who report having attended services in the last seven days has hovered around 40% since the 1930s. These findings have been contrasted with lower rates in Europe, Canada, and Australia.¹⁷ It now appears that American respondents presented themselves in keeping with the traditional ideal in which religious worship used to define Sunday. Using actual counts of attendance, rather than self-reports, Hadaway, Marler and Chaves suggested that a realistic figure for weekly attendance would be about 23% of the population.¹⁸ One solution to the problem of over-reporting is to rely on time-use surveys, where people record all their activities—religious and non-religious—each day of the week.¹⁹ The average American spent a total of 34 minutes on religious activities on Sunday based on analyses of time-use surveys during 2003-2007. Americans spend more time on socializing, relaxing and leisure on Sundays than anything else. Thus, data documenting how people use their time illuminate the secularization process undergoing in the American society.

New Tools/Measurements

The ARIS surveys rely on an open-ended religion question, “What is your religion, if any?” This approach offers respondents the opportunity to name, in their own words, their religious group. The subjective self-identification produced 100 choices. It also allowed for a refined differentiation between the various secular groups, namely atheist, agnostic, and ‘nothing in particular,’ all of which Pew’s Religious Landscape Surveys lump together as religiously unaffiliated.

The open-ended religion question approach has helped fill the void in statistical evidence on the rise of the *nones*, showing that since the end of the 20th Century more Americans have opted to self-identify in non-religious terms. The rise of the *nones* has taken different forms in other countries. As Zuckerman et al. assert, “Secularity is far from monolithic; what it means to be secular and ... how [it is] expressed ... [differ] from culture to culture.”²⁰

The vocabulary of the field continues to evolve alongside the measurements. “*Nones*” itself is a neologism, albeit one that has rapidly gained currency. “Cultural” has come to be used to describe people who remain connected to a religion without subscribing to all its tenets, as in “cultural Jews” or “cultural Catholics.” The language remains impoverished in one important respect: Secularity continues to be described as an absence of religiosity, rather than as a thing in itself; it is the shadow, not the light.

New Analysis

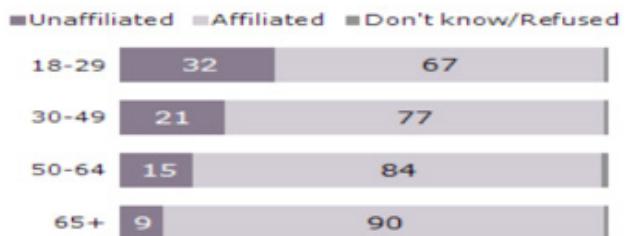
Sociologists of religion often measure religiosity along three dimensions, known informally as the three B’s—belonging to or identifying with a religious group; religious behavior, such as membership in a congregation and attendance at religious services; and belief in God. New analyses break down the population of the non-religious in terms of their positions along these three dimensions.

One of the consequences of the growth of the “*nones*” is that as the group expands it becomes more complex and variegated ARIS (2008) and Pew (2014) consistently show that not all religious “*nones*” are nonbelievers. In fact, the majority of Americans without a religious affiliation say they believe in God. When U.S. “*nones*” were asked a question regarding the existence of God, 24% said, “There is a higher power but no personal God” and 27% said, “There is definitely a personal God.”²¹ Some “*nones*” engaged in religious practices: 20% prayed daily; 9% attended services at least monthly; and 13% even said that religion is very important to them.²²

Is there inconsistency between what people say and what they do? Perhaps. In the United States atheists are a distrusted segment of society.²³ Thus understandably, only a small fraction of Americans declare themselves as “atheists.” When asked an open-ended question, “What is your religion, if any?” only 0.7% of adults in 2008, a slight increase from 0.4% in 2001, said “atheist.”²⁴ At the same time, more Americans admitted lack of belief in God: 2.3% believed “there is no such thing” (an atheistic answer), while 4.3% believed “there is no way to know” and 5.7% were “not sure” (agnostic expressions) in 2008.²⁵

* If it is true that our students are less religious, at least as measured by affiliation and tradition, what does this mean for our ability to teach them about religion?

Religious Affiliation by Age



Source: Aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, January-July 2012.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Keysar

Pew showed that a third of American adults under 30 have no religious affiliation. The generational religious gaps are striking: only 9% of the older generation would describe themselves as “nones.”²⁶

Young Americans of the digital cohort are connected globally to their peers, primarily on social media.²⁷ Consequently they are exposed to secularization processes in other countries. Thus, teaching and learning about religion ought to take into account local as well as global perspectives of worldviews. The Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) project is an international study of this digital cohort across 13 varied cultures. The project employs mixed methods: qualitative interviews utilizing Faith Q-sort (FQS) as well as survey data exploring the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) developed by Shalom Schwartz and associates.

Today’s students are certainly less religious. A national survey of American college students that we conducted from Trinity College in 2013 showed that one-third of the students professed no religion. Interestingly, the students were divided among not two but three distinct worldviews: religious, secular, and spiritual.²⁸ Our survey shows that each of the three worldviews is attached to a distinct outlook on theological, philosophical, scientific, public-policy, and political issues. Without a doubt, this diversity among young people is challenging and is creating tensions inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

Secularization is a process. The rise of the nones offers us a lesson in social scientists’ division of labor. Sociologists say secularization is caused by mobility, both spatial and social; education; and urbanization, which weaken ties to communities and traditions. The consequences are the decline of religious commitment and the fragmentation and privatization of belief systems.²⁹ Psychologists, in contrast, construct a process of secularization whereby humans no longer interpret misfortune as caused by gods, and where people cope with natural disasters and disease without tying them to moral calculus.

As scientists, we cannot limit ourselves to just one mode of investigation. The rise of the nones is a complex phenomenon bridging religion, psychology, and sociology, and thus demands multiple modes of investigation. Quantitative components, such as random samples of the population, are crucial, but so are qualitative components that produce insight beyond the scope of any scripted survey. This requires division of labor among collaborating

social scientists with different expertise. One component enriches the other.

On the quantitative side, longitudinal studies are especially valuable. By tracking the same individuals over time, rather than taking snapshots of the population, they can help determine cause and effect and help disentangle cohort effects from age effects. They help answer the question of whether secularity is something people “grow out of,” or a characteristic of a generation that persists as the generation ages. We used a longitudinal design in the mixed-methods Longitudinal Study of American and Canadian Jews Raised in Conservative Synagogues, which started in 1995 and followed up Americans and Canadians from middle school to high school to college (Keysar and Kosmin, 2004).

The rise of the nones has enlivened the scientific study of religion, forcing scholars to think again about seemingly settled questions and to develop new tools of inquiry. For me, it has been an intellectual journey.

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Christel Manning Sacred Heart University

How has the growth of Nones has impacted the study and teaching of religion in America? I come to this question having spent the last decade researching people outside of religion. I also identify as a None. From this vantage point, one important impact of None growth is the emergent subfield of Secular Studies. In the last decade we have seen the establishment of new professional associations, conferences, journals, book series by academic publishers, even university departments on Secular Studies. Secular studies takes seriously the idea that people can derive meaning, moral order, and community from sources other than religion (which is why many of us reject term None and its implication of lack). Secular Studies also explores diversity within the None category (rather than lumping everybody who isn't religious together) and its various organizational manifestations (though most people who identify as secular do not affiliate with related organizations).

But not all Nones are secular—which leads me to a second, broader impact of the None phenomenon. It challenges us to reevaluate what we are doing in Religious Studies, both in terms of how we define religion and in terms of methodological approaches we take to studying and teaching it. While this challenge can be frustrating, I think it is overall a good thing.

The term “none” comes from survey research, when people respond to questions about their religious preference, identification, or affiliation by selecting “none” or “nothing in particular.” The increase in number of people who respond this way is generally taken to indicate that Americans are becoming less religious. But are they? That depends on what they think religion means. Our use of the term None assumes that we all agree on what religion is (a unified historical organized tradition) and that it can be studied in certain ways (usually by examining texts or by asking people questions about their identification with, beliefs and participation in such organized traditions). Those assumptions are problematic.

Religious studies has proceeded largely from a Christian model of what religion is. The 19th century European thinkers who became the founding fathers of the field defined religion in terms of their own experience of it. To scholars like Tylor, Frazier, Freud or Marx, religion meant belief in god or supernatural beings and following rules set by those beings. Durkheim added symbol, ritual and community but he still called it church. Weber distinguished church and sect, priests and prophets, but Christianity remained the norm

to which others were compared. Inclusiveness was about fitting other traditions, like the Lakota in North America or Hindus in India, into these categories rather than dismissing them as something other than religion. The 20th century brought alternative definitions that embrace pluralism and the intertwining of culture and religion. Scholars like Geertz, Evans-Pritchard and Said began to question imposing Western models on non-Western religions and called for formulating categories rooted in local populations being studied. More recent thinkers like Asad and McCutcheon even question the very concept of religion as something that exists separately from other aspects of culture.

While post colonial critiques have had tremendous impact on the academy (e.g., topics presented at conferences and papers published), they have yet to be fully embodied in how we teach religion in the classroom. Textbooks on religion are still organized in terms of historical tradition and by categories like scripture and ritual, as are the syllabi in the scores of small and medium sized colleges that offer courses on religion.

The Christian framework also continues to permeate our research methods, especially when it comes to sociology of religion in America. While we've seen more research on immigrant religion, a 2015 review of 40 years of research in sociology of religion found that studies of Protestant Christians still predominate. Even when we study non-Christian religion, we continue to measure religiousness in terms of Christian categories such belief in god, affiliation with a single unified tradition, or attendance at services. It's not just research in US (which is, after all, mostly Protestant) but international research that is conducted this way (the World Values Survey is one example), which can seriously distort our understanding of religion in places like China or Japan. Scholars have paid more attention to the fluidity of affiliation (switching, liminality), yet affiliation is still used as primary indicator of religiousness. There have been efforts to study material religion, embodied religion, and religious experience, but it remains more difficult to get funding for these types of usually small qualitative studies.

I believe (hope?) that the rise of Nones will give a boost to some of these new ways of studying religion. Studying Nones quickly reveals the limitations of conventional definitions of religion. When I began researching Nones more than a decade ago, I assumed most of them would be like me: agnostic/atheist types. Instead, I found tremendous diversity within None category. Yes there are those who are secular, but there are many others who claim None label.

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Some are unchurched believers; they hold conventional religious beliefs in god, engage in conventional religious practice like prayer but reject institutions. Some choose None because they have a pluralist orientation and don't identify with only one religion. And some are just totally indifferent to either religious or secular worldviews.

I met secular Nones who were passionate about their atheism and participated regularly in on-line discussions and occasionally in on-the ground gatherings. Their secular worldview has become a functional substitute for whatever religion they left behind. I met spiritual Nones who aren't sure what they believe but participate regularly in Buddhist chanting, light a menorah in December, and celebrate solstice in June. I also know some Catholics who are totally indifferent to their tradition, don't believe in god, never attend church but still identify as Catholic. Who is the real None?

To make things more complicated, people's orientation shifts over time, especially when they start a family. An atheist participates in church services for the sake of his wife or children. A secular Jewish couple never attend services but they do Passover dinner with extended family and send their kid to Jewish Sunday school so they can have a bat mitzvah. Are these people religious or secular? It also matters where you live. I learned that Nones living in the so-called Bible Belt or other localities where Evangelicalism dominates the public culture felt embattled. They would talk about joining the Unitarians or the local Humanist society as a source of community and support to raise their kids, while None parents who live in places like New England, where religion is more private, had no such concerns. Should we conclude that the former have become religious while the latter have not?

Studying Nones also reveals limitations in our research methods. Studies of religious people can recruit members of a particular church, but this approach doesn't work for Nones. Even when they are deeply committed to a secular philosophy like Humanism they typically do not affiliate with a related organization. When we frame questions about religion in terms of supernatural belief, attendance at organized religious events, and affiliation with institutions, but these are not what's important to the people we are studying, then our results will be distorted. Perhaps because I am myself a None and also because I'm inclined towards qualitative research, I realized that such questions were inadequate. We need to pay attention to other kinds of beliefs and especially to behaviors, to look at what happens in the home not just in some institutional setting, to take

seriously the personalized worldview, what Bellah called Sheilaism, that is too often dismissed as non-serious. The diversity among Nones I described above remains invisible without that.

The growing presence of Nones will shape our teaching as well. Young people are less religious than any other age group (some 33% of millennials claim no religion), and they are increasingly open about it (even at the Catholic university where I teach). This situation offers both challenge and promise. When more of our students were conventionally religious, we could assume they had some basic understanding of categories like scripture or worship or ritual or story or priest or church, which made it easier for them to identify and apply these categories to other religions. But that pre-knowledge often limited their understanding of these traditions. A common example in my own classroom is the students' fixation on religion as belief, especially belief in gods, leading them to equate Buddha with a god, or to assert that atheists don't believe in anything. When students have no religious background, I may need to spend more time explaining what religion is. But carrying less baggage can also free them to look with fresh eyes at the phenomena we call religious, to ask questions rather than making assumptions, to help all of us gain a better understanding of what religion and secularity is in all its forms.

Redefining religion and reassessing our research methods is a difficult balancing act. Conventional definitions and measures of religion may exclude and distort non-Christian and non-religious worldviews and ways of life. But concepts like belief, ritual, or congregation also give us a common language so we can talk about what is religion and what is not. We need to include more categories arising from the experience of those studied to the repertoire measures of religion we currently impose on them (what some call emic vs. etic definitions). Yet theorizing always require some level of generalization and without ideal types it can be difficult to engage in comparative work. While religion may be a Western analytical construct rather than a "thing in the world" that can be universally recognized as such, I am wary of dispensing with it altogether. If we decide that religion does not exist, then the drive towards corporatization and professional education that dominates contemporary American universities will surely eliminate the departments many of us work in. More importantly, religion is very real for millions of people, including secular individuals, so eliminating the category may be just as arrogant as the Christian hegemony that produced it. Instead of a "repeal and replace" approach, we should refine and expand how we study our common subject, perhaps by articulating a broader concept such as "worldviews and ways

of life” that could incorporate the varieties of both religion and secularity.

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Studying and Teaching American Religion in the 21st Century

Digital Methods

Many fields have been affected by the rise of digital methods. To what degree have new methods for conducting or disseminating research changed the field? Do greater changes seem to be on the horizon and, if so, what should we expect? What is the nature of such changes—access by more people, access to more data, opportunities to broaden scope, ability to layer information, creation of new sorts of community? Do changes in methods portend communication difficulties within fields, either between and among generations or between and among scholars who use different methods? If so, are these difficulties qualitatively different from the past or just a different version of perennial issues?

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Nineteen-forty-nine saw one of the more curious collaborations in the study of religion. That year a young Jesuit priest named Roberto Busa managed to secure an audience with Thomas J. Watson, Sr., the founding CEO of International Business Machines—or, as we all know it, IBM. Busa, a recent seminary graduate, had recently completed a dissertation on Thomas Aquinas that saw him hand-write over ten thousand notecards documenting the saint's use of the word "presence." In order to find patterns in the twelve million other words Aquinas wrote, Busa realized he might need some kind of machine assistance. This is where Watson came in. Where IBM had perfected the use of computers to conduct numerical calculations, Busa proposed that linguistic analysis could also be automated by breaking down language into binary units that a machine could sort, parse, and algorithmically explore. Watson, remarkably, agreed and by 1960 he had set up a lab for the priest where Busa oversaw sixty cassock-clad Jesuit computer programmers who used IBM's punch card technology to build what came to be called the Index Thomisticus. Initially released in fifty-six printed volumes, the Index went on to become an early adopter of CD-ROM technology before switching over to a web-based platform that remains actively developed to this day.¹

Busa's work was groundbreaking. His index was the first fully functional database of human language, which was a necessary first step in the creation of those markup languages that facilitated the development of the World Wide Web. When he died in 2011 at the age of 98 tech journalists eulogized Busa as a prophet of hypertext, an innovator who foresaw the possibilities of our Web 2.0 world—the John the Baptist to our lord and savior Tim Berners-Lee (the primary developer of HTML).²

But Busa's work is also important in that it pioneered modes of inquiry that have become central to disciplines across the humanities. His was the first "digital humanities" project, a rigorous work of academic research that both employed and adapted digital technology for the express purpose of advancing scholarship. From his Index has emerged a whole genealogy of methods and tools whose offspring include digital archives, text encoding projects, data visualizations, network analyses, thick maps, and a host other projects or approaches that can be broadly described as works of digital scholarship. Indeed, Busa's impact among digital scholarship is so renowned that the Alliance of Digital Humanities named its lifetime achievement award in his honor and made him its first recipient.³

While Busa is widely known as a groundbreaking digital humanist, the study of religion has yet to fully embrace the digital humanities. Perusing the pages of the leading digital humanities journals returns only cursory treatments of religion, while a search in the study of religion's flagship journal returns not a single reference to digital scholarship. In contrast to other major professional organizations, those that govern the study of religion have yet to issue guidelines for the evaluation of digital scholarship, peer review the digital work that already exists, or recognize digital innovation with some kind of prize or award. As Ithaka S+R, the research and development arm of the nonprofit organization that developed JSTOR, recently noted in its report on the changing research practices of scholars in the study of religion, "Religious studies scholars' ongoing lack of awareness of and engagement with digital research methods, including those associated with the digital humanities, reflects major structural barriers to methodological innovation within the discipline..."⁴ If Busa really is an oracle who foresaw our contemporary digital moment, then it appears he is a prophet recognized by every house but his own.

This is not to say that important digital work is not being done. In 2015 I had the privilege of co-authoring a report on the impact digital technology is having upon the study of religion for the Social Science Research Council titled *Religion, Media, and the Digital Turn*. Given what we knew about the lack of discussion in traditional outlets of scholarly communication, my co-author Hussein Rashid and I assumed that this would be a study of absence. To our great delight and surprise, however, we found over 160 digital projects exploring the contours of religious life. These projects employed nearly every digital method available, from the digitization practices pioneered by Busa to the use of 3D technology to recreate lost religious worlds. But in the interviews Rashid and I conducted with two-dozen project directors, many individuals reported that they felt their digital work was less valued than other kinds of scholarly outputs.⁵

Discussions about digital methods are often conversations about our unsettled present cast as debates about the future. Those who make the case for digital scholarship often find themselves burdened with having to answer for the impact digital technology is having upon the liberal arts more broadly and its relationship to such trends as the decline in humanities majors, the rise of STEM fields, and the reallocation of university funds toward laboratories.⁶ Even the prompt for this session asked us to comment on

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how digital methods will “affect” the field (not promote or advance)—as if digital humanities are like tech start ups out to disrupt the storied industry of scholarship. But as the work of Busa and the 160 other projects I’ve documented make clear, digital methods have long been a vibrant part of the study of religion. Perhaps the question then is not so much what the digital futures of religious studies might look like, but how the field’s present might change if it fully embraced its digital past.

In lieu of such predictions, then, I’d like to conclude by offering three reflections on what this imaginary digital present might look like by way of the work of Roberto Busa—a virtual reality if you will.

First, in this imaginary digital present there would be a widespread recognition that what counts as scholarship takes a variety of forms. This is not to say that digital projects will supplant traditional modes of scholarly communication. Rather it is to say that the book and the journal article will be joined by a host of digital genres whose form of argumentation departs from traditional practices of linear, text-based reasoning. Indeed, what constitutes a scholarly contribution in a digital environment might not be an argument as it is traditionally understood at all, but rather the creative juxtaposition or critical curation of primary source material. This, after all, was Busa’s goal. His Index not only helped him answer his own research questions, but also became a platform upon which generations of research questions could be asked. Other projects take a similar approach. In the absence of official reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes, Nausheen Hussain’s *Islam for Reporters* project aggregates instances of Islamophobia as news reports about them are published online, while Sally Promey’s *Material and Visual Cultures of Religion* site makes developing access to new kinds of source material as important as the analysis of that material itself.⁷

Second, scholars would increasingly turn to the affordances of digital technology in making the form our work takes more closely mirror the topics that we study. In addition to expediting the creation of his concordance, Busa turned to the use of a database because it reflected his understanding of the nature of Catholic doctrine: a structured arrangement of knowledge that automatically answered queries on matters both sacred and profane based upon the information inputted by the database’s creator. Though less driven by devotion, other projects have similarly harnessed new media’s characteristics to change the ways we represent our research. The *Mapping Ararat* project, for example, uses augmented reality software to imagine what Mordecai

Noah’s unrealized Jewish homeland might have looked like; I, meanwhile, have attempted to use twitterbots as a way to replicate the cacophony of digital evangelical discourse.⁸ Freed from the tyranny of text, digital projects allow our work to be as visual and as sensorial as the religious communities we study.

Finally, the types of individuals considered stakeholders in the study of religion would be expanded dramatically. In the same way Busa forged an alliance with Thomas Watson, digital scholars will find themselves working with students, computer programmers, web designers, archivists, librarians, and even the general public in developing projects. Of course, such communities have always contributed to our work. But in a digital environment these individuals contribute less as academic service providers that we thank in our acknowledgements and more as collaborators who bring a specific set of skills or specialized knowledge necessary for a project’s development. Jeanne Halgren Kilde and Marilyn Chait’s attempt to map the movement of churches throughout Minneapolis’s history, for example, would not have been possible without the contribution of a colleague trained in GIS, while Kyle Roberts’ efforts to document the exchange of library volumes among early Jesuit universities would not be possible without the public’s help in transcribing the marginalia of digitized library books.⁹ Not every scholar of religion will learn how to code—nor should they. But we can be collaborators in the creation of digital projects that ensure digital tools conform to the needs of our work rather than the other way around.

I never had the privilege of meeting Roberto Busa, but it’s said that he had an infectious personality with an unbounded enthusiasm about the work at hand. Toward the end of his life, however, Busa was more circumspect about the impact digital technology was having on the field. When asked in 2004 how his work had changed the study of language more broadly, Busa was reluctant to answer. It was up to those who would outlive him, he said, to determine whether his life’s work was really a prophecy, or if it was but a dream.¹⁰ In imagining a digital future for the study of religion, perhaps we would do well to look at the times that already have been envisioned.

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I have been asked to address four tasks:

- 1) Review the degree to which new digital methods have changed the field.
- 2) Forecast if greater changes are on the horizon.
- 3) Predict if these changes will result in tensions between scholars of different generations and methodological approaches.
- 4) Assess if these changes and challenges are qualitatively different from the past.

I want to assure you, I will fail. Yet, each of these tasks intrigues me, so I will briefly touch on all of them.

Changing the Field through Increased Access

I'll start with the obvious: digital methods have brought changes to the study of religion by giving scholars immediate access to vast troves of data, books, articles and documents once confined to a few coveted collections. When I was conducting research for my first book, *The Churhching of America*, I spent long hours in the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library and spent my children's college funds on photocopies. On one trip, I even spent my bus fare home on photocopies and found myself pan handling for a bus fare.

Along with the increased access to the text and data, we now review and search this information in entirely new ways. Rather than being limited to paging through book indexes or data set codebooks to check for content, which I still enjoy doing, we can search vast collections in seconds or less. In the case of Google Books, you can search the content of millions of books. The new search tools both locate the information more quickly and they present the information in customized forms. Data, too, can be quickly retrieved for a specific topic and location. For example, the Association of Religion Data Archives (theARDA.com) now stores more than 17 million pages of content, but the online software tools can generate many millions more that are tailored to the user's needs. This level of detail and customized reporting is simply not possible with a standard reference book.

In brief, my answer to the first task is that digital methods have changed the field by storing more information, giving us greater and more immediate access to the information, and by allowing us to customize the information to our

needs.

Changes on the Horizon

The second task was to forecast if greater changes are on the horizon? I will offer three forecasts: one with confidence, a second with a high probability of occurring, and the third offers more a concern than a forecast.

The first and easiest prediction is continued changes in technology. In 1965 Gary Moore, the co-founder of Intel, proposed what is known as Moore's Law: "that components per integrated circuit would double every two years for the next decade." We are now three decades later and the speed of processors is continuing to double every two to 2½ years. Changes in software, memory and other areas are showing equally rapid changes. Changes that show few signs of slowing.

A second forecast is more rapid change in how scholars conduct research. Clearly, digital methods have already changed the way scholars are doing research, but the changes have been slow. Few graduate courses introduce the new digital methods and journals are often reluctant to accept new research designs. Yet, I think these changes will accelerate too. In an effort to encourage some of these changes, Chris Bader and I recently edited a book entitled *Faithful Measures* to demonstrate the promise of these new methods for social scientists.

The third area, and one I wish I could predict, is the extent to which data and scholarly information will remain in the public domain, or if it will increasingly become a fee for services. For example, the goal of the ARDA is to democratize access to data by making it free of charge. Democratizing this access, however, requires the technological advances just reviewed as well as principal investigators donating data free of charge and foundations, such as the Lilly Endowment and John Templeton Foundation, funding the operation of the website. Improved access requires more than new technology.

Possible Tensions

The third task was to anticipate possible tensions between scholars of different generations and methodological approaches. One method for anticipating future tensions would be to look at the library sciences today. The librarian was once responsible for organizing, cataloging, and storing information in the library. Today librarians are trained

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in information management and they serve as guides to information that goes far beyond their library walls. The changes for religious studies scholars have been far less dramatic than those faced by librarians, but the new digital methods are forcing all scholars to make changes.

Yet, the introduction of new methods for studying religion does not suggest that scholars will abandon old methods. For example, historians use of search techniques that can review thousands or even millions of primary documents will not replace the careful in depth reading of select primary documents. Social scientists coding of public data on religious organizations will not replace in depth qualitative studies of these organizations. No doubt, tensions will arise on the methods used, and a younger cohort of scholars will introduce new methods for gaining information, but the existing methods will continue to be used. Moreover, the criteria used for defining the quality of past scholarship will be used to evaluate the new methods as well. In the social sciences, for example, we will continue to be concerned about the reliability and validity of the measures and the representativeness of the sample.

Different than the Past

The final task was to assess if these changes are anything new. Is there really anything new under the sun?

On the one hand, many of these changes resemble the advent of written languages. Similar to the new digital methods reviewed, written languages allow us to store information, improve access to information, and to customize how the information is retrieved. What has changed dramatically, however, is the rate and volume of change. The amount of information that can be stored, accessed and customized is following a rate a change comparable to Moore's Law—doubling in capacity every two years.

So, what is my hope for the future? On the one hand, I would encourage scholars to evaluate the new methods and sources of information with the same rigorous criteria used for past scholarship. Being novel and new does not ensure the information is better and being high-tech does not suggest the information is more scientific or trustworthy. On the other hand, I would encourage all scholars to explore and use the vast trove of new information and data available. It would be foolish to ignore the new sources of information or the new methods for accessing and analyzing the data. Perhaps most exciting for me is that the new technologies

have greatly democratized access to information in ways that I could only imagine a couple decades ago. This access serves to level the playing field for scholars and allows more to play.

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We co-direct the American Religious Sounds Project, a digital initiative supported by the Henry Luce Foundation, to document and interpret the diversity of American religious life by attending to its varied sonic cultures. About a month ago, we found ourselves in another meeting with our app development team to discuss the production of our website. Over the past year Amy had traveled to Columbus for similar meetings. This one was virtual. With the aid of Facetime, texting, email, drop box, and Google docs, we convened and quickly discovered how little progress we had made in communicating our needs and priorities with the development team. It was not the first time that we were surprised, but this time, we were both angry. Looking back, it is fair to say that there was reasonable cause for frustration for everyone present.

At one particularly tense moment, we described our vision for the site—for what felt to us like the hundredth time—and the lead developer looked directly at Isaac’s computer screen, right at Amy, and said, “Wow, this is the first time I’m hearing any of this.” At that moment, Isaac’s phone buzzed, he looked down, and saw a text from Amy: “OMG! WTF?” And almost instantaneously, Isaac’s laptop “dinged,” and he realized, with horror, that Amy’s text message had popped up on the computer screen as well. Isaac grabbed the computer away, but a fraction of a second too late. “STOP TEXTING” he frantically wrote back. The WTF meeting, as we would come to call it, did not end well.

That meeting was a low point; we’re mostly back on track now. But what went wrong—and how we got back on track—captures some of the fundamental ways that working on a digital-based project has transformed the ways we think about research and scholarship. So rather than speak broadly to how digital methods are transforming “the field,” or, even more daunting, try to predict the future, we thought we would share a bit of our own experience, with the hope that what we’ve learned might resonate with others. There is much to say. However, we have restricted ourselves to three broad areas for today’s panel: 1) Rethinking the relationship between research and representation; 2) Valuing process over product; and 3) Embracing the challenges of collaboration.

The meeting broke down because the team was focused on different priorities. The development side zeroed in on aesthetics—the look and feel of particular pages, the navigation features, and other design elements. We were

preoccupied with the functionality of the database and tools we had asked them to develop.

The mistake, of course, was separating form from function. Working with digital technicians has raised pressing questions about the relationship between form and content, design and functionality, or, put more broadly, research and its representation. Our research questions, intellectual objectives, and theoretical commitments have informed all the choices we have made about audio recording, metadata collection, digital platforms, and user experience. And yet, thinking concretely about what our site would look like, what the capacities and limits of various tools are, how and where users will interact with it, and what their expectations and experience will be like, have, in turn, informed the way we go about doing our research.

In other words, we have moved away from imagining research as a unidirectional process that leads from gathering sources to analyzing and interpreting them to publishing articles and books about them. Instead, we have had to weigh all the choices we are making, from what and where to record to what color and font schemes to adopt, as critical parts of the process of producing knowledge.

Valuing “process” is a new skill reluctantly learned. We are accustomed to thinking of research as leading toward an end product—a conference presentation, an article, or a book. But, as many others have observed, digital projects are rarely “finished.” Instead, we find ourselves perpetually in “pilot” mode. We try some things out, launch a public website, solicit feedback from a variety of constituencies, refine our methods and systems of organization and classification, and try again. Our website and digital platforms are not merely modes of representing research that has been completed but of advancing that research -- so we can’t assess their effectiveness until people engage with our materials. Publication is not an endpoint, but merely a step in the process.

Our project is mapped out in terms of multiple phases and anticipated iterations. We drew up a long-term plan, prioritized steps, and projected future improvement. The system we are creating is one that we hope will be exported, replicated, and further refined. How we do what we do is as, if not more, important than what we ultimately produce. This process is extraordinarily time consuming, can feel remarkably unproductive on a day-to-day basis, and is almost impossible to evaluate by traditional promotion and tenure criteria.

DeRogatis and Weiner

Our inability to communicate the significance of “process” explains in part why the meeting fell apart. The developers approached the website as a product, as a way of representing the findings of research that had been completed. We wanted to see tools that would advance the process of research. They did not really understand the nature of humanities research, and we did not really understand the language of computer programming.

This brings us to our last point. Digital projects require deep collaboration and effective communication. Presently we oversee a team that includes web developers, multimedia content producers, graduate student project managers, undergraduate researchers, DH and metadata librarians, and faculty colleagues, not to mention the religious communities with whom we collaborate. We are effectively operating a “lab,” more on the model of the natural sciences than the humanities.

We have learned how to work with each other and how to manage a diverse team of researchers, with different skill sets, different ways of communicating, and different expectations about research. This is a messy process. For example, we have inadvertently excluded and insulted team members when we were consciously avoiding imposing on their time. We also are navigating the overwhelming white male world of digital humanities that casts a shadow on interactions among team members and relationships to power and knowledge. There are ethical and practical issues ranging from overcoming institutional barriers to learning to share resources and ownership of our work, to properly crediting people for their labor. Here again, we find ourselves thinking more in line with a “lab” model of multiple co-authors.

This is unfamiliar territory for us. While all scholarship involves some degree of collaboration, digital methods demand it in a qualitatively different way. There is just too much that we do not know how to do ourselves. Reimagining ourselves as team leaders, rather than lone researchers, has required a fundamental reorientation to our work. This, too, is a form of scholarship, but it largely goes unmeasured, and thus unrecognized.

We don’t mean to exaggerate the divide between “digital” and “non-digital” scholarship or scholars. At its core, our work is still driven by a similar set of questions, interests, and objectives. None of the issues we’ve outlined are fundamentally new. But they are qualitatively different in the case of digital-born projects, or at least brought to the

fore in a different way. This poses new opportunities and challenges for the study of religion and the humanities more broadly. For ourselves, we just hope to avoid too many more WTF moments—though we know, given the tricky terrain--they are probably inevitable.

The Religious Ordering of Things: Nation and World

Religion and the American State

The relationship among lived religion, civil religion, secularism, and government authority is a subject of continuous inquiry. What is the relationship among religion (of any kind), patriotism, and nationalism? How has “Religious Freedom” legislation shaped the public conversation about religion’s role and how are those changes perceived by different (racial, ethnic, LGBTQ) publics? In the same vein, how are attitudes toward policing or military intervention related to religion and how do these differ among those same publics? How has nationalism—or the reaction to it—shaped the very construction of the field?

David Sehat

Georgia State University

Christian conservatives have been feeling on the defensive for some time now. But you know the saying, sometimes the best defense is a good offense. For evidence, look no further than the religious freedom laws that we've seen in Indiana and elsewhere in the last few years. The justification for these laws, which allow Christian businesses to withhold services from gay people if it offends their conscience, is, as Ramesh Ponnuru, a senior editor also at the National Review, said, "the protection of our liberty as dissenters."

Yet, when considered in a wider history, I find that justification disingenuous. Instead, the way to understand these laws is as an offensive weapon to retain Christian privilege. It is a simple fact that through much of American history Christianity had a favored place within American law and politics. When Christians controlled the law, the religious liberty of minorities was of little concern to them. It was only after the 1960s, once the Supreme Court had spent a few decades dismantling Christian privilege in law, that conservative Christians came to see religious liberty as a means to recover the advantages they once took for granted.

Consider, for example, the nineteenth century, when state judges routinely proclaimed Christianity a part of the common law. Christianity offered, in the words Chancellor James Kent of New York, "the basis of the public morals." State legislatures made laws against blasphemy, indecency, profanity, Sabbath-breaking, slave emancipation and protection, and divorce. They did so with overt reference to Christianity and the Christian Scriptures. When these sorts of moral laws were challenged, courts were refreshingly direct in upholding both the laws and the religious rationales of the legislators who sponsored them. As the Georgia Supreme Court said in an 1851 opinion that dismissed the killing of a slave, "It is the crowning glory of this age and of this land that our legislation has responded to the requirements of the New Testament in great part."

State law could so forcefully advance Christian moral ideas because the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion, like the entire Bill of Rights, did not apply to the states. When the Bill of Rights was drafted in 1789, six states paid churches out of the public treasury. Under the First Amendment, states could do as they wished with respect to religion, whether that meant paying churches with public money, establishing an official religion, or doing nothing at all. Almost all of them supported Christianity in some way, though not necessarily monetarily. For example,

in many states office holders were required to take Christian oaths, and censorship laws were used to prosecute anything officials considered offensive to Christianity.

Slowly, though, Christian authority became unstable. By the end of the nineteenth century, judges began to reject the explicitly religious rationale for moral laws. They still often found ways to uphold those laws, like Sabbath laws, on some ostensibly secular basis. But judges eventually grew skeptical of even that. By the 1920s, liberal jurists began to formulate a pluralistic vision of American society that denied the special place of Christianity within American law. The goal, as Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts explained, was to create a body of law in which "many types of life, character, opinion, and belief can develop unmolested and unobstructed." It also began to explicitly protect minority religions, first through a 1940 case, *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, which applied the free exercise clause of the First Amendment to the states for the first time, and then seven years later in *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, which applied the establishment clause to the states.

These decisions began a sustained dismantling of Christian privileges within law, culminating in a flurry of decisions in the 1960s. During this relatively short period, the Court struck down state laws requiring public officials to believe in God and to affirm an afterlife of rewards and punishments. They eliminated prayer and Bible-reading in public schools, practices dating to the beginning of public education in the United States. They decided that a person's sincerely held, but not necessarily religious, belief in the immorality of war was a sufficient basis for exemption from the military draft. They overturned state laws forbidding the sale of contraceptives, and, not incidentally, declared for the first time that the right to privacy was part of fundamental law. They ended censorship and obscenity laws designed to uphold a public morality. And more.

Initially, Christian conservatives responded with outrage and organized under the umbrella of the New Right. But as they were unable to hold back the encroaching secular state, a feeling of victimhood began to spread among them. That sense of victimhood has only grown in recent years with the expansion of gay rights. The Court's decision in first *Lawrence v. Texas* (2002), which struck down sodomy laws, and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which allowed gays to marry, really showed the limited reach of Christian authority. As the late Justice Antonin Scalia, who dissented in both cases, wrote, the majority's opinions failed to acknowledge

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that all law was “based on moral choices.” The logic of the Court’s gay rights opinions made it difficult to uphold “laws against . . . adult incest, prostitution, masturbation, adultery, fornication, bestiality, and obscenity.” Moral devolution, he asserted, would follow.

In response, conservatives turned to religious freedom. In this pivot, they found an unexpected weapon in a bill signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993 called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). The primary purpose of RFRA was to roll back a conservative Supreme Court ruling, written in 1990, by, you guessed it, Antonin Scalia. Scalia had used a case, which involved a group of Native Americans dismissed from their jobs after ingesting peyote, to rewrite religious freedom law and to lessen protection to religious groups, particularly minority religious groups. Congress responded by passing RFRA, which required that “governments should not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification.” House Democrat Jerrold Nadler, who co-wrote RFRA, later explained that the intent of the law was to provide “a shield, not a sword.”

But once Christian conservatives realized that their own prerogatives were falling away, they turned RFRA into a weapon. They complained of a war on religion, and they sought exemptions to otherwise-applicable laws. They also began to pass religious freedom acts on the state level, even before the Court’s rulings on gay rights in Lawrence and Obergefell. An extensive 2006 New York Times report found that, thanks in part to state-level RFRAAs, religious organizations across the nation enjoyed exemptions to laws dealing with taxes, immigration, discrimination, employment, pensions, child care, and land use, among other issues. The objective has been to carve out ever-widening swaths of American life in which places of worship, hospitals, schools, daycare centers, and now—with the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* (2014)—for-profit businesses no longer have to abide by generally applicable law, if they can make a religious freedom claim. These developments are, to me, troubling.

Today, when Christian conservatives invoke the First Amendment, they sound like they want to defend constitutional rights. But in fact they are on offense, seeking to assert the kind of moral authority under which Americans used to live, before the First Amendment protected the many different kinds of belief, opinion, and character within the United States. My own sense is that these laws should be critiqued and resisted.

Lerone A. Martin
Washington University in St. Louis

I want to use my time this afternoon to comment on one way scholars have thought about religion and the state in American history. I want to specifically focus on the relationship between Protestant religion and J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Studies of the FBI and religion have overwhelmingly fixated on the Bureau's antagonistic relationship to religion. Indeed, the Bureau's surveillance, counter-intelligence, and hostility towards "communist" clergy and religious groups is well documented and rightly so: names such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin King, and the National Council of Churches easily come to mind. Moreover, recent studies have also detailed Hoover's role as a prominent spokesman of anti-communism during the Cold War.

Today, I want to push a little further, and go beyond the idea that Hoover and his FBI were simply a federal law enforcement unit that was outspoken in their denunciation and destruction of communism during the Cold War. I want to push because I fear that our study of the FBI has fallen victim to reading present knowledge, namely COINTELPRO, back into the historical study of Hoover and the FBI. Moreover, contemporary questions of the FBI and religion reveal that our historical narratives are just too neat. Easily divided into good vs. evil, with Protestant clergy cast as the former and the Bureau the latter.

Therefore, I want to pose the question: What would our studies of religion and the American state look like if we positioned Hoover and his FBI as significant and productive forces in the shaping of America's religious landscape. That is, what if we examined Hoover and his FBI as leading spiritual Cold War warriors who practiced, espoused, and authenticated a particular brand of religion, namely the making and maintenance of Christian America. If the Cold War aided the formulation of a "spiritual industrial complex" and one nation under God, Hoover and the FBI were then be its spiritual army. I want to make three points to argue for this perspective and then ponder about the respective scholarly possibilities and implications.

First, I want to assert the importance of the faith of J. Edgar Hoover in the history of American religion and the state. Scholars of Hoover have considered a host of factors that shaped the Director, (including communism, racism, sexuality, and even mental illness), but not religion. What if we were to consider how Hoover's Old School Presbyterian faith was at the core of his worldview? Hoover served as a Sunday school teacher in his Presbyterian Church as a teenager and later went on to be a Trustee of the National

Presbyterian Church in Washington DC. He remained an outspoken advocate of a Christian America. Specifically, he saw America as a country founded upon Christianity with the individual soul as the primary theological, social, and political unit of global society. For Hoover, this commitment was best expressed and embodied in the traditional American "democratic" values of white supremacy, individual salvation, Judeo-Christian morality, free market capitalism, and a Christian government to preserve it all. True Christians exercised and exhibited their faith by maintaining said values. Christian faith was a pledge of allegiance to the nation, even as loyalty to the state necessitated personal Christian conversion. Any and all threats and challenges to this Christian society were deemed godless and therefore subversive.

Indeed, long before Billy Graham came on the scene, Hoover was a leading spiritual Cold War preacher. As early as 1942, Hoover preached to the public, "I am sure that if more emphasis were placed on the Gospel of Salvation, and less on social justice, the latter would become a great reality." Conversation, not the restricting of social arrangements, he argued, was the only path to "real and lasting social justice..." The only cure for America's battle against the godless philosophy of communism was "the changing of men's hearts...[and] the return to the faith of our fathers." And the Bible was, Hoover noted, "the solution to life's problems." Simply put, there was nothing plaguing or threatening America's Christian democratic system of government that a spiritual awakening could not fix.

While scholars of Hoover and the FBI have not taken the director's faith serious, during Hoover's lifetime most Americans did. In fact, Americans trusted Hoover's religious guidance and showered him with letters seeking Christian advice on moral questions and even which religious radio broadcaster or televangelist they should listen. Denominations from the National Religious Broadcasters, United Methodist, and African Methodist Episcopal Church honored the director with everything from a stained glass window to awards, while Billy Graham's *Christianity Today* beckoned Hoover to write twelve essays for the pivotal magazine. Simply put, Hoover was a leading spokesman for a Christian America.

So, what would it mean for scholars of American religion and the state to place Hoover alongside the likes of Graham and Eisenhower in the post war pantheon of America's religious landscape? What would it mean to consider J. Edgar Hoover as a major religious and political figure in

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the making of a Christian America? If Billy Graham is America's pastor, is J. Edgar Hoover then the patron saint and leading defender of Christian America? How would these questions augment studies of Christian America specifically and religion and the state more broadly? And perhaps equally important why has our field hereto avoided this question?

The second and related claim I want to make is this: Hoover baptized the FBI in this vision of Christian America. That is, what if our studies of the FBI and religion considered the formation of the modern FBI, Hoover's FBI, as having its foundation in part, in Hoover's religious ideas. There was little doubt about this in the Bureau. During training, new agents were consistently reminded of Emerson's maxim, "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." The FBI was Hoover's shadow. And when a journalist asked Hoover at the end of his career if "the principles of your religion guided you in the organization and operation of the FBI?" He shot back "Yes." Indeed, he exclusively recruited and hired like-minded, white, outwardly heterosexual, married, Protestant and Catholic agents. The "Boss" also initiated and oversaw private worship services for Bureau personnel at his Presbyterian church, as well as Catholic spiritual retreats, communion breakfasts, and FBI chaplains. Moreover, Hoover repeatedly had prominent preachers speak at FBI graduations, including Bishop Fulton Sheen and Norman Vincent Peale. All because, Hoover told his employees, it was the duty of the FBI to "reaffirm" the Bureau's "Christian purpose...to defend and perpetuate the dignity of the Nation's Christian endowment..." Hoover then oversaw the transfiguration of the FBI from an organization that investigated crime, into a Bureau of leading spokesmen and defenders of Christian America.

A second set of questions then emerges from the religious culture of the FBI: how has religion shaped the composition and mission of the FBI and what are its enduring effects? Can the story of religion in and of the FBI expand how we have understood this storied Bureau and its mission? Or for fans of Game of Thrones: is the FBI the faith militant? But seriously, how has the spiritual army of G-Men contributed to the public understanding of "good" religion? And what about our understanding of current pressing issues? The religious culture of the FBI endures. The FBI, like most institutions and large sea vessels, turns very, very, very slowly. As William Webster, FBI director from 1978-1987 relayed to me, "most of the FBI Agents I knew viewed their work in the FBI as a way to put their faith into action." To no surprise, the recently ousted FBI director James Comey

testified before congress that Americans should be concerned about Russia because, "I truly believe we are shining city on a hill." How has this religious culture contributed to the recent hiring and training of an increasingly overwhelmingly white male cohort of FBI agents and their collective understanding of contemporary issues of religion and its relationship to domestic security?

Finally, the Bureau utilized a cartel of ministers and religious institutions to promote, create, and preserve this world. Therefore, what if it shifted our focus away from the Bureau's antagonistic religious engagement and focused on its cooperative religious activity? Indeed, the FBI had, what I call, Bureau clergymen. Far from secret informants, these black and white male Protestant and Catholic clergy deliberately enjoyed very public and cooperative relationships with the FBI. These anointed men, and they were all men as the Bureau deliberately ignores the validity of female clergy, deeming it blasphemy—had the trust and approval of the FBI. They were members of the FBI's "Special Service Contacts" or placed on the Bureau's "Special Correspondents List." These ministers gained this special status because they, in one-way or another, "expressed their willingness...to be of assistance...and demonstrated their complete loyalty, reliability, and value to the Bureau" in upholding the status quo. The Bureau maintained frequent contact with this religious army which included Billy Graham, Elder Michaux, Reverend Archibald Carey, Jr., Cardinal Richard Cushing, Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, to name a few. These men were periodically "call[ed] into service," meaning they were given "special assignments" to utilize their "particular talents" to oppose ministers, faith communities, and politicians the Bureau deemed subversive and publicly support the work of the G-men as gospel labor.

So what can we learn about religion and the state from the cartel of ministers that openly and privately colluded with the Bureau? To be sure, collusion, as we have probably all learned from the news or the constant goggling of the legal definition of "collusion," is not in itself a crime, regardless if it's the FBI or Vladimir Putin. However, collusion does usually entail a common interest; an elective affinity if you will. What common interest did Bureau clergymen have with the FBI? Could it reveal or at least bring to the fore that in addition to national security, civil religion, and a ruse for free market capitalism, Christian America was also or actually an exercise in the maintenance of white male supremacy? Recent studies of Christian America have largely, ironically, avoided this question of whiteness. However, the public

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partnership between clergy and the FBI—the agency charged with enforcing law and order—surely invites questions into how Protestant clergyman worked with the state to maintain prevailing social arrangements, namely that of hetero normative maleness and whiteness. And perhaps equally illuminating, what does the seemingly scholarly avoidance of such public relationships reveal to us about our field?

Permit me now, if you will to gesture towards something resembling a conclusion. History, I believe, is one of the indispensable tools we have to make informed decisions about current pressing issues and offers us a fighting chance to free our selves, our communities, and our institutions from past practices that, if not confronted, can hinder democratic flourishing both now and in the future. In all, I hope the kinds of questions I have attempted to put forward here today concerning Hoover's faith, the religious culture of the FBI, and Bureau Clergyman can help us expand our narratives of how the Bureau engaged and utilized religion in America to achieve the aims of the state. This perspective of religion and the state might help to further reveal, as Edward Snowden has showed us, that the legal and public measures the state, or in this case the FBI, employed were as troubling and challenging to democratic practice as the more notorious illegal and covert endeavors.

Melissa M. Wilcox

University of California Riverside

At the “Taking Exception” conference in Bloomington a few months ago, Anthony Petro and I got into a conversation about the limits of the concept of religion, and others at the conference chimed in while we all thought through embodiment, sexuality, and practice. What we were asking was this: What does it mean for the study of religion that a gay man might speak of “worshipping cock?” All too easily the religionist’s eye slides uncomfortably away from this question—“Oh look! White evangelicals! Quick, let’s go talk to them again! (Unless they’re worshipping cock too.)”—but I think this unease with the idea that a human penis could be literally and not figuratively an object of worship, in the U.S. rather than in some Other culture, speaks volumes about the limitations of the study of religion in the U.S.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence—the international order of self-described queer nuns who are the focus of my forthcoming book—have no problem bringing sex and religion together. Whether we’re talking about the founder of the Sydney house using a dildo to sprinkle party drugs like holy water on the gathered faithful in a gay bar in the 1980s, or the distribution of gold-foiled condoms as the Host during the Condom Savior Mass in San Francisco in the early 1990s, these particular nuns aren’t shy about sex even though they generally observe a moratorium on sexual activities while in habit.

Deeply serious about being nuns, equally serious about being queer, with their glam makeup, drag, frequent cigarettes, and ample purses stuffed with safer sex supplies, the Sisters engage in what I term “religionfuck.” This term is an adaptation of “genderfuck,” which describes a generative “fucking with” or messing with gender, undoing societal assumptions by juxtaposing supposedly incongruous markers of gender. Like genderfuck, religionfuck destabilizes—fucks with—taken-for-granted ideas about what religion is, ideas about what constitutes legible, coherent, and cohesive religion. There’s a reason that “worshipping cock” doesn’t show up as a religious option on the widely-used sociological research tool called the General Social Survey, but that reason is not that worshipping cock isn’t a religious practice. The reason is that the General Social Survey is decidedly, undeniably, and unsurprisingly not queer.

Along with enacting genderfuck and religionfuck, the Sisters ardently embrace sexuality for many reasons. Perhaps foremost is that they serve communities that have been repeatedly shamed, silenced, and medically, psychologically, and religiously tortured—in the U.S. just

as much as elsewhere—for their sexual practices. Focusing like a number of other nuns’ orders on education and health, the Sisters in San Francisco produced the first sex-positive safer sex guide for gay men in 1982, just as the conditions that came to be known as symptoms of AIDS were being noticed in their community. These nuns were invested, you might say, in helping others to worship cock without getting sick. Within a few years the concern became how to worship cock without dying, and this is where the Condom Savior played an important role.

Yet at a time and in a country where, for those privileged enough to have adequate health insurance, an HIV diagnosis is no longer a death sentence, questions have arisen about the intense, often state- and corporate-sponsored, insistence on condom use and more recently the use of pre-exposure prophylactics, or PrEP, among gay men. Proponents of condoms and PrEP point out, rightly, that HIV has many strains and that those who are HIV-positive can still be infected with new strains that can further threaten their health. They also note, again rightly, that penile-anal sex without a condom is among those sexual activities that carry a higher risk for the transmission of infections. But others are suspicious. Why, they ask, is penile-anal sex between a man and a woman not subject to the same intense surveillance and management when it comes to safer sex, since it carries exactly the same risks? Why is there such intense condemnation and surveillance of HIV-positive men who have sex with men in the absence of condoms or PrEP, while heteronormative people are left to their own devices in this regard as in so many others? This intensive biopolitical management of the gay male body is intimately tied to the state through public health initiatives, criminal statutes, and the enforcement of both. Likewise, the intensive biopolitical management of other queer bodies, such as those of transgender and genderqueer people, is enacted through the criminal, medical, and psychiatric interventions of state apparatuses. These workings of power have been discussed at length in other contexts. Since such contexts are typically rooted in queer theory, which generally has little patience for considering the complexities of religion, what is less often mentioned is that this intensive biopolitical state management of queer and trans bodies is rooted in state Protestantism and sometimes more broadly in state Christianity—a disavowed state religion, to be sure, but all the more potent for that disavowal.

I am far from the first to write of the Protestant values, tropes, and practices within the U.S. state; in fact, I first learned to think about these through Cathy Albanese’s

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reading of Bob Bellah's famous article on civil religion and through her textbook on U.S. religious history. Critically important work by Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, as well as recent superb histories by Heather White, Sara Moslener, and Anthony Petro, have further developed this theme, with the former two focusing on the subtler and more disavowed aspects of the Protestant state in the U.S. and the three historians documenting repeated episodes of unabashed and open collaboration between Protestant and Catholic leaders, state-sponsored sexism, homophobia and transphobia, and the biopolitical management of female, queer, and trans bodies.

Foucault argues that biopolitics engages power through making its subjects live or letting them die; following Gregory Tomso, one might read state insistence on gay men's use of PrEP or condoms through the former, and state regulation of trans and genderqueer bodies, with its blatant invitations to violence, through the latter. But not all queer and trans bodies, as many critics have already pointed out, are managed in this way toward life. Others—particularly the bodies of queer and trans people of color, poor queer and trans people of all races, queer and trans immigrants and refugees, and queer and trans people from non-dominant religions—fall more often within the co-existing regime of power that Achille Mbembe terms “necropolitics.” Wielding the power to make die or let live—the inverse of biopolitics, but also intertwined with it in Foucault's initial conceptualization, then more carefully delineated by Mbembe as a separate if complicit regime of power—necropolitics in Mbembe's formulation is a form of “sovereignty” constituted by “the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not.” As Jasbir Puar argues in her analysis of the differential treatment of queer people in the U.S. after the September 11 attacks, a form of “queer necropolitics” stalks the bodies of queer and trans people who for reasons of race, religion, immigration status, class, gender nonconformity, or more likely some combination of these cannot enact the homonormativity and patriotism—a combination Puar terms “homonationalism”—that would allow them to be biopolitically “folded into life” and the state.

Under the necropolitics of a Protestant U.S. state that disavows its own religiosity, some queer and trans bodies disappear entirely—or are disappeared, in the case of queer and trans Muslims incarcerated and deported along with their straight and cisgender co-religionists in the years after 9/11. They disappear into prisons along with other black and brown bodies; they disappear into hospitals and mental institutions—other forms of incarceration—along with

other medically-designated misfit bodies and other bodies traumatized past the ability to enact homonormativity or homonationalism. They disappear into the desert along with other disposable refugee and immigrant bodies lacking the papers and the social privilege to be folded awkwardly into the state's racist, Christocentric embrace. They disappear into refugee camps, banned from a dubious safety in the U.S. along with other Muslims under U.S. state Islamophobia. They disappear into shallow graves along with others deemed too queer to live, dying at the end of a boot or by their own hand under the sign of a homophobic and transphobic star-spangled cross. They disappear across the border into Canada, undocumented immigrants not to but from the U.S., seeking asylum along with others who were never safe here to begin with but who have reached a level of fear that forced them, like all refugees, to flee.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence inhabit an ambivalent relationship to these forces of biopower, necropower, religionfuck, and disavowed state Protestantism. I've argued elsewhere that the Sisters violate the neoliberal mandates of the privatization of sex, the privatization of religion, and the separation of church and sex each time they manifest. In violating these neoliberal commandments, and in explicitly sacralizing queer bodies and queer sex, the Sisters disrobe the neoliberal state and its techniques of power. In doing so in specifically religious ways, and in ways that directly challenge Christianity in the state by castigating, emulating, and ardently queering it, the Sisters issue an important challenge to the disavowed state religion, revealing the intertwined embrace of Christianity and the U.S. state. Yet because they restrict their work to serving queer and (occasionally) transgender people who are interpellated even if not embraced by state biopolitics, the Sisters' religionfuck fails to intervene in any significant way in U.S. state necropolitics.

Nonetheless, I think the potential for such intervention exists, both within and beyond the order. In a Foucauldian conception of power there is no outside, no space in which to stand apart from the forces of sovereignty. The route to resistance, then, is from within, and subversion is its most powerful tactic. Religionfuck, like genderfuck, is a potent form of subversion. The Sisters are not the only queer folks engaged in religionfuck, and the U.S. is not the only state in which such queer religious subversion takes place. The possibility remains, then, for religionfuck to serve as a key source of resistance to necropolitics as well as to biopolitics and Christian imperialism. Hints of these possibilities exist in the Orthodox Christian themed erotic calendars and videos produced by activists in Romania, and in the bright

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red, sequined burqa worn by a member of the activist group Muslims Against Homophobia in Sydney's Mardi Gras parade a few years ago. But until you know where to look for religionfuck, you might miss it entirely and see just a bunch of cock worshippers. Hopefully this brief reflection will inspire you to look more closely.

The Religious Ordering of Things: Nation and World

American Religion and the World

Increased attention is being paid to American religion's role in international affairs, as well as interaction with the world shaping American religion. From national security, missionaries, and war to colonization, nation building, and empire, there exist complex relationships. How does religion provide the background for justification of authority in the ordering of life internationally? How does it authorize the use of force in its international interventions and initiatives? How is a religious vision of the state mapped onto international interventions and initiatives? How is a religious vision of the state mapped onto international space? What role does "security" play in a religiously-inspired international agenda?

John Corrigan

Florida State University

Over the last two years, The Catholic pope, Francis, an Argentinian, has popularized the term “ideological colonization.” It appears throughout American Catholic publications, from the *National Catholic Reporter* and *National Catholic Register* to the *U.S. Catholic* and *Catholic Medical Quarterly*. Francis found traction using the term in making a claim that humanitarian organizations operating in developing countries had linked aid to implementation of liberal American ideas about transsexuality, birth control, and other assaults on what the Pope called “family.” He told a story about an education minister who was offered funding for school construction with the proviso that the school libraries included books on gender theory that questioned traditional understandings of male and female roles. “This is ideological colonization,” he said. “They colonize people with ideas that try to change mentalities or structures. . . . But this is not new. This was done by the dictatorships of the last century,” such as those of Hitler and Mussolini.¹

That the leader of an organization that over many centuries has excelled in setting the terms for programs to impose “mentalities and structures” on indigenous peoples could without apparent irony complain about “ideological colonization” is instructive for us as scholars of American religion. It dramatically mirrors what religious and political leaders in the United States imagine as their own innocence in their interactions with local populations in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. American agents carry a gospel of capitalism to all parts of the world. They also missionize those populations, urging Christian religions upon them. But it is the American effort to establish religious freedom in other countries that is a crucially important component in a State Department scheme to ensure that “mentalities and structures” are reformed so as to enable the progressive opening of foreign markets and the securing of frameworks for favorable trade. Religious freedom, according to writers such as William Inboden and Thomas Farr, is a national security issue. For them, the guarantee of religious freedom everywhere is foundational to America’s national security.

The gospel of capitalism—which cannot be considered apart from references to “national security”—thus is intertwined with an insistence upon religious freedom as a necessary condition for the global advance of the American brand of capitalism. And promotion of religious freedom has become a religious cause as much as a “national security” issue. In recent years, as many Christians have died at the hands of ISIS, a call for recognition of Christianity as the most persecuted religion in the world has rung out from

American Christian pulpits. (And frequently it is recklessly extrapolated into a parochial fiction of Christians as the most persecuted religious group in the United States.) The State Department’s promotion of the ideal of religious freedom abroad accordingly has taken on an increasingly more evangelical character, in the sense that it is clothed in the kind of moral certainties usually reserved for the proselytizing of missionaries. The same kind of certainties—if we draw back the veil to see them—that animate neoliberal ascendancies.

The securing of the world for neoliberalism and the ensuring of religious freedom (especially for persecuted Christians), both ideological gospels and both innocent of innocence, operate together as a hand-in-glove enterprise. It is an ostensibly political venture with strong religious undertones and one that claims authority for its presumed mandate through a dream, as Walmart historian Bethany Moreton puts it, to “replace the state with a store and a church.”²

Such American seeming “ideological colonization” of the world, long discussed by scholars, is equally a projection of American failures to implement domestically the ideology that its civil and religious deputies seek to export. The United States sometimes comes bearing a poisonous gift. There is nothing intrinsically objectionable in religious freedom, in as much as it represents a broader human rights agenda. It is in many cases an inspiring ideal. The implementation of that ideal, however, over the course of two centuries in America, has been a matter of fits and starts, losses and gains, and, most visibly, a failure to finish. The current uptick in hate crimes against Muslims, Jews, and others, following the election to the Presidency of a man who incites religious hatred, strongly evidences the fact of disjuncture between public embrace of a constitutional principle and its implementation.

America suffers from amnesia—amnesia about much of its history, and especially its history of religious hatreds manifested in wars of words, outright discrimination, and violent confrontation. Always reverent in their civil prayers affirming freedom of religion as enshrined in the Constitution, Americans have forgotten the rest of the story, the intolerance and violence. It then is little wonder that when Americans imagine locking down a secure international charter for trade and religion, they rely upon the seemingly trustworthy power of ideas—neoliberal ideology and the ideal of religious freedom—as they prosecute that agenda. Thinking in terms of ideological fixes—ideas about freedom of religion here, trickle-down economics

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and unregulated commerce there—is to think abstractly, apart from the messiness of historical events. In prescribing religious freedom for the world, American leaders reenact internationally the drama of American amnesia. America projects itself. It projects its own forgetting—its forgetting about the setbacks involved in making religious freedom work, including answering the question, “What is religion?” It pitches its amnesiac vision into an international arena where in the short term it can be easier, and generally more politically expedient, to claim a silver bullet cure than to acknowledge that we just will not know until we get into the weeds and start hacking.

World religious history has amply demonstrated that ideas are not as portable as their popularizers fancy them to be, even when money is on the table and conflict can be avoided. Without a blueprint for implementation—without a plan that has proven itself by its previous record of negotiated applications—ideas fall flat.

We as scholars will not succeed in estimating the complex role of religion in twenty-first century American foreign policy, global corporatism, and the cultural agenda, as Pope Francis might say, “to change mentalities and structures,” without fully engaging American religious history. And by history, I mean the longue duree—the last 250 years of American religious history in which the inspirational ideal of religious freedom has in too many cases remained aspirational. How we have forgotten domestic religious intolerance, by what means we have occluded it and for what purposes, are central questions that must be addressed before we can understand why, given American difficulty in fully implementing it, religious freedom is, as Hillary Clinton tweeted a few years ago, “a bedrock priority of our foreign policy.”³

Finally, this is not to say that the promotion of religious freedom abroad is a mistake, or that Americans have not had real successes in creating a framework for tolerance in North America. The point is that the sparkle of ideology is not enough to create tolerance. It may, for a while, serve to uphold American claims to authority to intervene internationally in matters of religious conflict and, because religion and capitalism are entwined, in commerce, politics, and “structures” as well. There may be such a thing as “ideological colonization.” But when that term masks the realities of inflexible power and, equally, the necessity for compromise, when it forgets that ideology is about the ideal and not the practical, it is an overblown idea itself, and a distraction from initiatives that build coalitions from the ground up, rather than by imposing them from the top down.

Are American religious interests, projected internationally, the stuff of ideological colonization, or are they, in concert with neoliberal ideologies, a plausible cover for another American agenda? And how powerful is that strategy, which marshalls the seemingly inexhaustible energy of American Christians’ ambitions to prove to the world that Christianity is the best religion if only given a chance? How does the State Department foster its own political vision for the global reach of American business by building a foreign policy out of the—a la Clinton—“bedrock” idea of religious freedom?

1. Philip Pullella, “Pope Says Birth Control Ban Doesn’t Mean Breed ‘Like Rabbits,’ ” Reuters, January 19, 2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-airplane-idUSKBN0K-S1WY20150119>. Accessed 5/25/17.
2. Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 268.
3. Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks at the Release of the 2011 International Religious Freedom Report,” Washington D.C., July 30, 2012. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/2009-2013-clinton/rm/2012/07/195782.htm>. Accessed 6/12/2017.

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In 1947, the US Congress passed the National Security Act, which established permanence for what became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The legislation constituted a watershed moment. It demonstrated a veritable inflection point in what had been forming over several decades throughout the globe—the rise of national security as an essential component of state power. The creation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which began gaining significant power during World War I, is a key example of earlier developments. Nations throughout the world began to institutionalize multiple iterations of intelligence activity as a foundation of their state power—among the many examples are France, Britain, the Soviet Union, Germany, South Africa, and China. This national security encompassed collecting information through technological surveillance, infiltrating targeted groups, disrupting and destroying individuals and organizations, and engaging suspect citizens enemies of the state in a military sense. For the first time, national security became as essential to the state as having a national currency or a military. And the rest, as they say, is history.¹ The national security paradigm proceeded not merely to intensify the linkage between domestic state power and international politics. It also enhanced the capacity for treating domestic subjects as enemies in the way foreign military subjects had been seen.

On the surface, there is nothing obviously religious about this national security paradigm. The actual history of national security practices, however, reveals otherwise. Steve Weitzman and I have realized through our collaboration with over a dozen scholars of religion who have co-authored *The FBI and Religion*, that national security and religion have a long, enduring intersection that merits sustained research for understanding the nature and consequences of their cultural history.² For instance, it is in hindsight rather clear that the FBI explicitly interpreted communism as a threat to the religious integrity of the United States. The National Security Council was equally explicit in denouncing communism as a religious phenomenon that undermined US security by promoting idolatry—worship of the state. During the 1950s and 1960s, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover himself leveraged the bureau to cultivate positive relations with the Catholic Church after learning that the Church had begun excommunicating communists.³

More recently, we have seen intelligence agencies such as the CIA and NSA engaging the so-called Muslim world abroad as well as American Muslims as inherent enemies of the United States and its friends or allies. The current administration's on-going efforts to ban Muslims from

entering the US is a striking and strident expression of this politics. Equally relevant is the rapid expansion of drone warfare against Muslims in majority Muslim nations that has led to the killing of thousands of Muslims in the name of preserving American national security.

In this context, Christianity and Judaism have become the basis for a Judeo-Christian framework that functions to rationalize a global alliance of Western Europeans against what is often branded the Muslim world. As Mahmood Mamdani has skillfully demonstrated in his *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, this does not mean that US national security mechanically engaged all Muslims as enemies—the US-Taliban alliance is a clear counter-demonstration.⁴

With the above points in mind, I want to advance two specific suggestions: (1) the scholarship on political theology is especially useful for clarifying how state power is grounded in the creation of friends and enemies in the international arena (2) the pattern of establishing friends and enemies of the state is profoundly, though not reductively, shaped by religion.

In recent years, a growing number of intellectuals have engaged with political theology as developed by such scholars as the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt and Italian philosopher Giorgio Gamberi to interpret the relationship between religion and state power. This work typically foregrounds the legacy of European fascism and the assumptions of political liberalism. Schmitt is well known for his claim that Western concepts of the state are essentially secularized forms of Christian theology. More relevant here is Schmitt's conceptualization of sovereignty. He argued that we can recognize the sovereign for exercising the power to invoke a state of exception, a state of emergence in which the rule of law is suspended. More generally, Schmitt elaborated, state power is exercised to render “friends” and “enemies”—that is enemies of the state—to bring coherence to the concept of the political. This was Schmitt's attempt to account for rule by brutality within a Western system of political liberalism.⁵

The racialization of Islam constitutes a long-standing element in this global order of politics that has been integral to the logic of US power. Karine Walther's *Sacred Interests* is a lucid and compelling demonstration of this trend at work since at least the early 1800s. In this context, we should also reckon with Gil Anidjar's assertion that Christianity is not just a religion. If we take these arguments seriously, we might discern how Christianity exceeds conventional ways

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of conceptualizing religion. At the same time, we can more keenly apprehend how formations of political theology in the genealogy of Christianity have depended upon and existed in relation to Islam. The latter, through this relation, has likewise been rendered as something that exceeds facile notions of mere faith.⁶

One telling moment of this political history is the early twentieth century. Among the key shapers of popular, academic, and elite political views and practices at the time was Lothrop Stoddard, who is best known for his 1919 book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*. Perhaps more telling of Stoddard's larger intellectual trajectory, however, is the book he published immediately afterwards—*The New World of Islam*. This subsequent book detailed Stoddard's account of why Islam was rapidly becoming the chief threat to US imperial power and the race-based dominance of other Western empires. He promoted White supremacism to thwart what he recognized as anticolonialism. In this way, Stoddard was boldly honest about the material stakes animating global politics.

When we consider Walther's exposition of how US imperialists engaged Muslims as civilizational enemies—outside the family of nations constituting the Christian West—and when we account for the US engagement with Muslims during and following the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of Western colonization in Palestine, it becomes easier to recognize that religion has been central to American national security and the global order of US empire.

The global order of American political power now deploys a semblance of Christian-Jewish friends against Muslim enemies. In this political context, scholars of American religion will need to engage more robustly with the study of Christian nationalism qua “West” and the increasing relevance of Zionism as a major site of religion and global politics. This is particularly relevant in light of the alliance of Jewish and Christian Zionists in the United States that has more stridently targeted Palestinians (among whom are some Christians), Arabs, and Muslims as enemies on the one hand, with Western nations as friends on the other. The rise of the Trump administration, particularly its inclusion of staunchly anti-Muslim officials such as Jeff Sessions and Stephen Bannon, has only heightened the need for scholars to produce further study of how religion functions as a site of the political in the sense that Schmitt elucidated—rendering friends and enemies—as a central means of producing a coherent exercise of national security.

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1. Among the many useful historical discussions explaining the emergence of national security as a central governing paradigm is Loch K. Johnson, *National Security Intelligence*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).
 2. Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman, *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).
 3. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport: Praeger, 2009). Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Steve Rosswurm, *The FBI and the Catholic Church, 1935-1962* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).
 4. Mahnoor Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).
 5. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, rev. ed., trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attel (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).
 6. Karen V. Walther, *Sacred Interests: The United States and the Islamic World, 1821-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015). Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

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Let me begin with two stories from the mid-1980s, both having to do with Christianity, the US, and South Africa. In October of 1985, a middle-aged white American evangelical named David Howard was arrested in Soweto. Howard was the director of the World Evangelical Fellowship, a large and conservative global network of evangelical denominations and parachurch groups. He had come to South Africa to be the keynote speaker at the South African Conference of Evangelical Leaders; he expected to talk about winning souls. Instead he met a man named Caesar Molebatsi, just 36 years old, who was the dynamic director of an evangelical outreach program called Youth Alive Ministries. As a result, Howard would soon learn—quickly and directly—about the realities of apartheid.

Molebatsi and Howard made a strong connection almost immediately. Racial tensions had erupted early in the conference, and Howard had supported Molebatsi in a conflict with a representative of the Frontline Fellowship, a radical right-wing organization that grew out of the South African Defence Forces (SADF). Before one session, members of the group had asked Molebatsi to use his talk to denounce “black theology” as unbiblical. He had refused. Things then became so tense that several evening sessions were devoted to talking about racial issues among believers.¹

The day after the conference ended, Molebatsi invited Howard to his house in Soweto for lunch. The two men had some history in common: they had both attended Wheaton College, although many years apart. As the two men and another friend sat talking, the South African Defence Forces came sweeping into the house. They were looking for the suspicious white American who dared to have lunch in a black township. The soldiers asked Howard to come to the local police station for questioning. Molebatsi then stepped up and told the soldiers that, if they were going to take his guest, he would have to come too. The soldiers obliged. Molebatsi’s move was brave, even reckless. The SADF, he knew, had been looking for him because of his anti-apartheid activities.²

At the police station, the officer in charge questioned them closely. After threatening to keep both men in jail for the weekend, he released them. By South African standards, this was not much more than an inconvenience, but it made quite an impression on Howard. A few months after he returned home, he wrote about his experience in a special issue of *Transformation*, an international evangelical journal that functioned as the voice of “social concern” evangelicals. Howard told there—and in many other venues over the next few years—of how he had been changed by the experience. Molebatsi was “a brilliant, godly

man” who was doing God’s work in South Africa. It was time to speak up.³

Within a few months, Molebatsi would sign the Kairos document, a major South African Protestant manifesto against apartheid signed largely by mainline Protestants but including a few evangelicals. And he would then take leadership in writing an anti-apartheid document by black south African evangelicals, specifically, titled the “Evangelical Witness against Apartheid,” which would be circulated in South Africa and globally.⁴

The second story I will describe more briefly, although it is actually more complex. Just a year before these events, the AME Church’s General Conference in Kansas City voted—for the first time—to issue an official condemnation of apartheid. Noting that “our sisters and brothers in South Africa, unfortunately, may qualify for the dubious honor of being identified as the most oppressed people on the face of the earth,” the convention called on its members to put pressure on Congress for sanctions, and to boycott all companies with holdings in South Africa. “We now join in their struggle which is both difficult and dangerous,” the resolution stated.⁵

“We now join in the struggle.” AME opposition to apartheid was not new, certainly; if you read its internal publications, anti-apartheid views were a given.⁶ But the situation that enabled this official statement was new. Because, at that same meeting, the Conference had voted to require that one of its newly elected bishops be from Africa. The AME had two Episcopal Districts in Southern Africa, but it elected bishops centrally, at annual meetings attended almost entirely by Americans, so that, since the 1950s, every bishop in the South African districts had been American.

Many South Africans were offended by this reality. In addition, the AME church often faced difficulties getting its American bishops admitted into South Africa—it always took months, and often longer if the church was perceived as outspoken on apartheid. In 1953, the South African government had refused to allow two American bishops entry to take up their posts, saying that AME churches were used as anti-government meeting places and that church members were involved in the resistance.⁷ For the next several decades, the church constantly had to navigate the South African government’s fears of black Americans’ potentially subversive agendas.

For at least two years before the 1984 meeting, members of South Africa’s 15th District had done a good bit of overt lobbying for their candidate, and had made a determined effort to raise money for South African delegates to travel to Kansas City.⁸

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When South African Harold Ben Senatle was elected the first African bishop in thirty years, the AME also issued an official resolution, at last, against apartheid.⁹

I offer these two stories as a way of highlighting the centrality of transnational networks to the attitudes that these very different groups of theologically conservative US Christians had toward apartheid. There is, of course, a great deal more to tell.

But the point is a larger one: these Protestant Christians, black and white (and Arab and Asian and other) understood then—and do now—that they were part of a self-consciously globalizing faith. Of course, as scholars of religion we know this. But the fact that believers also know it, and have known it, matters—far more fundamentally and fully than we often acknowledge.

My argument is this: The transnational church isn't a topic, it's a baseline. In saying this, I don't mean to repeat the transnationalism debates that have animated the fields of religious studies, history, American Studies, and others.¹⁰ I do not argue that all questions are more radical, more interesting, more important if they are posed on international terrain. I don't believe that, I don't think it's useful or true. But I do think that there is in the study of US religion a kind of hesitation at the borders that is problematic, in part because it makes certain kinds of political realities harder to see.

If we take seriously its international dimensions, for example, I think it becomes much harder to talk about “white American evangelicalism.” There are, of course, white people who are evangelicals, but, whatever evangelicalism is, on a global scale, it is not primarily white. It is African, Asian, Latino, Arab, and more—as well as white.¹¹ In addition, and although I know it is controversial, I strongly believe that the common habit that separates out African American theologically conservative churches from white or racially mixed theologically conservative churches, while understandable, is also part of this problem—it defines evangelicals by their theology, and then excludes a large number of people with that theology from the category.¹² But if evangelicalism is globe trotters Franklin Graham and Rick Warren, it is also TD Jakes, Juanita Bynum, and Samuel Rodriguez, as well as David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church—a Nigerian church now relentlessly global—and uncountable others.¹³

This reality has shaped the international institutions of evangelicalism, from the Lausanne Convention to Anglican Communion. But it still seems to me that, too often, we write and study about evangelicalism as if there were two categories: the US and the “global”—which allows us to have books about

the globalization of Pentecostalism but commentaries about American evangelicals, presumed to be white, that operate as if their churches were hermetically sealed.

They are not. And our writing about current evangelical life as well as evangelical history will be stronger when it fully accounts for this reality. In the case of responses to apartheid, we can only understand the Southern Baptist Convention's heated debates about divestment—we are likely to even be looking for the history of those debates—if we know something about transnational networks. And we can only appreciate the complexity of AME positions on apartheid if we know what South African AME churches were saying, and not saying, in the 1970s and 80s. In both cases, the Americans are part of a global evangelical community which, in the 1980s, was already beginning to understand that it was only one part of a much larger story about faith and politics.

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1. David Howard, “The South African Conference on Evangelical Leadership,” *Transformation* 3, no. 2 (April 1986): 9–10; Isaac Phiri, *Proclaiming Political Pluralism: Churches and Political Transitions in Africa* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001), 108–9.
 2. The arrest is recorded in three places, with slightly differing details. David Howard, “A Personal Encounter with the South Africa Police,” *Transformation* 3, no. 2 (April 1986): 21–22; David Howard, *What I Saw God Do: Reflections on a Lifetime in Missions* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Caesar Molebatsi, *A Flame for Justice*, 1st ed. (Chariot Victor Pub, 1991), 124–28.
 3. Howard, “Personal Encounter,” 22.
 4. John W. de Gruchy, ed., *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986); *Evangelical Witness in South Africa: A Critique of Evangelical Theology and Practice by South African Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1987).
 5. Columba Aham Nnorum, “African American Churches and the Evolution of Antiapartheid Activism,” in *Long March Ahead: African American Churches and Public Policy in Post-Civil Rights America* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 200–201.
 6. James Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New

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York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

7. "South Africa Explains Ban On AME Bishops: Say Church Back Of Native Revolt," *The Chicago Defender* (National Edition) (1921-1967), March 14, 1953.

8. D.Z. Tantsi, "The Fifteenth Episcopal District Presents Dr. Harold B. Senatle, The Man of the Hour for Bishop in 1984," *Voice of Missions*, February 1984; J. Happy Wesinyane, "'Pray For' and 'Go' with Senatle 1984," *Voice of Missions*, May 1982.

9. The actual placing of bishops was a bit more complicated: The candidate promoted by the 15th District, Harold Ben Senatle, was elected as a Bishop in 1984 but assigned to the 18th District, comprised of the homelands and Botswana. The American head of the 15th, John Hunter, was also re-elected to be a Bishop, but seems to have been appointed to a newly created District, #19, formed out of the eastern part of South Africa. (In other words, the 15th was split into two.) An American named Henry Allen Belin Jr. gets assigned to the 15th. Then Hunter dies, Senatle takes both 18th and 19th districts for awhile, and ultimately ends up as a long-serving bishop of the 19th District. "AMEs Elect 4 Bishops," *Afro-American*, July 21, 1984; Rev. A. W. Molise Makhene, "19th Episcopal District Leadership Conference an Overwhelming Success," *Voice of Missions*, February 1986.

10. The useful scholarship on transnationalism is too vast to do justice to here. A few key texts are: Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Thomas J. Csordas, ed., *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Ruth Feldstein, "Screening Antiapartheid: Miriam Makeba, 'Come Back, Africa,' and the Transnational Circulation of Black Culture and Politics," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 1 (2013): 12–39; Kevin Gaines, "Locating the Transnational in Postwar African American History," *Small Axe*; Bloomington, no. 28 (March 2009): 192–202,231; Ussama Makdisi, "The Privilege of Acting upon Others: The Middle Eastern Exception to Anti-Exceptionalist Histories of the US and the World," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge [Eng.] & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 203–16; Andrew Zimmerman, "Africa in Imperial and Transnational History: Multi-Sited Historiography and the Necessity of Theory," *The Journal of African History* 54, no. 3 (November 2013): 331–40.

11. Conrad Hackett and Brian J. Grim, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population" (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, December 2011), www.pewforum.org/christian/global-christianity-exec.aspx; Pew Research Center, "The Future

of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050" (Washington, DC, April 2, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

12. Two examples of recent books that consider evangelicals across lines of race are: Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005).

13. There is a massive literature on global evangelicalism. See, for an overview, Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012).

Pluralism and Production

Diversity, Pluralism, Secularism

For years, American religious scholars claimed that the religious freedom that resulted from disestablishment created religious competition that led to the United States' high level of religiosity. Recent studies, however, indicate that pluralism and its unlimited options might be leading to lower levels of religious belief and practice. What is the nature of the relationship among diversity, pluralism, and secularism? Does religious freedom breed vibrant and diverse faiths, or does it create so many options that people eventually relativize them all and turn toward secularism?

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On January 20, 2009, I sat in my living room listening to President Obama deliver his first inaugural address. Here's part of what he said: "We know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jew and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth." When I heard those words, I jumped out of my seat, not sure I heard it right. Could it be that my religious group, and the idea that many of us from somewhere else, was outright acknowledged by a President of the United States?

It was a potent symbolic moment. Growing up in Cobb County, GA, I always knew I was different. I was a little brown Hindu girl in the South. I knew what it meant to be non-white. I knew how it felt to be non-Christian in a place where megachurches dominated the scenery and my classmates' social lives. President Obama's nod to pluralism (and that he included non-believers) was refreshing. Pluralism often means discussing the diversity of religions that are present in America and how they are becoming American—yet that's not always something that we're at ease with, as Americans or as scholars.

It is a fascinating time to be examining the crossroads of race and religion in American public life. Many Americans are realizing that religious and racial diversity is the nation's "new normal"—not a temporary change, but a transformation the impacts of which will be profound and permanent. We are recognizing that diversity is here to stay. So, now what? Is a pluralistic society emerging?

Pluralism is more than diversity; it requires engagement. Specifically, Pluralism in U.S. society needs a social justice approach that recognizes and seeks to correct the unequal treatment of different religions in society. This approach must acknowledge the presence of a Christian norm within the U.S., and the existence of a religious consensus around monotheism (and theism itself) that ignores or trivializes, denigrates and alienates citizens from marginalized faith communities and nonbelief convictions. It calls attention to the calendar of observed or ignored religious holidays and ritual/traditions, to the food served in public cafeterias, and to legal and business restrictions on head coverings or beards. These facets of the culture advantage Christians and disadvantage others. A social justice approach to the study of religions explores how religion intersects with race, class, gender, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation, to affect the human experience.

To begin, we must acknowledge that Christian hegemony shapes American definitions and the popular understanding of "universal" truths. We are accustomed to speaking about various factions—be they political, religious, or philosophical—as having their own "perspectives." However, the cultural power of Protestant Christianity in the U.S. has given it more than just "perspectives": Protestant perspectives have become the "truths" at the bedrock of American society. Christianity dominates by setting the tone, and establishing the rules and assumptions about what belongs or does not belong and what is acceptable and not acceptable in public discourse. It is embedded in our institutions in ways that provide advantages to Christians and disadvantages for members of minority religious groups¹.

When discussing matters of bias and inequality, we usually look at and talk about the group that is the target of bias or discrimination. For example, when we talk about racism we describe the experiences of people of color. So in matters related to religious bias, our focus is on the religious minorities: the synagogue that has been vandalized, or the Muslim woman who doesn't get a job because she wears a headscarf. But for every disadvantage to some person or group, there's an advantage to some other person or group. To really understand religious bias and discrimination in America, we must see that it is Christians for whom and by whom society has been constructed.

Religious minorities encounter marginalization not only in direct personal experiences of discrimination, but also in a societal web of disadvantage built up over centuries and still supported by institutional structures today. From a host of court decisions and legislative enactments, it is clear that our laws are not religion-neutral; they create a continuing exclusion and inequality of access and opportunity. The political power of the norm causes lawmakers to embed Christian values, principles, symbols, and assumptions in our laws and public policies. The cultural power of the norm is that the way religion is understood, taught, and practiced by Christians is the ordinary state of affairs. Other faiths' beliefs and practices are different and implicitly lesser—abnormal, deviant, even illegitimate.

When Christian dominance is maintained so subtly, through the power of cultural norms and the influence of nominally secular or majoritarian phenomena, privilege is neither analyzed, nor scrutinized, nor confronted. You've heard of "color blind"? Well, most of my Christian students are "religion-blind," unable to see the Christian privilege

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they have. Their advantages are invisible to them, and they don't recognize how their non-Christian friends don't share these advantages. In order to critically discuss religious pluralism, it is necessary to see and understand the full impact of Christian normativity. Every year, we seem to be caught in the same discussion, whether we call it the "December dilemma" or the "war on Christmas." Until the people making and debating public policy learn to recognize Christian normativity and privilege, this cycle will continue.

Once Christian privilege is seen, and we understand there is a Christian norm, we can address and respond to questions that get at genuine and meaningful inequities in the lives of Americans, like: Is the workplace an equitable environment for non-Christians? Why is one's Americanness or patriotism questioned if they are not Christian? What is the difference in educational experience between students whose religious holidays (Christmas, Easter) coincide by design with school holidays and students who must take an excused absence to observe Eid, Diwali, or Yom Kippur? What does peer-on-peer teasing feel like, and how should it be responded to, when it is directed at a Muslim girl's hijab or a Sikh boy's turban?

We must also root out the implicit biases in our scholarship. The Pew Research Centers' groundbreaking 2012 report on Asian American religious communities gave us a glimpse of what Hinduism looks like in the daily lives of individuals. Pew's data show that nearly half (48%) of Hindus engage in daily prayer, and more than three quarters (78%) keep a religious altar or shrine in their home. Nearly as many (73%) believe in yoga as a spiritual practice, and more than four in ten meditate daily (44%) or fast during holy times (41%). Pew also notes that just one-fifth (19%) of Asian American Hindus say they attend a house of worship regularly².

Regrettably, Pew interprets this last data point to mean that Asian American Hindus are less religious than their Christian counterparts. In doing so, Pew applies a lens of Christian normativity—treating Biblical practices like weekly organized worship as the model for what constitutes "religious" behavior. When religious engagement is measured through the Christian normative lens, researchers may under-estimate the religiosity of Hindus: Hinduism doesn't have a weekly Sabbath like the Abrahamic faiths, and Hindus are as likely to worship at home or visit a temple to do darshan (the act of seeing and being seen by God), which they may not identify as attending a "service." Thus, regular temple attendance is an inadequate indicator of "religiosity" or of religion's role or importance in the lives of Asian American Hindus, and Buddhists as well³.

Finally, many American religious minorities trace their heritage to Asia, Africa, and the Arab world. In other words, they are simultaneously racial minorities and religious minorities in a country which remains both majority-White and majority-Christian. So to understand and contextualize the characteristics and experiences of these communities we must address not only race and religion but also the intersectionality of the two, and how the multiple ways different religions are racialized in the US today (and in regards to Islam, and Sikhism and Hinduism, this is not a post 9/11 phenomenon). Understanding 21st-century American pluralism is not just about faith and doctrine but also about race, ethnicity, and culture.

I'd like to end with a question and a pedagogical request: Bryan Stephenson, the noted attorney and civil rights activist, talks about the need to "get proximate" to the things we seek to change—to engage, personally and directly, not just abstractly, with the very societal challenges on which we are scholars or advocates. Scholars and students need to be proximate to this material in their classrooms and their lives; this requires that all of us to meet and discover America's religions on their own terms. Policy-makers and government officials need to not just read about the changing demographics in their districts, but to get out there and understand what it means to be Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim in America. These communities likewise need to engage with majority communities. This is the deep meaning of a social justice approach to pluralism. So what will it look like, in your teaching, to create a citizenry that recognizes and responds to these dilemmas?

1. Maurianne Adams and Khyati Y. Joshi, "Religious Oppression," *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, edited by Adams. M., L.A. Bell, D. Goodman and K.Y. Joshi (New York: Routledge, 2016).

2. Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths Washinton D.C.", 2012.

3. Jane Naomi Iwamura, et al., "Reflections on the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths Data and Report." *Amerasia Journal* 40 no. 1 (2014): 1-16.

Peter Manseau
**Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of
 American History**

A few months ago, I had the unusual experience of being drawn briefly into a very high profile disagreement about American religious diversity. It was October 2016 and during one of the presidential debates, a Muslim woman rose from the audience to ask the candidates this question: “With Islamophobia on the rise, how will you help people like me deal with the consequences of being labeled a threat to the country after the election is over?” To his credit, Donald Trump responded, “Well, you’re right about Islamophobia, and that’s a shame.” But then he added, “We have to be sure that Muslims come in and report when they see something going on.”

Hillary Clinton meanwhile framed her answer with a nod to history. “We’ve had Muslims in America,” she said, “since George Washington.” While this might have been better phrased so as not to imply that Washington himself was Muslim, her point was plain enough: Islam has been here a long time. Nothing more about this statement was said during the debate. But a few days later, it came to the attention of the editors of the website Politifact—the Pulitzer Prize winning fact-checking site that rates the accuracy of claims by public figures on a scale of True to Mostly True to Mostly False to Pants on Fire. They determined that this claim was worth investigating.

Under the headline “Clinton says Muslims have been in America since George Washington,” one of the site’s fact checkers wrote, “We wondered about Clinton’s remarks about Muslims being in America since the nation’s first president, more than 200 years ago.” And then they proceeded to weigh the merits of the statement. Now, I’m not a regular reader of Politifact. I must admit I was alerted to their efforts only because I have a Google Alert set up for my name. And so when an email landed in my inbox suggesting that I was somehow implicated in this conversation, I went immediately to the site, scrolled down a bit, and read:

“Clinton’s campaign pointed [Politifact] to a Feb. 9, 2015, opinion piece in the New York Times by Peter Manseau, who has written about American history and religions.”

In that short opinion piece called “The Muslims of Early America” I shared a few moments from history which demonstrated that indeed Islam has been part of the American experience for centuries. I had written it a year and a half earlier, during a period of increased anti-Muslim

activity in Texas, Oklahoma and elsewhere, around the time President Obama had made a similar statement at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism. As he said at the time, “Islam has been woven into the fabric of our country since its founding.”

Though the presence of Muslims in the young United States is probably well known to everyone here, you will likely not be surprised to learn that when President Obama noted this, it was met with apoplectic outrage. David Barton scoffed that Islam’s American influence could be seen only in the role followers of Muhammad played as slave traders on the other side of the Atlantic. South Carolina Congressman Jeff Duncan wondered if the president’s view of the past came from his “Jakarta elementary education.” My favorite response came from an editor of a Catholic newspaper who tweeted Obama’s reflection on Islam woven into our history, and then asked simply, “Is he high?”

So, I was pleased when my small contribution to this discussion helped steer Politifact toward giving Clinton’s claim about Muslims in America an unambiguous “True” rating. But, I was also troubled that they had seen fit to fact check what should’ve been a completely non-controversial statement. Doing so, I feared, contributed to the sense that this was a matter open to debate—which it quite simply is not.

Scholars going back to Allan Austin’s African Muslims in Antebellum America in 1984 have established that perhaps 20% of the enslaved population brought to colonial America and the US had some connection to Islam when they arrived. Even counting conservatively, we’re talking about tens of thousands of individuals. To put this in the context of other religious minorities of the time: In 1800 there were perhaps 40,000 Catholics in the United States, the Jewish community numbered around 4,000. While precise numbers can’t be known, it’s entirely possible there were more Muslims in the early republic than there were Catholics and Jews combined.

All of this, I should add, was fairly common knowledge at the time. Every so often in the 18th and 19th century press, enslaved Muslims became celebrities of a sort. In 1734, articles appeared about a man who had escaped enslavement in Maryland; who, an Annapolis judge wrote at the time, “shewed upon all Occasions a singular Veneration for the Name of God, and never pronounced the Word Allah without a peculiar Accent.” In 1825, a Philadelphia paper

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told the story of a captured runaway in North Carolina who filled a jailhouse wall with Arabic verses from the Quran. In 1829, newspapers around the country told the story of an enslaved Muslim believed to a prince in his homeland. As one account noted, he had read the Bible and admired its precepts, but added, “His principal objections are that Christians do not follow them.”

So if the presence of Muslims in America was taken for granted in the middle of the 19th century, how do we get to 2016 and the need to fact check Hillary Clinton’s comments on Islam and ask if Barack Obama is high for stating a simple historical fact? What is the cause of this remarkable instance of forgetting? How to explain the disappearing diversity of our past?

For this panel we were asked to reconsider the relationship between religious freedom and the resulting competition that led to the United States’ high level of religiosity. Yet we should also consider those forms of early American religion which were effectively barred from competition; those for whom the supposed “spiritual marketplace” was never open for business. What can be known about traditions whose flourishing was made impossible because circumstances determined they could offer no structures of communal support but many obstacles to continued practice, facing active efforts at their eradication, declining and ultimately vanishing as a result?

As it happens, we can see this process at work and gain an understanding of how its gradual nature can lead to forgetting, in the work of a mid-19th century missionary named Charles Colcock Jones, who preached on plantations in Georgia until his death in 1862. In his book *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* Jones complained that among the enslaved, Muslims were particularly reluctant to embrace the new faith he offered, but slowly they were coming around. Many Mohammedan Africans, he noted, had found ways to “accommodate” Islam to the Christian beliefs being imposed upon them. “God, say they, is Allah, and Jesus Christ is Mohammed. The religion is the same, but different countries have different names.”

I would argue that this negotiation, and the loss of one aspect of American religious diversity which it represents, is a by-product of the same religious freedom so often credited with breeding vibrant and diverse faiths. It is perhaps no coincidence that the traditions which benefited most from disestablishment, the Methodists and the Baptists, had the most success winning African American adherents. This of course affected not only Islam in America, but many other

beliefs and practices, including Christianity itself. After Emancipation, the establishment of black churches exploded in the South. Resources were pooled & houses of worship became focal points for newly liberated communities, while missionaries from free black denominations of the North arrived to provide support and encourage conversion. A process begun in the 18th century found completion by the end of the 19th as Protestant Christianity became one of the most significant elements of African American life. The many religious expressions that had been brought together by slavery were then subsumed within a single faith, which also was changed as a result, often through similar processes of “accommodation” described by the missionary Jones.

I’ve highlighted Islam here because it’s an urgent example of religious diversity under fire. But we can find other moments of accommodation between minority and majority traditions throughout the nation’s history, whenever individuals or communities encounter the reality that American culture may be full of many religious choices, but only a few bring clear social benefit, or in some instances, hope of survival. Taking stock of the interplay between disestablishment and diversity, we should of course continue to examine the experiences of those for whom the ability to affiliate, disaffiliate, and reaffiliate is a matter of spiritual fulfillment. Likewise we should explore moments when overabundance of choices leads to a rejection of all.

But we should not neglect stories of those for whom religious freedom was just another word for nothing left to lose. The current dangerously politicized rhetoric surrounding religious diversity in our country is not merely a matter of xenophobic fears of supposedly new traditions making a home here; it has its roots in a forgotten history, which is partially obscured by an incomplete and somewhat romantic view of the practical implications of religious liberty. It demands that we find more effective ways to convey the complexities of the nation’s multi-religious past.

Fenggang Yang
Purdue University

Let me begin with some clarification of the relevant terms. Several scholars, including Robert Wuthnow, James Beckford, and I myself have spoken and written on distinguishing several terms.¹ Without reviewing the details of the confused and confusing usage, here I'd simply offer simple and clear definitions. Pluralism is a philosophical or theological position, plurality is a description of the coexistence of multiple religions, and pluralization is the process of increasing plurality. Plurality and diversity are interchangeable in most places.

Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish pluralism at two levels, the individual level and the social level. At the individual level, pluralism is a personal philosophical or theological position different from exclusivism, inclusivism, or relativism. At the social level, pluralism is a kind of social arrangements for dealing with multiple religions within a given society. The arrangements include legal regulation, cultural understanding, and civil society norms. Unlike religious monopoly or oligopoly, the pluralist social arrangements are to guarantee religious freedom for individuals and faith communities.²

These two levels of pluralism are closely related, but they should not be confused. In a pluralist society, a person may favor pluralist social arrangements without adopting a personal philosophy of pluralism. Many theologically conservative believers of Christianity, Judaism, and other religions may be exclusivist in their personal philosophy and theology, but are adamantly fighting for the social arrangements of pluralism. Indeed, this is the traditional position of the so-called free churches. Only if religious freedom is guaranteed in the society, can the conservative believers retain their non-pluralist personal beliefs.

Unfortunately, people are often confused about the two levels, either insisting on everyone becoming a pluralist at all levels and times, or rejecting pluralism completely. On the one hand, wholesale or complete pluralism is a form of radical relativism, believing all religions are equally valid or equally invalid. On the other hand, the complete rejection of pluralism would lead to religious fundamentalism. Peter Berger in his 2014 book, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, says that religious relativism would lead to moral nihilism, whereas fundamentalism would lead to fanaticism. Modernity, or a functional modern society, requires people to maintain certain level of tension between one's own truth conviction and practical approaches to people who hold different truth convictions. Religious fundamentalists reject modernity and

demand social conformity in the name of certain religious truth, and extreme secularists have similarly, fanatically pressed for uniformity of the pluralist or relativist mind for all people.

Second point: if we create a scale of plurality from 0 to 100, where 0 represents no religious plurality at all, with one religion, or no religion, for all the people of the whole society, 100 represents extreme plurality, where everyone has his or her own religion and no two persons share a religion. Of course, religion by nature is social and collective, but individualized religion, or more precisely, individual spirituality, has risen substantially in American society in recent decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, various spiritualities were imported or emerged. In the 1980s, Robert Bellah and his associates identified the phenomenon of Sheilaism, which holds an eclectic mix of beliefs and practices from multiple sources as well as personal inventions.³ Recently, an increasing proportion of Americans claim no religion but most of them hold some religious beliefs and engage religious practices. There are also those claiming to be spiritual but not religious. Overall, individualized religions or individual spirituality has become a major social phenomenon in America. This may indeed signify the end of American exceptionalism. If we follow the Durkheimian tradition, we may say that when individualized religion becomes dominant in society, religion is no longer the glue of society or communities. Religion loses the pro-social functions. Now, on the scale of plurality between 0 and 100, where does the U.S. stand today? And we may also ask a related question: What is the optimal degree of plurality for religious vitality in American society? This is not intended as a rhetorical question, but a research question for empirical research.

The United States of America began with some degree of plurality, which contributed to the adoption of the pluralist arrangements. Up to now this is a fundamental difference between the USA and Europe, where the norm at the time was the state church. Once the U.S. set the model of separation of church and state, it set off the process of pluralization, importing traditional religions and inventing new religions. Today we may say that almost every religion from anywhere in the world in any period of human history has some believers or practitioners in the U.S. nowadays. Compared with the British model of the state church and the French model of laïcité, the American model led to religious thriving, as Roger Finke and Rodney Stark have argued.⁴ However, that religious vitality might have ended by the end of the 20th century. So, an interesting research question

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is, has the religious pluralization in America passed the optimal degree of plurality for a healthy, functional society? It seems that American society has entered a new age of fragmentation with irreconcilable fractions.

Interestingly, religion in China is moving in the opposite direction: there have been growths of institutionalized religions, more specifically, congregational religions, especially Christianity.⁵ Protestant Christianity has grown on average about 10 percent a year since 1980. If the rapid growth continues, in a decade or two, there will be more Christians in China than in the U.S.⁶

In traditional China, multiple religions were present but the religious institutions were weak. Most people held some religious beliefs and engaged some religious practices, which were often a mixture of beliefs and practices taken from multiple religions, plus personal or familial or communal inventions.⁷ These kind of religions in the Chinese context have been referred to as folk religions or popular religions, which are, in my view, not really different from the contemporary American phenomena of Sheilaism, spiritual but not religious, and the like.⁸ The majority of the Chinese could be classified as religious “nones” who do not self-identify with a particular religion but nonetheless have religious beliefs and practices. These kinds of individualized religions were dominant in traditional China. To a large extent it remains so in China and Taiwan.

In the globalizing world today, it is fascinating to observe religion in China moving toward the pattern of traditional America while religion in America is moving toward the pattern of traditional China. I’m not saying that China and America have become similar. They are still far apart from each other in their distinct religious configurations. However, China and America are changing toward each other. The converging trends have become increasingly apparent to me and other observers. In my SSSR presidential address, I called the converging phenomenon Chinamerica.⁹ Given the converging trends of China and America, one of the questions to ponder is: what is the optimal religious plurality in a healthy, functional society?

on Multicultural Societies 1 (available from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001437/143733E.pdf#page=19>); Fenggang Yang, “Agency-Driven Secularization and Chinese Experiments in Multiple Modernities,” in Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014).

2. For a more elaborated discussion, see Fenggang Yang, “Agency-Driven Secularization and Chinese Experiments in Multiple Modernities,” in Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014).

3. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

4. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

5. Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

6. Fenggang Yang, “When Will China Become the World’s Largest Christian Country?” *Slate* December 1, 2014.

7. Fenggang Yang and Anning Hu, “Mapping Chinese Folk Religion in Mainland China and Taiwan.” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 51(3, 2012):506–522.

8. The Pew Researcher Center’s report, “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050,” includes folk religion as a major category of religions, but counts folk religious followers only among Africans, Asians, Native Americans, and aboriginal Australians, whereas white Americans and Europeans do not have folk religions. This is not logical. See my criticism in Fenggang Yang, “Exceptionalism or Chinamerica: Measuring Religious Change in the Globalizing World Today,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2016) 22(1):7-22.

9. Ibid.

1. Robert Wuthnow, “Presidential Address 2003: The Challenge of Diversity,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43: 159–70, 162; James A. Beckford, “The management of religious diversity in England and Wales with special reference to prison chaplaincy,” *MOST Journal*

Pluralism and Production

Cultural Production and American Religion

Twenty years ago, Stephen Warner called the master function of religion “social space for cultural pluralism.” What role does religion play in sustaining multiple cultures and, relatedly, what role does it play in supporting an ideology of pluralism as desirable? How does religion contribute to or challenge racialization—the practice of producing, maintaining, and contesting racial classification? Are we indeed witnessing the inevitable end of “white, Christian America?” How is religion reflected in movements such as Black Lives Matter or Standing Rock?

Paul Harvey

University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

Scholars speak of religion and race being “co-constituting categories.” This essentially means that religious concepts formed racial ideas, and racial concepts infused religious ideas in American history. The two worked in tandem to create deeply held notions of where people came from (including origins myths and migration stories), who they were as a people, what they as a people were to do with their individual and communal lives, and how they would define themselves among the others around them. Religious ideas created racial categories and imposed race upon individual human bodies—that process also helps explain the hierarchies that emerged out of them. But religious ideas also helped undermine racial hierarchies. Likewise, ideas about race created the categories of religion by which people imposed order on the chaos of ideas and practices swirling around them. But as ideas about race came to be seen as human inventions serving social purposes, then the religious stories undergirding them also were subject to the same scrutiny.

Religion played a significant part in creating race. That point is clear in the scholarship. Yet as my colleague Tisa Wenger has pointed out in her incisive review of my book *Bounds of Their Habitation: Race and Religion in American History*, while scholars have made clear how religion has formed and defined race, it’s also true that “if race and religion are truly co-constituted, then race was simultaneously making and re-making the categories and practices of religion.” As she points out, “That side of the story, not only in this book but also in the field of American religious history more generally remains mostly untold.” Right there, I think, Tisa has hit the challenge for a future generation of scholarship.

Christianity fostered racialization, but also undermined it. Biblical passages were powerful but ambiguous, and arguments about God’s providence in colonization, proselytization, the slave trade, and slavery were contentious. Christian myths and stories were central to the project of creating racial categories in the modern world; but the central text of Christianity, the Bible, was also amenable to more universalist visions, and in that sense was not a fully reliable ally for theorists of racial hierarchy. At the same time, ideas about race helped to remake modern ideas of what constituted Christianity, and who was, or could be, or could not be, a Christian.

Such notions found their way into the founding laws of the country. The first citizenship law in American history, from 1790, famously extended the rights and duties of citizenship

to “free white men.” Only they could be naturalized and receive full privileges. For much of the eighteenth and even more so nineteenth centuries, race and religion were joined in the project of civilization. Christianizing others involved civilizing them. Sometimes this involved brutally stripping colonial subjects, especially Native Americans, of their own civilizations. At other times, the joining of Christianization and civilization underwrote idealistic crusades of bringing formerly enslaved peoples into American civilization. In other instances, the intertwining of Christianity, civilization, and whiteness justified the complete exclusion of peoples from the American Republic, notably in legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Defining citizenship for black Americans in the Fourteenth Amendment, for example, involved a deliberate discussion of whether race or religion was the fundamental constituting element of American citizenship. If black Christians could be included in the Republic, what about heathen others? And what about Christian others, including Christianized Indians, Chinese Protestants in California, and Latinos who had been assimilated into the United States after 1848. Progressive Christian writers such as Josiah Strong articulated a Christian nativism, warning against the dilution of the Protestantism which had been instrumental in forming American democracy.

White American Christian nationalism, in effect, recreated itself within the new constitutional structures that came out of the Civil War. But that form of racial nationalism took form within the context of a massive immigration of European Catholics and Jews, and the domination of the last groups of Native peoples who fought to preserve their lands and liberties in the West. These racialized conceptions of nationalism in the post-Civil War era arose with the rapid pluralization of the American populace. That basic paradox set the terms for the discussion of religion, race, and citizenship from the end of the Civil War to the twentieth century. And it framed a discussion which, to this day, has never fully disappeared. Racial nationalism emerged both in intellectual life, politics, and popular culture, also derived partly from Christian myths about what peoples were sacred, and who were not, as well as over cultural contests over who possessed the capacity to be Christian citizens of a white Republic. In the contemporary world, Steve Bannon and Steve Miller make sure those ideas influence policy discussions.

In the twentieth century, ideas of cultural pluralism that percolated through the progressive intellectual world of

Harvey

the early twentieth century eventually found their way into an American discourse of religious pluralism. This was never all-inclusive. For groups whose spiritual practices did not constitute a discernible “religion” and thus did not enjoy the benefits of First Amendment protection, religious freedom remained a more distant ideal. Yet for many others, including those who were excluded by the legacy of racist immigration legislation and others who historically had been dishonored, religious pluralism as an ideal in public discourse constituted a true revolution.

Religious conflicts occupy courts and other places in the public square. In recent years, those have often come from religious conservatives who feel embattled, even persecuted, even though they historically created a powerful Protestant moral establishment that effectively governed the country for the better part of two centuries. In other cases, they have arisen from conflicts between particular religious practices and the demands of the modern workplace.

But for groups whose spiritual practices did not constitute a discernible “religion” and thus did not enjoy the benefits of First Amendment protection, religious freedom remained a more distant ideal. “Religion,” as understood by the courts, meant traditions that resembled Protestantism: that is, separable from other areas of life, interior and individual, chosen or not. Religions rooted in relationship to the land, embedded in daily habits, relationally inherited rather than voluntarily converted into, were not recognizable as such.

The current balancing act of a demographically self-identified Christian nation with a rising pluralist population will shape race and religion in the decades to come. The implicit, de facto Protestantism of the American Republic historically has defined public discourse, shaped public ceremonies, and dominated public life in the personage of political officials. Moreover, racial profiling as applied to black or Middle Eastern Muslims affects lives and individual liberties in a way that is simply unthinkable for the dominant Protestant majority. In this way, the nexus between “religion” and “race” has never died. Religious pluralism has opened up spaces for ethnic groups and minority religions that have been surveilled and suppressed. And yet, the network of surveillance is still there, as documented in the spate of recent studies on religion and the FBI, religion and the state, and the way local government and police forces operate to support the carceral state and fund themselves through penalizing and fining poor people, often trapping them in de facto debtors’ prisons.

Thus, in a society sometimes said to be moving into a

“post-racial” era, ethnic and racial constructions remain a central ordering fact of religious life. That reconstruction of the American religious fabric remains incomplete, an ongoing project, as the recent examples of controversies about immigration, deportation, and policy towards Muslim immigration demonstrates. The contemporary experience of African Americans, Muslim-Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans of (at once) freedom and surveillance, mobility and suspicion reflects much of the long colonial history of race, religion, and “difference” in American history. The fears expressed in contemporary culture (and stoked by politicians who invoke older versions of American nationalism) harken back to nativist movements familiar in American history. Even as the language of religious pluralism has become dominant, a resurgence of conservative rhetoric about America’s history as a “Christian nation,” and the continued predominance of the white Protestant and Catholic elite in positions of political power, suggest that the intertwining of racial and religious identity in conceiving of citizenship in America remains powerful.

Josef Sorett
Columbia University

First of all, I want to follow my colleagues in thanking Phil, Art, and the team of faculty and staff at the Center for the Study of Religion in American Culture for the invitation to participate in this incredibly rich conversation about our shared subject, contested object, or “field of inquiry,”—whether that object is “religion” or “America” . . .

More specifically, I appreciate the invitation to think with folks at this table, and in this room, about the play between “Cultural Production and American Religion,” which is at once a very precise and extremely expansive, or unwieldy, pairing. It has now been just about twenty years since David Hall’s seminal edited volume, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* was published. And for those of us, like myself, who entered graduate school not too long after this publication, we entered the field taking for granted the language of “lived religion,” the push toward “practice” over and against “belief,” the prioritizing of laity over against clergy, and the privileging of the local over the comparative or the universal, as part of a broader “cultural turn” in the humanities and social sciences that seemed to have achieved a position of orthodoxy by the time we were being disciplined by the field of American religious history. We have since witnessed a host of more specific analytical frames—material and visual cultures, sensory cultures, affective registers, aesthetic formations, and more—that have, in effect, added flesh onto the bones of the early intervention made by the contributors to Hall’s now-classic anthology. With this cluster of historiographic developments in mind, I’d like focus my brief remarks, by way of a minor revision our panel’s call, to consider with you “The Cultural Production of American Religion,” as both a field (of inquiry) and a phenomenological terrain.

To do this, I want to organize the structure of my presentation by taking seriously the series of smaller prompts associated with our panel’s charge to consider: first, the significance of religion to contemporary protest movements (whether it be Standing Rock or #BlackLivesMatter); second, the relationship between religion, racial classification and cultural pluralism, and, finally, the provocative proposition of a pending end to “white, Christian America.” Moreover, I want to weave all of these considerations together with a focus on my own specific subfield(s); namely, African American religious history. And, just to be clear, this presentation proceeds less as a single coherent argument than as a series of related reflections on the entanglements between American religion and cultural production.

So, as it relates to the first prompt: the question of religion and social movements or, better yet, movements of social protest, such as #BlackLivesMatter. Here I want to observe, or call our attention to, what would seem to be an irony of history. It seems that just as scholars of African American religion have been moving to challenge an analytical framework that assumes the oppositional (which, of course, valorizes the position of protest) as normative, we have witnessed the emergence of a new black protest movement—at least that’s one way to think about the Movement for Black Lives). Here I am thinking about at least three kinds of recent interventions in the historiography. First, there are books—like Barbara Savage’s *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us* and Curtis Evans’ *The Burden of Black Religion*—that have historicized the politics of a field that gave us a vision of a politically-engaged “Negro Church” as normative. Second, there are works on the contemporary period that turn our attention to kinds of black Christianity that complicate this idea of “The Black Church”; such as Marla Frederick’s *Between Sundays*, Jonathan Walton’s *Watch This!* and most recently, Judith Casselberry’s *Labors of Faith*. And, third, there are historical works highlight the longstanding presence of such complexities, both within and without black churches, including Lerone Martin’s *Preaching on Wax* and Judith Weisenfeld’s *New World A-Coming*.

In the face of all this complexity, past and present, there are a number of ways we can then think about the place of religion within #BlackLivesMatter. At first, the media was wont to imagine the movement as the secular successor (or foil) to an earlier, and decidedly Christian, Civil Rights movement—at least as we have imagined it. Upon closer inspection, however, stories then paid attention to the heterodox beliefs (and practices) of the three women commonly considered the movement’s “founders”: Patrisse Cullors (the Yoruba practitioner), Alicia Garza (the Marxist), and Opal Tometi (the practitioner of Black Liberation Theology). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cullors, Garza, and Tometi were readily located within the rubrics of religious/theological traditions (or, via Marx, the rejection thereof) even as the very construction of the movement as sacred (with its singular creation myth and three founding figures) and the way in which the movement itself has advanced a spiritual vision of blackness has been left relatively unquestioned. In this view, #BlackLivesMatter was cast as queer as much for its religious commitments (or lack thereof) as for its gender and sexual politics. In both regards, #BlackLivesMatter is brought into view as but one example of a black social movement (and cultural production) wherein religious diversity (and the secular) is

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enlisted in service to a novel claim for the oppositional as normative. Never mind that Opal Tometi, who espouses a commitment to liberation theology, has also partnered with the evangelical (really Pentecostal/Charismatic) Hillsong Church in New York City. Or that the kind of spiritualized blackness enunciated in #BlackLivesMatter has a history that dated back at least to the New Negro movement of the 1920s. Indeed, these are the very practices and performances of (religious difference) in the present that provoked the kinds of historical questions I tried to get at in my first book, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*, and which am still grappling with as I wrap up the next, *The Holy Holy Black: The Ironies of an African American Secular*.

Which leads me to our second prompt; that is, the play between religion, racial classification and cultural pluralism. One of the things that I think we can begin to see in this view of #BlackLivesMatter (and the longer history of which it is a part) is how religious difference is made to stand-in for (or provide the evidence of) cultural pluralism, which is organized/managed by an (unmarked) secularized (or liberal) Protestantism. Here I am following accounts of secularism in the work of scholars like Tracy Fessenden's *Culture and Redemption*, Ann Pellegrini and Janet Jakobsen's *Secularisms*; but also the insights of Pamela Klassen and Courtney Bender regarding pluralism's powers, whose volume *After Pluralism* hones in on the many ways that pluralism functions descriptively and prescriptively at once. And here is where I find myself turning, once again to that quintessentially American institution, "The Black Church," which not too long ago, as we all may recall, was both the object of a popular elegy and the target of an academic moratorium. I raise this not to rehearse a debate about "The Black Church" (or to resurrect instrumentalist and exceptionalist arguments thereof), but rather to situate that story in relationship to the 2017 RAAC Biennial's conversation about the persistence of Christian hegemony. Here what's most interesting to me is how religious studies' disciplinary anxieties about the fissures and tensions (as well as the continuities) between theology and history (and the humanities and social sciences, more broadly) seemed to be amplified in their intensity when applied to African American religion. Perhaps, to paraphrase Curtis Evans, this is just one of the many burdens of black religion.

At least in my own work, the turn to cultural production was motivated by a desire to follow the field in its effort to decenter "The Black Church," as a subset of the larger investment in somehow subverting, escaping or undoing the

Christian hegemony. Literature and the arts, in this regard, offered a set of presumably secular sources. Only, when turning to said sources, I observed anything but an absence of "religion" and, instead, found myself mapping a multiplicity of religious ideas, including the presence of a persistent and privileged (yet anything but singular) "Negro (and later, Black) Church." That is, my own work has attempted to write a history, which I alluded to earlier, about the spiritual grammars that have often underwritten efforts to advance modern visions of black subjectivity and social life. Here, rather than a black church monolith, Afro-Protestantism came into view in its varying institutional manifestations, but also as a set of affective registers and emotional dispositions, aesthetic formations, and discursive logics. Ultimately, in this view, "The Black Church" emerges as an assemblage of race and religion (but also of class, gender, nation and sex); and, much like Melissa Wilcox argued yesterday in regards her queer nuns, as a Foucaultian episteme from which there is no escape or outside. Afro-Protestantism, then, presents a vital range of positions and possibilities, problems, and prospects. The Christian hegemony—in black and white—is never complete, even as it provides the very terms and frames through which we attempt to oppose and undo it. In this sense, religion (really a heterodox, excessive yet expansive, Afro-Protestantism) rendered black identity and culture as both markedly different and decidedly American.

Finally, I'd like to just briefly highlight three quick examples (without explanation) of where we can see religious pluralism and Afro-Protestantism entangled in distinctively modern visions of blackness. Here we need look no further than that most avowedly "secular" moment of black cultural production known as the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which was also described by one of the movement's leading theorists, Larry Neal, as the "spiritual sister of Black Power." Example one: In his essay, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," James Stewart called for a "methodology affirmed by spirit," which he delineated as follows:

That spirit is black.
That spirit is non-white.
That spirit is patois.
That spirit is Samba.
Voodoo.
The black Baptist church in the South.

Example two: Ishmael Reed's "NeoHooDoo Manifesto," where the author iconoclastically lambasted Christianity as a colonial and "cop religion" that helped maintain American

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capitalism and imperialism. Almost seamlessly, Reed then referred to NeoHooDoo as a “Church finding its lyrics.” In both of these instances, it is not “The Black Church” writ-large under discussion but rather the art and politics produced and performed in and by different kinds of churches.

Finally, example three: Toni Cade Bambara’s essay “On the Issue of Roles,” which appeared in her 1970 anthology, *The Black Woman*, extended a similar line of thinking to Reed. Therein she attributed contemporary gender problems, both in Africa and Black America, to the impositions of western Christianity’s collaboration with European colonialism. And when looking for alternative visions, she appealed to a surprising spiritual exemplar in the person of Father Divine. The charismatic preacher created a host of controversies during his living, including because he eschewed the language of race; clearly not a position endorsed on the pages of *The Black Woman*. However, Cade Bambara invoked Father Divine because he also insisted that members of his Peace Mission movement do away with gender identifiers in favor of shared status of “Angelhood.”

This leads me to the final prompt for our panel: Are we indeed witnessing the inevitable end of “white, Christian America?” Hopefully it’s pretty clear that—given the ways that I am thinking about the entanglements of religion and race (inescapably tied to other categories, such as sexuality, nation, gender and class)—my most simple answer to this question would be, “No.” Demographic statistics are no doubt changing all around us. Yet the structural arrangements and symbolic terrain of race and religion still largely adheres to a privileged Protestantism. Post-Christian fantasies (like, and often linked to, post-racial ones) rarely, if ever, bear themselves out in real time; both in terms of the terrain of American religion and the study thereof. Moreover, as my three above examples suggest, cultural production lent in service to critiques of white, Christian hegemony often leads in unpredictable directions to religious performances that defy our desirable political metrics. As Judith Weisenfeld writes in the introduction to her most recent book, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*:

In some sense, all religious groups in the United States could be described as religio-racial ones, given the deeply powerful, if sometimes veiled, ways the American system of racial hierarchy has structured religious beliefs, practices, and institutions for all people in its frame. (5)

Here I find our field challenged to direct closer attention to

these kinds of questions in the study of American religion, in general. Not just to those religious subjects deemed “other;” but rather, and perhaps especially, to that “religio-racial” group named as “white, Christian America.”

Tisa Wenger
Yale Divinity School

The prompt for this panel asked us to consider the role that “religion” plays both in “supporting an ideology of pluralism as desirable” and also in the dynamics of “racialization—the practice of producing, maintaining, and contesting racial classification.” I want to turn these questions around to ask what roles pluralism plays in making and remaking cultural formations of race and religion. Contemporary articulations of pluralism—and of the closely related principle of religious freedom—work to actively forge ‘religion’ every bit as much as the reverse.¹ And race is intimately involved in every step of this process, not only because race and religion have helped define each other across the scope of U. S. history but also because over the course of the last century or so Americans have used the ideologies of religious freedom and pluralism to negotiate the boundaries and distinctions between race and religion in American life.

Religious groups don’t always advocate for pluralism or support it in practice, to be sure. Many American Christians have been more inclined to fear or bemoan than to celebrate the presence and growth of non-Christian or differently Christian groups, especially when those ‘others’ are non-white. At the same time some of them wield the language of pluralism and even more so of religious freedom to construct cultural formations of religion that tacitly identify it as socially conservative, white, and Christian. These tactics are hardly new, but they have accelerated along with the cultural authority of pluralist ideals.

Consider the statement “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” written in 1994 by Chuck Colson and John Neuhaus and signed by a who’s-who list of evangelical and Catholic luminaries. This statement called for ‘religious freedom’ and a stronger public voice for ‘religion’ as the foundations of civil society. “Religion, which was privileged and foundational in our legal order, has in recent years been penalized and made marginal,” they wrote. “We contend together for a renewal of the constituting vision of the place of religion in the American experiment.”² Notice that they talk about all religion, religion-in-general. This is a nod to religious diversity and it suggests the ideology of pluralism, but their real concern is Christianity alone.

“Evangelicals and Catholics Together” was released less than a year after the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993, which Colson and Neuhaus saw as an opportunity to reframe the national conversation about religious freedom.³ They began the statement by defining a set of Christian convictions shared by Catholics

and evangelical Protestants, and then (in a tactic that is all too familiar today) invoked “religious freedom” in favor of conservative Christian positions on the culture wars issues of abortion, pornography, and “parental choice” in education. The racial dynamics built into these claims are most obvious in the push for “parental choice,” an idea that became an evangelical talking point starting in the 1970s. Christian schools provided some white Americans with a means of escape from newly integrated public schools, and religious freedom provided a conveniently high-minded rationale for that escape. Two decades later, by foregrounding issues of parental choice, abortion, and sexual morality, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” ignored questions of racial and social justice and in so doing actively upheld a politics of white as well as conservative Christian and male supremacy.

A similar dynamic is at work in the politics of the Trump administration, most of all in the space between the Executive Order on Immigration—otherwise known as the ‘Muslim Ban’—and the Executive Order on Religious Liberty. Even in its first iteration the immigration order did not directly mention Islam, but spoke in coded terms about the danger from “foreign born individuals” who “harbor hostile attitudes” towards the United States and its “founding principles.” It suspended the admission of refugees into the United States, with the exception of any “claims made... on the basis of religious-based persecution,” where “the religion of the individual is a minority religion in the individual’s country of nationality.”⁴ This policy was couched in the language of religious freedom but obviously intended to privilege Christians.

After several federal courts ruled the order unconstitutional, the president released a second version that began by defending its predecessor via the logic of religious pluralism. The priority granted to “members of persecuted minority groups” had not been “motivated by animus toward any religion,” the new order insisted. In hopes of toeing the constitutional line, this new version did not specify religion as the basis for exceptions to the suspended refugee program. Instead it allowed administration officials “to admit individuals to the United States as refugees on a case-by-case basis, in their discretion,” if they determined that these individuals posed no security threat and where “the denial of entry would cause undue hardship.” All this only obscured and abstracted the issue even further. Exceptions were to be granted purely by “discretion,” a policy that would allow the administration to tacitly privilege those they might identify as Christians without any official mention of Islam, Christianity, or even the category of religion at all. At the

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same time, like the first order, it used the coded language of “aliens” and “terrorism,” along with a list of predominantly Muslim countries, to invoke racialized fears of Islam.⁵

Two months later, the president’s religious liberty order used the terms ‘religion’ and ‘religious freedom’ to support a set of issues that have been pushed by a socially conservative, primarily white, and overwhelmingly Christian constituency.⁶ As in the immigration orders, the rhetorics of pluralism and religious freedom were invoked here in the name of all religion, but function to support a very particular kind of Christianity. This is not a religious freedom framed with Muslims, Native Americans, African Americans, or any other racial-religious minority group in mind. Instead, the category of religion is shaped in a distinctly white and Christian mold.

Against this backdrop, neither the Black Lives Matter movement nor last year’s Standing Rock protests defined their concerns primarily in religious terms. These movements arguably suggest the limits of pluralism as a frame for the most pressing concerns faced by racial-religious minorities in the United States today. Black Lives Matter has moved away from the tactics of an earlier civil rights movement that foregrounded Christianity and the ideology of religious pluralism. Black Lives Matter has gained support from some religious groups and some of its leaders use imagery and theology drawn from the black Christian tradition, as my co-panelist Josef Sorett and others have observed. Yet as a whole the movement has avoided an explicitly religious frame. There are no doubt a variety of reasons for this approach. But surely one of them is the overwhelming association of religion and religious freedom in recent years with white Christians and politically conservative causes. This conservative politics of religious freedom has shaped American formations of religion in specific ways, making it less likely for BLM activists to frame their cause in this way.

The situation was somewhat different in the recent protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline, where Standing Rock Sioux tribal leaders made a point of incorporating prayer and ceremony into the protestors’ daily routine. The support they received from a diverse set of religious groups and many hundreds of clergy suggests the potential of pluralist ideology for such protests. Organizers dramatically challenged the role of Christianity in upholding settler colonial rule, past and present, when they staged a public burning of the papal bulls that initiated the Doctrine of Discovery in the fifteenth century. A widely circulated statement signed by more than five hundred “interfaith clergy members” invoked both

Christian and pluralist ideals: “We denounce the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and of our various religious traditions as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God.”⁷

In this way the protests mobilized the moral authority of Christianity alongside a pluralist, interfaith appeal to human rights, in order to support an indigenous claim to the land. Thousands of protestors arrived at Standing Rock, many of them representing indigenous communities from across the Americas and around the world. They marked the emergence of a new pan-indigenous movement for land rights and sovereignty. But the political winds of the past year and the powerful financial interests of the oil industry added up to their defeat. State authorities brutally attacked the protestors and cleared the camps, while the Trump administration eagerly gave its permission for the pipeline to move forward.

It is worth noting that although the pipeline traversed lands that the Lakota people have identified as sacred, the #NODAPL movement did not argue its case in the language of religious freedom. This is in stark contrast to the prevailing legal strategies of the 1980s and 1990s, when Native American leaders, buoyed by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, advanced a series of legal claims aimed at protecting ‘sacred lands’ from various forms of development. They did so at a time of optimism and activism on the part of many racial and religious minorities, who—buoyed by the pluralist politics of faith and freedom during the Cold War—saw real potential in the constitutional promise of religious freedom. But the vast majority of these sacred land claims failed in the courts.

At Standing Rock when the protest camps were about to be destroyed, tribal leaders finally did adopt this strategy and filed an appeal on religious freedom grounds. But this attempt failed, too. A federal judge ruled that the pipeline posed no demonstrable harm to Native American religion and that the government had no constitutional obligation to halt the pipeline on these grounds.⁸ Given the slippery quality of a religious freedom that has in recent years been overwhelmingly associated with white Christian interests, it is no wonder that Native American leaders have more often chosen to argue on grounds of environmental interests, treaty rights, and tribal sovereignty instead.

On the current political scene, it seems, the ideologies of pluralism and religious freedom are invoked most often to support the interests of white Christians—and in so doing to

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reinforce cultural formations of ‘religion’ as implicitly white and primarily Christian. These associations are powerful, but they are not inevitable. Pulling back just a bit from the contemporary scene, we can see that racial and religious minorities too have invoked (and will continue to invoke) the ideologies of pluralism to support more inclusive and expansive visions for what counts as ‘religion.’ In all of these ways and more, pluralism shapes ‘religion’ and navigates its intersections with racial formations in American life.

1. Courtney Bender and Pamela E Klassen, eds., *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement, Religion, Culture, and Public Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

2. “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” *First Things*, May 1994, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium>.

3. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act was passed with the support of an unprecedented alliance of religious groups in reaction against the Supreme Court’s widely despised ruling in the peyote case, *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990). The decision allowed the state of Oregon to deny unemployment benefits to Alfred Smith and Galen Black, Native American Church members who had been fired for violating a state prohibition on the use of peyote. Their religious freedom claim was denied on the grounds that the state had no constitutional obligation to provide an exemption to otherwise applicable laws, even without demonstrating a “compelling interest” for that refusal—the generally accepted constitutional standard, thus reversing the accommodationist standard set by *Sherbert v. Verner* (1963) in the decades prior to Smith.

Given the subsequent politics of religious freedom, it is surprising to recall that in the deliberations over RFRA, many abortion opponents including the organized body of Catholic bishops initially feared that the law might empower women to seek abortions on religious freedom grounds. See Douglas Laycock, “Free exercise and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,” 62 *Fordham Law Review*, 883, 896 (1994).

4. “Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, January 27, 2017, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>>.

united-states>.

5. “Executive Order Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 6, 2017, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>>.

6. “Presidential Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, May 4, 2017, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/04/presidential-executive-order-promoting-free-speech-and-religious-liberty>>.

7. “Standing Rock Protestors Burn Document That Justified Indigenous Oppression,” *Huffington Post*, November 4, 2016, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/interfaith-clergy-dapl-doctrine-of-discovery_us_581cb86ae4b0aac62483d92f>.

8. “Judge Denies Tribes’ Request to Halt Pipeline on Religious Freedom Grounds,” *America*, February 13, 2017, <<http://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/02/13/judge-denies-tribes-request-halt-pipeline-religious-freedom-grounds>>.

What We Do, How We Do It

How a Changing Landscape Reshapes the Study of Religion

The role of traditional religious institutions is changing, but so too are the institutions that study religion in society. Seminaries once dominated the study of American religion, but now the field is dominated by large religious studies, history, and sociology departments in state and private universities. Meanwhile, large research centers within and without academia were created to study various aspects of religion in the United States. What do shifts in funding and the creation of centers that change the infrastructure of the study of American religion portend? How are these changes affecting the field, itself? Have government or neoliberal interests of some funders shaped the way questions are asked and answers given, and if so, how?

Marie Griffith

Washington University in St. Louis

Our charge in this session is to think about how shifts in funding sources are potentially changing the very infrastructure of the study of American religion and the consequences of such changes. This is a question of considerable importance, and it deserves sustained attention—more than we'll be able to devote to it in our time here. Presumably, the conveners asked me to speak on this topic because of the position I occupy at the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, so I'd like to talk about both the center's creation and the "religion and politics" rubric that has gained so much traction over the past decade on our field.

My own intensive interest in this conceptual framework goes back at least to the mid-2000s, when Melani McAlister and I worked together on a co-edited special volume of the *American Quarterly* that Johns Hopkins University Press later published *Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States*. (And I want to thank her publicly here for inviting me in to do that project with her—co-writing our introduction was a wonderfully rich experience both of collaborative intellectual growth and friendship.) Since taking on the directorship of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics in 2011, I have thought a great deal more about that rubric, "religion and politics." It holds a few assumptions in common with another trending framework, "religion and public life," especially if "politics" is used expansively to include a lot beyond elections, legislation, and various matters of governance. We certainly define it expansively at our Center, much of the time construing "politics" in line with its humanities conceptualization—the politics of identity, of representation, the politics of space and place, etc.—alongside more conventional social science notions familiar as "political" issues (voting patterns, party platforms, disputes over issues such as reproductive rights, the law, religious freedom, marriage, school prayer, etc.).

The Religion-and-Politics framework has in a very real sense become a focal point in the liberal arts at Washington University and increasingly, I think, at many other institutions and in other venues as well. Why is it that the case, and why now? Historians of religion in the U.S. have been analyzing political issues, social institutions, various iterations of the public-private distinction, and a whole host of related matters for more than a few scholarly generations. While the category of politics, broadly defined, has long held considerable interest for scholars of religion, the terrain is now visibly shifting, in part because of recent events in U.S. history and growing interest in elucidating, for instance, the politicized Christianity that begat the religious right

and the Tea Party, the stress on "social [sex] issues" in the Republican party, and controversies over settled scientific matters like evolution, as well as anxiety over politicized Islam and recurrent, often clumsy attempts to distinguish "good" Muslims or "true" Islam from the bad varieties. As "religion," very loosely conceived, has come to loom ever larger as an obviously political subject and project, political historians have focused more and more of their own attention on religious phenomena; so too have many journalists, in print, broadcast, and online media. For these and, I'm sure, many other reasons, we appear to be in a moment when "religion and politics" is all the rage (though not yet, I hope, repetitious and overdone).

Significant financial resources have been marked for research and programming at the intersection of religion, politics, and public life; and many university alumni and donors apparently hold great interest in religion's impact on such issues as the law, public policy, and elections as well as on matters pertaining to racism, gender inequality, violence, and war. The emergence of the Danforth Center may hold some interesting clues to what's happening in this area. The Center was launched in January 2010 by a \$30 million gift to Washington University from the Danforth Foundation, based in St. Louis and originally established in 1927 by Ralston Purina founder William H. Danforth. The endowment gift was part of a spend-down process the foundation was undergoing as, after decades of nationwide philanthropic activity, it prepared to permanently close its doors. With \$100 million remaining in its coffers, the foundation board allocated its other \$70 million to the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis: an agro-science center that was essentially the vision of William H. Danforth M.D., the center's founding board chair and former long-time Chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis.

William H. Danforth's younger brother, John C. Danforth, spent his career in politics with the Republican party, serving as Attorney General of Missouri before winning election to the U.S. Senate in 1976 and remaining through 1995. A graduate of both Yale Law School and Yale Divinity School (and an undergraduate religion major at Princeton), Senator Danforth is also an ordained Episcopal priest—a politician and a cleric, then, but one who believes the intermixing of religion and politics can, in some cases, be dangerous—as he argued in his 2006 book *Faith and Politics: How the "Moral Values" Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together*—but in others, salutary—as he later framed in *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People*

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Can Change Politics (2015). His vision for the center he wished to create focused on religion and politics specifically in the United States, to get scholars to engage with big public issues and political problems without becoming acrimoniously partisan, while also focusing on the more traditional professorial tasks of academic research and classroom teaching. That vision greatly appealed to me, and I became the center's first permanent director in 2011.

According to our mission statement, the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics serves as an open, nonpartisan venue for fostering rigorous scholarship and informing diverse academic and public communities about the intersections of religion and U.S. politics. Its commitments are essentially three-fold: 1) To support and enhance outstanding scholarly research on the historical and contemporary intertwining of religion and politics; 2) To disseminate excellent scholarship to students and the broad public by means of courses, lectures, conferences, publications, and electronic media; and 3) To foster public debate and discussion among people who potentially hold very different views about religion and politics or religion's role in public life.

As Senator Danforth and the Danforth Foundation put it at the time of the center's founding, there is a tremendous need for better understanding of religion's complicated public and political role in the contemporary world; indeed, in their eyes, the need for informed debate and public education in matters of religion and politics has never been greater. The Center on Religion and Politics would provide a space for a broad array of constituents to work through the full implications of the dynamic principles of religious freedom and tolerance, along with debating the best ways of confronting the multiple threats to their well-being—threats from simplistic avowals of the U.S. as a "Christian nation" to outraged calls for Koran burning, from terroristic violence performed in the name of religion to coercive abuses of power inflicted by powerful religious leaders upon trusting members of their flock. If today's 24/7 media matrix mostly fans the flames of these explosive controversies rather than providing resources to address them; a center created for scholarship, education, and public engagement could do better.

As many of you know, our faculty (7 of us now) are heavily weighted toward American religious history, for a set of reasons I'd be glad to elaborate in our discussion. Among the current historians are Laurie Maffly-Kipp, Lerone Martin—whose terrific work on the FBI you heard yesterday—Leigh Schmidt, and Mark Valeri. We extend our interdisciplinary

reach through our fellowship program as well as our newest faculty: we recently gained the addition of a legal scholar from the law school world, John Inazu, and we've just hired a junior ethicist, Fannie Bialek. Over the years, the Center has established a postdoctoral fellowship program, a resident dissertation fellowship program, an online journal aimed at the broad public, an undergraduate minor for Washington University students, a book series with Princeton University Press, and a number of other ventures. We have also hosted numerous public speakers and events, some of them at the suggestion of Senator Danforth but most emerging from our own faculty.

To the point of this session: How has the funding that created this Center then shifted the study of American religion? Well, for one thing, many of us who came to the center left institutions where we were training outstanding PhD students in the field, and for various structural reasons pertaining to Washington University we have not inaugurated a PhD program at the Center. Doctoral programs at our former institutions have continued to flourish, of course, and are training many excellent young scholars (a number of them here this weekend). But we ourselves do miss training PhD students and helping to shape the next generation of scholars at that level. Working with postdocs has been a joy and has mitigated some of that loss, of course, and has seemed the responsible place to focus our mentoring efforts given job market realities.

There's also the fact that the center has likely been one contributing factor (among many others) that has boosted the "religion and politics" rubric within and beyond the study of American religion. We hardly invented that—indeed, the center's formation in 2010 shows that we were rather the beneficiary of it—but we've been part of a wave that may have had a real impact in how scholars think about framing and publicizing their work. It's been an exciting wave, one that has included many scholars present here this weekend who have been working in this area for some years, but we could ask whether other important questions for our field have suffered neglect in the process. We could also ask whether any of these ventures have had any proverbial strings attached that might bring us pause. As other centers have burgeoned across academia, named for alumni and donors who are significant to the universities that host them, it is well worth asking how that money may be shaping the kinds of questions that get asked or neglected and so subtly or unsubtly working to shift the broader field.

There is doubtless a great deal more to say about how the Danforth Center and other ventures like it may or may

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not have influenced the study of American religion, and I'm eager to hear your thoughts about that in our discussion. Let me conclude where I began by noting that these questions about funding sources for our field—for any field—are critical and should never go ignored. The study of religion, politics, and public life is soaked in vested interests that all of us should interrogate and understand.

Deborah Dash Moore
University of Michigan

Ever since I arrived at Vassar College as an assistant professor in 1976, I have been acutely conscious of how my personal position has influenced my perspectives regarding the study of religion. My consciousness derived in part from a feminist understanding of the importance of recognizing our subjective situation as scholars. Where we sit, the people we meet in the halls, the journals we subscribe to and the conferences we attend—all affect our view of the academic landscape, not to mention the place of religion within it. Undoubtedly the shift from studying religion in seminaries to studying it in departments of history, sociology, and religious studies, in state and private universities allowed me to participate as a scholar of religion. My own intellectual odyssey illuminates aspects of that transition, even as my particular commitment to Jewish studies colors my analysis of the changing academic landscape.

To begin: I was trained in a large history department in a private university as a social historian of American Jews. When I received my degree, my field of American Jewish history didn't really exist. But then, neither did a whole host of fields, such as women's history. I ended up teaching at Vassar College in a religion department, the first woman hired by the department. I felt like—and was—an outsider. My colleagues had studied in divinity schools as well as universities.

In my second year at Vassar, I received an NEH fellowship to attend a seminar led by Walter Capps at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The seminar was devoted to the origins and history of religious studies. It was specifically designed for folks like me who were teaching in religion departments but who had not been trained in the emerging secular field of religious studies. We were a very diverse lot. It was a great seminar. Capps was a wonderful professor. I left the seminar having read the classics of religious studies scholarship, convinced that, with a few exceptions (e.g. Durkheim), the major theorists were looking through Christian glasses. The NEH, a relatively new federal program, not only funded the seminar but did so for several years running. In so doing, it provided an important mandate for academic religious studies and helped to change the study of religion in the U.S.

One article on Durkheim and several of the books I subsequently published—on New York Jews (based on my dissertation) and on Jews in L.A. and Miami in the 20th century—incorporated understandings derived from that seminar. My fellowship year also influenced my teaching. I

took over the course on religion in America when the faculty member who had taught it left; I brought insights into our joint faculty colloquium for religion majors from the NEH seminar; I regularly pushed my colleagues in history to think more seriously about religion. Mostly, I was unsuccessful in the latter. In those years, historians were particularly attuned to race, class, and gender. They relegated religion to the margins or to the 18th century (which was roughly the same thing). By contrast, American studies opened up to religion and to Jewish ethnicity. I found myself directing the program in American Culture at Vassar.

Then, in the 90s, another source of funding—the Pew Foundation—touched my professional life. Conrad Cherry asked me to lead one of the seminars for young scholars in religion sponsored by IUPUI's Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture. Stunned that Conrad considered me a senior scholar (I think I still thought of myself as something of a young rebel), I accepted. The young scholars who attended that seminar were amazing. They taught me that I did have something to teach them. Together we came variously to the conclusion that to best study and teach American religious history, we should decenter it. We also gave ourselves a name—the Creoles—that reflected our intellectual approach. We have stayed in touch. (Our most recent meeting took place in 2015.) The seminar produced influential scholars in religious studies. In addition, it fostered collaboration, for example, an innovative book series with NYU press. Just before Pew shifted its priorities toward polling and research, my book on GI Jews also benefited from Pew support (a year's fellowship at Yale).

In 2005 I arrived at the University of Michigan as Director of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies. My primary research stalled as I focused on establishing an Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies. Building the Institute brought its own rewards. Every year a cohort of fellows gathered to reflect, individually and together, on a larger theme—e.g. Secularization and Sacralization. Thus the Institute introduced me to diverse and brilliant scholars, from early career postdocs to distinguished professors. And so I began to work collaboratively on editing projects—several anthologies of articles, one major anthology of primary sources in Jewish culture and civilization, a three-volume history of New York Jews. There was little sustained time or mental energy for my own work. In fact, I still vividly recall a conversation with a colleague, Don Lopez, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism who directed the program in Asian Languages and Literatures. When I had complained that I

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wasn't getting any of my own scholarship done, my dean sent me to Don. He knew how to balance administration with scholarship. Don explained to me how to make time for creative work: take small projects (article length), do editorial work, work collaboratively with partners who share the burden of research and publication.

It's a very different perspective on scholarly production. I also shifted my identity from scholar of religious studies and American culture to historian of Jewish studies. I began to pay more attention to the national and international scene in Jewish studies; I worked to raise the profile of the University of Michigan. I stopped attending AAR and ASA and started going to AHA and OAH along with AJS. I sought support largely within the world of American Jewish foundations. I learned that foundations have no qualms about expressing their priorities, whether those are in support of secular Jewish studies (e.g. the Posen foundation) or of conservative religious Jewish studies (e.g. the Tikvah foundation).

Looking back on the key role that NEH and Pew played in shaping my own career, I would expect that foundations now seeking to influence the character of religious studies centers will succeed. They foster synergies that have ripple effects throughout the field and change it. A savvy director can shield individual scholars from direct pressures from funders as Jon Butler did for me at Yale (and I have done for others at Michigan). But sometimes that means loss of funding. It takes constant care and effort to court funders while promoting a center's own goals. One aims to set priorities that reflect one's own intellectual interests, to respond to ideas of one's colleagues, to expand areas of scholarly inquiry, and to seek support for these initiatives. On occasion, if one is lucky, these goals converge.

It is not clear to me where studying American Jews fits within the changing academic landscape of religious studies. I would like to think that there are synergies waiting to be fostered. But I fear that without conscious efforts by religious studies scholars to connect with historians studying American Jews, religious studies departments will proceed to ignore the burgeoning field of American Jewish history in favor of modes of Jewish studies that appear to align better with religious studies. If my own career offers any evidence, such a shift would be an unfortunate development.

What We Do, How We Do It

Categories and Interpretation

Many of our conversations hinge on well-known organizing principles: gender, race, class, tradition, institutions, centuries, etc. How well do these categories serve us today? Are there new frontiers that transcend these categories, or are changes primarily aimed at doing these things “more and better”?

Kathleen Flake
University of Virginia

This is a hard question. If I am not careful you will think I think I know answer to it; that I know the state of the scholarship on “gender, race class, tradition, institutions and centuries.” I don’t.

I am, rather like you I assume, overwhelmed and always feeling behind the curve of what is being said and done in religious studies and allied fields. So, let me admit frankly that I know my view is partial and my job here is to offer that partiality to you in a way that makes you want to contribute your part.

Also, I admit to resisting the concept of “transcendence” in all things human. Clearly, none of these categories can be “transcended.” Indeed, the first three categories carry with them a moral imperative to better understand the etiology and effects of religiously inflected sexism, racism and classism. Taking the spirit of the question, however, I believe we are being invited to consider “how can we grow these categories” and “what kind of correctives are needed for growth.”

In sum, my answer is “yes” to all aspects of this question. Yes, these six categories remain productive ways of interrogating and illuminating the human condition. And, yes, “more” is possible. But, “yes,” there is something else we could be doing that is “better.” My intent is not to complain. In fact, as you will see, I think the tone of our writing tends to complain too much. I want to draw you into a discussion of whether there is a better way to present our research, even on moral grounds, that is more than a complaint and, hence, has a better chance better heard by a wider audience that is in need of it.

First, let me say, these categories are better, even best used when they are not put in service to describing merely bad actors and failed aspirations, but to teaching us something. Ideally that something gestures toward a future possibility for a solution, whether theoretical or political. Let me give you one model of such writing. It is a remarkably brief treatment, but nevertheless manages to integrate these six categories in a manner which acknowledges moral imperatives without shaming its subjects or excusing their injustices.

The most recent issue of *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* hosted a forum commenting on the recent presidential election. Bob Orsi undertook to parse what is meant by the oft-referenced, but little defined category “white middle class voter.” After establishing that

a key demographic in this category was Catholic and male, he states without equivocation, “they are making a racial comment,” when they exult that Trump’s election allows them to speak more freely. With historical detail, Orsi stresses it is “right to deplore the redlining of neighborhoods to keep out African Americans; the complicity of parish priests in pressuring their parishioners not to sell their homes to black people under pain of sin; and the street violence against black families who dared to move into white Catholic neighborhoods.” But, he cautions, it is not only racism that motivates these voters and possibly not even primarily racism, but “diverse intersubjective and communal divisions and tensions . . . arising from many different areas of experience, including religion.”

Orsi analyzes these divisions and tensions, revealing “hidden injuries” and “grief that inchoately mixed with the rage and racism, the desolate feeling of having lost a world,” a world where men’s work, worldly knowledge, and salaries had been superior to women’s. Later, these rage-inducing losses were, he adds, compounded by “the closing down of parishes based on the decisions, once again, made by an absent and unaccountable elite, an elite, moreover, that had just been revealed as caring so little for the children in ‘white working class’ communities as to put among them [sexually exploitative and abusive clerics].” In sum, race matters but it is—like gender, class, religious tradition, institution, and centuries—insufficient of itself to explain those labeled “white working class” whose “injuries of class are as much matter of memory as they are of contemporary experience.”

Orsi concludes: “It is not enough to say that “the white working class” and its descendants are wrong to blame people of color for the woes that befell them in the past decades; it is necessary instead to piece out where that idea comes from, what else it articulates, how it has endured, and what it may teach us about how to rebuild a civil society that includes this ‘white working class’ that has felt so long excluded.” Such making sense—intellectually and empathically—is the labor, and possibly even a little bit of the love, that constitutes good scholarship. A number of other examples could be and have been mentioned throughout our conversation these last two days—examples that are better because they do more. By combining interpretive categories, attending to all injuries, and placing these injuries in a larger context, such scholarship gives us a way forward, “teach[es] us about how to rebuild a civil society that includes” us all because it speaks to all.

Let me add a second question. Even if we research and

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write inclusively, the challenge remains of how to reach “civil society” outside our elite academies. Recently a poem of Berthold Brecht’s has received considerable attention but typically for his assessment of Germany in the 1930s:

Truly, I live in dark times
 An artless word is foolish. A smooth forehead.
 Points to insensitivity. He who laughs
 Has not yet received
 The terrible news.

When I question, as I am about to do, how we bring the terrible news about racism, sexism, and classism in American religious institutions, traditions, and throughout its centuries, it is not because I laugh, having not yet received the news. I have heard and found it terrifying that it must be stated—much less demanded—that “Black Lives Matter.” That a sexual predator is the chief executor of our nation’s laws and public mediator of its values. That it is no exaggeration to say wealth care is replacing health and every other kind of social care. I do not have a “smooth forehead” about such things.

The chief burden of Brecht’s lament was not, however, over the terrible injustices of his time. The poem is titled “To Those Who Follow in Our Wake” and explicitly addresses “You, who shall resurface following the flood/ In which we have perished.” Thus, the poem is Brecht’s assessment of his generation’s failure to be believed because it was:

Through the class warfare, despairing
 That there was only injustice and no outrage.”

And yet we knew:
 Even the hatred of squalor
 Distorts one’s features.
 Even anger against injustice
 Makes the voice grow hoarse. We
 Who wished to lay the foundation for gentleness
 Could not ourselves be gentle.

About this, too, I believe we should not have a “smooth forehead.”

So, I invite you to consider whether these last several decades of deconstruction and critical theorizing has prepared us to construct a story of American religion that is hopeful, not just despairing. As we have witnessed in the call to “Make American Great Again,” metanarratives don’t cease just because we have properly learned to suspect

them. Maybe it is time for us to try again to write a publicly persuasive history; a history that is no less theoretically rigorous for its empathy and no less uncompromising in its criticism than in its affirmation that the United States, like the moral universe of which it is a part, still “bends toward justice.”

Kathryn Lofton
Yale University

Everyone keeps telling me that administrative life is a distraction from intellectual work. Kindly advisors tell me to take a break from institutional service, telling me the most important work is our intellectual work. Working as a chair and dean of diversity, I have had many reasons to realize again the rightness of these counselors' counsel. During the meeting I sat in on Thursday about hiring in the sciences over the next five years, I knew they are right. I know it, because it's what we have been taught to think about our value as traditional intellectuals. This value is estimated by our capacity to be pure vessels of disciplinary maintenance (to be, as Matt Hedstrom mentioned in the last session, pure researchers rather than applied researchers), to be in the archives rather than in strategic planning sessions; to be preoccupied with footnotes rather than the compromises of fundraising requests; to be students of the obscure rather than managers of institutional populations.

I want to pose this as the initial frame of reflection: What is the relationship between intellectual work and institutional work? Even more: What is the role the study of religion might play in illuminating the nature of our institutionalization, and how it affects our intellect?

I like to think it could help, right? That knowing about the concept of religion might help us consider the conceptual frames of other regimes of power, institutionalized? Or is this just me justifying my neoliberal confinement?

Let me take a step back, then, and try to categorize myself in order to check myself relative to the institutional life that I occupy. I was trained to be a scholar of religion in the Americas. What does this mean? To speak in a noncritical voice of historical reportage: it means I was trained, early on, to think democracy was better than monarchy; that many religions were better than few religions; that religions could be violent and nonviolent; that our job is to help citizens be moral actors in societies we cheerfully hoped were plural in their religiosity. (Do these ideas sound old time to you? Or do they sound current?)

In any event—still speaking in a noncritical voice of historical reportage—I should also say that I was trained to know that this subject, the subject of religion, was itself a minority condition in the academy, kept often outside of American textbooks and history departments and (as Marie Griffith just observed) possessing low status in political science departments in American universities.

Once upon a time, though, it was otherwise—once upon a

time religion was king, and the social sciences were nothing but a twinkle in some unborn grandchild's eye. Once upon a time theology was the king of the sciences, I thought ruefully in my Thursday meeting. Now I am here, the agent of diversity at a meeting for the sciences. I'm the garnish on the plate, the person who represents diversity because I'm queer, and maybe because many people believe studying religion means you have an affinity with that thing, that thing mentioned so often in our departmental websites and undergraduate majors, namely: the world's diversity.

That this is all extremely comedic (nobody, not nobody hosts Orientalism, conservatism, and chauvinism better than most Ivy League departments of religion) doesn't matter. What I'm selling you is what I'm being sold as. Like French food, German automobiles, and Argentinian tango, the locution American religion has an affect that supersedes its reality, and in someplace somewhere someone thought to be a student of American religion meant I might be friendly to this thing, this thing known as diversity.

Even as I'm the marker of diversity, we know how we have been trained. We have been trained to know that we are not exactly descendants of a diverse genealogy. We know that the disciplinary work we did was conditioned by a history of it having been done for a long time by only certain persons, only to certain theological ends. This was a part of my training, though it was unclear to what end. Why did I know this? Why did I know the names Robert Baird and Philip Schaff? What do we know from knowing about them?

The lineage of my present job, and indeed every job I have had, is tied to the phrase "church history," and the effect of my present on that past is something many have explicated. We know it, now, like shibboleth: no matter what sect or subject you study for real, if you are a scholar of religion in America, you are always and ever also a scholar of Christianity; to be a scholar of Christianity in America is to be a scholar of a force usefully connected to another term, namely that of hegemony.

Michael Altman and Melissa Wilcox have reminded us that there are theoretical shores to lean into, here. Antonio Gramsci wrote extraordinary treatises on these themes, and one thing I want to say, first, is that to pull from Gramsci is not to pull from a pure theorist in some neutral sense, but from a political actor, someone who was hoping to re-program the work of Marxists in Italy. He stopped his education early to engage more deeply with the political

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problems of his day, and he did so—here a shout out to the once-upon journalist Daniel Silliman, who has been so carefully recording our #RAAC2017 thoughts here for Twitter—as a newspaper columnist and, eventually, the founder of a newspaper that recorded his own specific brand of sort-of Bolshevik politics.

I underline these biographical points not to say Gramsci wasn't a theorist, but to go back to something Samira Mehta pointed out in her excellent question right before lunch, where she showed how we moved here, in our own conversations, from particularity to hegemony. How we couldn't seem to stay on particularities for long; how we seemed to forget how often specific cultural acts challenge authority in complicated ways. As with almost everything in social life: we are not alone in our slipping. Gramsci saw the same things happening, as practical discussions about the best procedures for the most inclusive democratic practice kept slipping into abstract philosophical fights. He wrote work to reply to our quandary, here identified by Samira: to try to keep the particular in the theoretical. When he fought for workers' councils—for example—he did so because he hoped their existence might serve two purposes: to take control of the task of organizing production, and to develop a coterie of workers as intellectual leaders.

This was an intellectual proposition, bent upon critiquing a certain kind of intellectual life he abandoned for the development of another. There was nothing anti-intellectual about Gramsci's embrace of workers as intellectuals; on the contrary, he held intellectuals as the most critical actors in the work of social reform insofar as they generate and spread ideas. And the generation of ideas is critical to hegemony's exercise of power. But he distinguished between two kinds of intellectuals. The intellectuals who spread the hegemonic ideology of the dominant group are, according to Gramsci, traditional or institutionalized intellectuals. These are intellectuals who, due to their institutional degrees and qualifying social markers, are sanctioned by hegemonic infrastructures to speak. Although traditional intellectuals may believe that they are independent voices, although they may believe they are genuine allies of the subaltern, according to Gramsci, they are rarely as independent as they believe they are. University professors are good at thinking about hegemony because they are its primary agents. For this reason, Gramsci argues that overturning or revising a hegemonic ideology requires the role of organic intellectuals. See those workers, and the councils he avidly argued to be formed.

I had planned to speak today about religion, about how its category problems connect deeply and usefully to the category "race." I had planned to speak from the last year of experience I have had thinking about diversity in an institutional setting, and to say how often the work I did there (in meetings and meetings and more meetings) was informed and situated by thinking I've benefitted from so many of you here. I was going to link specifically the calls for representative diversity in the nonprofit institutions we occupy with the history of race told through the study of religion. I was going to do this by linking admiring summaries of recent books I love: Sylvester Johnson's, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*; Josef Sorett's *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*; Tisa Wenger's remarkable (soon to be released) "Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal." What these three books reiterate—through granular archival reading and strong-armed analytic insight—is that there is no history of the secular without a history of racial organization, and that there is no history of race outside the history of religion.

What I wanted to do, in other words, was remind a field I love—this field called by this conference "Religion and American Culture"—called "American religions" by so many doctoral programs, was a field of inquiry that could teach a thing or two about why it is hard to make our institutions (those nonprofit corporations) more diverse. For the same reason we can't unstick Christian from hegemony in our conversations: because these institutions were not made to engender difference. They were meant to assemble us into assimilated groups different from the difference out there. It isn't an insult to call universities segregationist states; it is a descriptive fact. (For more on this, see Craig Steven Wilder's 2013 book, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*.) I wanted to say why Johnson and Sorett and Wenger, in their extraordinary acts of scholarship, gave me an oasis of disturbing and brilliant confirmations of that even as they also show how people craft politics, aesthetics, and strategies within it. They each showed, in a variety of ways, what Sara Ahmed taught me about the fight for diversity within higher education. (See her 2012 book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*.)

I jumped quickly to a connection, so I'll just say it again, with a little detail from Ahmed. Ahmed, like so many of us, was trained as a critical thinker. She then became employed (again, like many of us) by an institution. At that institution (like many of us) she became very disturbed by the lack of

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apparent and substantive diversity. Why were there so many bodies of a certain ostensible cis-kind? Why were there so many of the same ideas about ideas circulated by those homogeneous bodies? To combat this apparent failure of difference to thrive, Ahmed became engaged in the work of diversity. She decided: I want to help my institution become less un-diverse.

The analogy to the study of religion, the study of American religion, can be quickly sketched: we are critical thinkers. Most of us learned certain bibliographies, and we imagined our work would contribute to diversifying those bibliographies. We thought, maybe: I'll make the history of religion in America less about Christianity, and more about Buddhism or Islam or Hinduism; I'll make the history of religion and American culture less about priests and synagogues and more about laypersons and domestic piety; I'll make the story of the state multifaceted in its theological practice; I'll make the gendered body queer. Newer generations have had stronger dreams: dreams to show the Christian in the Hindu, the theology in our politics, the moral establishment in religious freedom, etc.

Ahmed discovered pretty quickly that diversifying is impossible because the category itself is meaningless. It operates, as she writes, like a floating signifier, a moving target, that can mean whatever it needs to mean for the claim to be true. And if you try to make the concept a solid thing, if you try to pin it down, you start real trouble. Again, borrowing from her language, she explains that to institutionalize the policy of diversity is to allow it to be forgotten. If the institution is accused of having forgotten diversity, it can point to the office or policy of diversity and say, it's institutionalized. What was supposed to become automatic, what was supposed to become habit, in practice becomes just a defense of the institution with no real movement toward meaningful inclusion. Ahmed writes, "For a commitment to do something, you must do something 'with it.'"

To return again to the shores of "American religion" (a phrase I, and my generational peers, always put in quotation marks), the works of Johnson and Sorett and Wenger could not be clearer: even when we think we are acknowledging difference, we are actually managing it; even when we think we can supersede institutional life through observations about practice, we are still organizing human bodies to render them legible in established frames of anthropological reference. And the baseline for our management, for our organization, is some amalgamated thing we call by various

names: the secular, the Protestant secular, the Christian West, Christianity, Christian hegemony.

We all know this, now, so much so that we exhale it: the category of religion is an implement of empire; the empire is not religiously ecumenical even as it preaches pluralism; pluralism is itself a practice of the empire of certain religion. Segregation is not a strategy for white supremacists we cast in grim tones; it is the special skill of our institutional homes.

I think many in this room know these truths. I think many of us are committed to using our conscientiousness about the colonial category function to change our worlds (institutional and epistemological). But I think many of us wonder, then: what next? How do we, in the study of religion, respond to Ahmed's call: For a commitment to do something, you must do something 'with it'.

Organic intellectuals, by Gramsci's definition, are not traditional in that they are not necessarily scholars, not necessarily clever with words or knowledgeable about systems. Rather, these intellectuals are workers: technicians from the working class. These individuals are not credentialled or sanctioned as trustworthy social mouthpieces; rather, they are concerned primarily with the practical matters of their daily living. These technicians are who the world needs to upend its bad ideas, its segregations, and its failure to fulfill principled promise.

I imagine that there is no one in this room who avoids feeling at times as if they are figures of contradiction. We wonder how much our politics coordinates with our practices, how much the wrong ideology informs our economics, or how much our principles don't quite line up with our daily lives. Knowing this—knowing that no one escapes the wrestle with hypocrisy—makes me want to avoid punishing us harshly for any interpretive gap. But still, I will. Because Gramsci would say: of course we can't stop talking about hegemony. It is our identity; it is our expertise. We are its agents. And we live in a time when you could see forms of organic intellectual habitus—Twitter and comment fields, voter referendums, and executive orders—as coordinating little with our hegemonic hopes. And this scares us. And it should. The answer of what next—what to do next, how to write now, what to be now that we know what we know about colonialism, and power and Christianity and our time—is the one to find. I just don't know if anyone in this room has the ability (given our history, our Christianity, our traditions that make our version of the traditional) to answer it.

Ann Taves
University of California, Santa Barbara

Any answer to the question of how well our categories serve us today depends on who “us” is, what we want to study, and what we want to know about it. The default “we” here is scholars of religion and American culture. That was my primary identification in the eighties when my work focused primarily on sexuality, gender, and race as they related to lived Protestant and Catholic practice. The U.S. is still my home base in terms of sources or data, but it is an identity I wear loosely these days, because the questions I am asking are permutations on traditional religious studies questions. So I would also identify as a “scholar of religion,” who focuses on issues of theory and method, with a longstanding interest in traditional topics—“religious experience,” “new religious movements,” and “comparative religion.” But, while I embrace a religious studies identity for professional purposes, I do think there are new frontiers that transcend these categories. All three of the topics I just mentioned—religious experience, NRMs, and comparative religion—suffer from major conceptual problems and have been thoroughly critiqued by religious studies scholars. I am not going to rehearse the problems here, other than to say that many responded to the problems by abandoning the questions. I think scholars of religion faced a choice—rethink the categories, place the questions in a broader comparative framework, and threaten the field as a field or preserve the boundaries and claim that we should turn to topics other than religious experience or comparative religion. For me, these older questions remain central, but to pursue them I have had to deconstruct the categories. I deconstruct not for its own sake, but to find more basic concepts or building blocks or points of analogy—pick your terms—that allow me to set up comparisons in order to better understand how things emerge. My interests in experience, emergence, and comparison have taken me well beyond religious studies into an interdisciplinary space in which I am working between the humanities and the natural and social sciences, dissecting narratives of events, seeking to understand multi-level appraisal processes and the role of these processes plays in the emergence of worldviews and ways of life.

Basic Insight – Foundational Story – Comparison

My transition from a American religious historian into whatever I am today began with a core insight: between psychiatry, anthropology, and religious studies, there is a set of experiences that share features in common even though they are connected to different disciplinary concepts and practices. Since then, I have been hooked on exploring the similarities and differences and trying to figure out how

similar looking phenomena could go in quite different developmental directions. These broader comparisons took me beyond “comparative religions.” In pursuing this question, I couldn’t just limit my comparisons to “religions” or “religious things” and thus to move beyond “comparative religions” approach. I have come to think that doing so can be a form of disciplinary protectionism and the source of some of our perennial problems in conceptualizing religious studies.

Finding an Object of Study and Figuring Out How to Study It

The comparative insight came in the late eighties, but it took another ten years to turn it into a book. My central problem was figuring out what I was studying. If I wasn’t studying religious experience, what was I studying? Trance experiences? Dissociative experiences? I went through a range of terms that all turned out to be concepts my subjects were using to argue with each other. Finally I realized I had to back away from the terms they were using and find another way to specify my object of study. Ultimately, I built *Fits, Trances, and Visions* around a more generic object of study—experiences that involved alterations in people’s sense of self—and analyzed the way that my subjects understood such experiences over time as they drew on different frameworks —medical and religious—to interpret, develop, and/or treat them. This is now one of the basic strategies I use in setting up comparisons that cut across the usual categories. I look for a way to characterize the common feature in terms that are acceptable to those I am comparing. In setting up *Revelatory Events*, which you could say examines the role of unusual experiences in the emergence of three new religious movements, the NRM terminology didn’t work. Mormons were OK with it, but Alcoholics Anonymous characterizes itself as spiritual but not religious and, I learned, the Course in Miracles folks don’t consider themselves a movement. I wound up referring to all three as new spiritual paths. In characterizing them in more generic terms, my goal was to analyze and compare their emergence as groups. I wanted to understand how the unusual experiences of the key figures were interpreted by followers and critics as the process unfolded and how that real-time interpretive process led to the emergence of these new spiritual paths.

Focusing on processes – An attributional approach – Events and appraisals

So there is a process question driving my research that

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has to do with events and appraisal processes. I am trying to understand how group processes feed into brain processes to shape how people decide what is happening. What's at stake here? I'll highlight two things: First, it turns out that many of the measures that social scientists and clinicians use to discuss what they variously refer to as mystical, religious, psychic, and psychotic experiences contain many overlapping items, which suggests that the concepts are to some degree overlapping, culture-specific, and subject to appraisals made by both scholars and subjects. Psychosis researchers, recognizing that the experiences they associate with psychosis are also common in the general population, are finding that in many cases it is not the experience itself but the appraisals that go with it that influences whether or not people seek clinical care. It was a psychosis researcher's presentation on "roads to psychosis" that crystalized my interest in the dynamics that lead in the opposite direction—to the emergence of "new spiritual paths." I view this as a core religious studies question, but one I don't want to cast in RS terms so that we can remain open to what emerges, especially as we expand the question across cultures and traditions of practice.

What's Emerging? Paths – Ways of Life – Worldviews

This brings me to the second issue that at stake. We don't know much about the frequency of unusual experiences across cultures and how that relates to the ways specific kinds of experiences are encouraged or discouraged across cultures and within traditions of practice. Psychiatrists tend to want to universalize their categories, but it is not clear to what extent this is valid. In exploring this, I don't want to look only at people who consider themselves as religious or participate in traditions we have labeled as such. This is where what I've been thinking about loops back to our opening our initial session on the "nones." Rather than conceptualize "NonReligion and Secular Studies" as some new approach to religious studies, I think it makes more sense to locate both under the rubric of the study of worldviews and ways of life. Within religious studies, a worldviews and ways of life approach offers a way to rethink the much maligned "world religions paradigm" without having to obsess about whether Confucianism is really a religion or not. The worldviews and ways of life concepts not only work across cultures, they also allow us to pursue comparisons across species. Although humans, as far as I know, are the only animals that generate explicit worldviews, all animals have a way of life. When coupled, these terms create a broad comparative framework that links humans and other animals.

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