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Title

NEW WORLD A-COMING: BLACK RELIGION AND RACIAL IDENTITY DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION. By Judith Weisenfeld. New York: New York University Press, 2017. xii + 368pp. \$35.00 cloth.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4hq9b6q0>

Journal

Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 57(1)

ISSN

0021-8294

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Publication Date

2018-03-01

DOI

10.1111/jssr.12490

Peer reviewed

BOOK REVIEWS

NEW WORLD A-COMING: BLACK RELIGION AND RACIAL IDENTITY DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION. By Judith Weisenfeld. New York: New York University Press, 2017. xii + 368pp. \$35.00 cloth.

Of the many social, political, and cultural changes wrought by the Great Migration, the proliferation of new religious movements was one of the most profound. In *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration*, religious historian Judith Weisenfeld looks at some of the most influential movements to emerge in the black community in the early 20th century. Her approach to these religioracial movements provides a window into members' lived experience in ways that previous research has failed to adequately appreciate.

Weisenfeld defines religioracial identity in terms of movement insiders' commitment to the notion that identity—both individually and collectively—is a function of the inextricable linkage of religion and race. These diverse urban movements shared a belief that black people's "correct and divinely ordained religious orientation" could only be revealed "by understanding their true racial history and identity" (p. 5). Specific movements considered include: the Moorish Science Temple (founded by Noble Drew Ali), the Nation of Islam (founded by W. D. Fard and later led by Elijah Muhammad), the Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation (founded by Wentworth Arthur Matthew), Congregation Beth B'nai Abraham (founded by Arnold Josiah Ford), and Father Divine's Peace Mission. The main argument is that, through their teachings and practices, these movements provided their (primarily) African-American followers alternative narratives about their true identity, origins and history, and their destiny. In doing so, they created space for followers to reimagine themselves and actively contest the racialized identities that had been imposed upon them, thereby becoming active participants in the process of race making—including

the interrogation of whiteness—in the context of the American racial stratification scheme.

The book is structured in three parts. In the chapters constituting "Part I. Narratives," Weisenfeld compares the theological content of the movements, highlighting their deployment of narratives around geographies of race and religion, sacred space, and divine time. The chapters within "Part II. Self-Hood," introduce and explain some of the specific self-making practices used by movement insiders to assert their religioracial identities in the context of mundane, day-to-day activities. The chapters in "Part III. Community," demonstrate how their practices informed community formation and place making while affirming a sense of collective identity within the respective groups. Throughout the book, outsiders' reactions and the consequences of members' practices highlight the tensions between these faith communities and the larger world and provide essential context.

There are numerous striking illustrations of movement practices detailed in the book. For example, naturalization applications and military registration forms became battlegrounds upon which members fought for recognition of their religioracial identities through their adopted names or designations such as "Moorish American," "Asiatic Muslim," "Ethiopian Hebrew," or "human," rather than "Negro." Dietary practices, and rules for the disposition of members' bodies upon death, as another example, reinforced community boundaries. Ideas about marriage, spatial arrangements of the sexes, and issues concerning parental authority over children—and the responses of government officials, neighbors, and other family members—offer a powerful lens to see movement members struggle to embody their individual and collective commitments and the ways in which their choices led to real, material consequences. For certain groups, like the Peace Mission, members' beliefs and practices were frequently met with challenges to their judgment, their morality, and even their sanity. Weisenfeld's emphasis on believers' agency in these and many other examples is a major strength of the book, making it quite sociological in the ways in which it illuminates the lived, embodied ways believers sought to realize

their faith in the most mundane of activities. Rather than focusing primarily on the leaders, she foregrounds followers' understandings of movement teachings and their choices in attempting to live out those understandings amid great external resistance. In contrast to some of the previous work on such religio-racial groups, members are not dismissed as misguided, gullible followers of figures promoting inauthentic doctrines or outright charlatans.

Another powerful feature is Weisenfeld's use of unconventional sources (in addition to more traditional source material). Such routine civil actions as draft registration, naturalization, census reporting, applying for food service permits, and so on have left a record of those activities as sites at which movement members did the work of interrogating and participating in race making. Tensions at the interface of believers and the state as it attempted to enforce the prevailing racial order foreshadowed contemporary struggles for recognition of identities not given at birth (or that challenge official classifications) in official records, military service, access to public accommodations, and other aspects of civil life.

New World A-Coming is a masterful work of religious history. Weisenfeld's analysis pushes our understanding of the ways in which black religio-racial movements of the early 20th century functioned as far more than mere "urban cults," inviting us to reimagine their meanings. The book is a significant contribution to the study of religious narratives and their role in shaping African-American identity and community in the past and the present.

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SECULAR CONVERSIONS: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND AUSTRALIA, 1800–2000. By Damon Mayrl. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xii + 286pp. \$99.99 cloth, \$34.99 paper.

Damon Mayrl's analysis of secularization in the United States and Australia reflects two

contemporary facets within the sociology of religion and advances a third one. It is among a recent spate of excellent comparative-historical studies of religion. Mayrl's examination of the place of religion in education policy is comparative-historical in research design, analytic framing, and mode of argumentation. Mayrl also adopts a "postsecular" perspective, one that calls into question the assumption in classical secularization theory of unidirectional and teleological secularization accompanying modernization. Instead, secularization is seen as political, contingent, and reversible. In a welcome contribution, the book centers its analysis on the role of the administrative state as a key explanatory factor. This "state-centered" approach is well established in studies of political and economic phenomena, but less widely used in studies of religion. Mayrl employs this perspective with sophistication, showing that administrative, legal, and electoral features of the state play important roles in secularization (and desecularization) processes.

The book is motivated by a comparative puzzle. Up through the 1960s, Australia and the United States both managed the role of religion in public education in comparable ways. These similarities were based on constitutional, demographic, and historical commonalities between the countries. To use one of Mayrl's key terms, they had similar "secular settlements." Then in the 1960s, they took divergent paths. The Australian government started providing public funding for religious schools. Since then, state aid for religious education has become a durable feature of Australian schooling. In the United States, Supreme Court decisions and other political dynamics led to the United States becoming one of the most formally secular systems of public schooling in the West.

Mayrl uses a political institutional framework to explain this divergence. His approach focuses on political struggles between actors whose interests are constituted and mediated by specific institutional contexts. He finds that variation between three features of Australian and U.S. political systems help explain the divergent paths of religion in educational policy: the level of centralization or decentralization in the education system, a restrictive versus