



Religion is Raced

Understanding American Religion
in the Twenty-First Century

EDITED BY GRACE YUKICH AND PENNY EDGELL

Instructor's Guide

Demonstrates how race and power help to explain
American religion in the twenty-first century

When White people of faith act in a particular way, their motivations are almost always attributed to their religious orientation. Yet when religious people of color act in a particular way, their motivations are usually attributed to their racial positioning.

Religion is Raced makes the case that religion in America has generally been understood in ways that center White Christian experiences of religion, and argues that all religion must be acknowledged as a raced phenomenon. When we overlook the role race plays in religious belief and action, and how religion in turn spurs public and political action, we lose sight of a key way in which race influences religiously-based claims-making in the public sphere.

With contributions exploring a variety of religious traditions, from Buddhism and Islam to Judaism and Protestantism, as well as pieces on atheists and humanists, *Religion is Raced* brings discussions about the racialized nature of religion from the margins of scholarly and religious debate to the center. The volume offers a new model for thinking about religion that emphasizes how racial dynamics interact with religious identity, and how we can in turn better understand the roles religion—and Whiteness—play in politics and public life, especially in the United States. It includes clear recommendations for researchers, including pollsters, on how to better recognize moving forward that religion is a raced phenomenon.

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Religion | Race & Ethnicity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Notes for Users – 2

Introduction – 4

Section I – 5

Section II – 10

Section III – 14

Section IV – 17

Section V – 19

Conclusion – 22

NOTES FOR USERS

Below you will find summaries and questions for each individual chapter, each of which is designed to stand alone in the context of teaching a particular class. However, the book as a whole is also organized thematically and authors of all the chapters were asked to focus on some core questions and themes. For some courses, it may make sense to assign multiple chapters and to assign discussion questions that allow students to explore connections between chapters.

For Discussion of Connections between and across Chapters:

1. The chapters by Rhys H. Williams and Omar McRoberts both discuss civil religion. Do both authors define the concept of civil religion in the same way? Do they have the same critiques of the concept as it is used in the social scientific literature? Do they have similar, or different, evaluations of the potential for civil religious discourse and symbols to be a unifying force in American society?
2. The chapter by Sikivu Hutchinson suggests that civil religious discourse has been harmful for African American women—why? How does her analysis of gender, respectability politics, religion, and race complicate your understanding of what civil religion is and how it works in American society?
3. The chapter by Sikivu Hutchinson and the chapter by Joseph O. Baker both address the issue of the stigma associated with openly adopting a secular identity. Taken together, how do these two chapters help you to understand how race and gender shape both the experience of being non-religious in American society and the costs associated with publicly claiming a non-religious identity?
4. The chapters by Kelsy Burke, Dawne Moon, and Theresa W. Tobin and Ashley Garner and Z. Fareen Parvez both use qualitative research methods to analyze the relationship between religion, race, gender, and sexualities. All of the authors are women; some are women of color, and some are not. How might a researcher's own background make it more or less difficult for them to conduct research with different religio-racial groups and on different topics? What does this suggest about the importance of religio-racial diversity among scholars studying American religion?
5. The chapters by Sarah Imhoff and Kelsy Burke, Dawne Moon, and Theresa W. Tobin both discuss how stereotypes of hypersexualization have been used to “other” religio-racial minorities. How do these stereotypes restrict the freedom of religio-racial minorities to express their genders and sexualities?

6. Both the chapters by Janine Giordano Drake and Jaime Kucinskas highlight how well-meaning religious people, particularly those who are White and upper class, at times build movements for social justice that ignore racial inequality. What are some similarities in the two cases they study, and what are some differences? How can our own racial and class backgrounds, especially when we come from advantaged backgrounds, limit our understandings of the causes of social problems?
7. The chapters by Russell Jeung, John Jimenez, and Eric Mar and Edward Orozco Flores both demonstrate how immigration status shapes participation in public life, both voting and community organizing. How do different religio-racial groups approach participation in public life differently, and how does this relate to the degree to which immigrants become integrated in American public life?
8. The chapters by Jerry Z. Park, James Clark Davidson, and Besheer Mohamed describe how current surveys make it difficult to gain an accurate understanding of non-White and non-Christian religious experiences in the United States. What kinds of solutions do both chapters outline for improving survey research on religion in the United States? How do these compare with the solutions that Joseph Baker suggests for improving research on non-religious identities and experiences?
9. Given what you learned in the chapters on measuring religion, how has your understanding of “American religion” changed? What kinds of critical questions will you ask in the future when assessing how the news media portrays American religion, or the links between religion and politics?

INTRODUCTION

“Recognizing Raced Religion”

GRACE YUKICH and PENNY EDGELL

The introductory chapter, authored by the book’s editors, outlines the urgent need for an intersectional approach to understanding religious belief, identity, and practice in the United States, as well as introducing the topics addressed in the book’s sections and chapters. It describes dominant, typically colorblind ways of understanding American religiosity, including summarizing some of the major theoretical approaches to the sociological study of religion. It proposes an approach to religion that conceives of religion as a cultural repertoire, bridging the sociology of culture, religion, and race. Finally, it discusses the shifting racial and religious demographics in the US that make a recognition of religion as raced more important than ever.

For Discussion:

1. What problems do the authors identify in current approaches to the study of American religion? Why do they believe a book like this is needed?
2. How do the authors define “intersectionality”? Why do they think it is important for scholars to adopt an intersectional approach to the study of religion? Be prepared to discuss what the authors believe is new about their approach, and what new kinds of research they would like to encourage.
3. Why do the authors think that race is the most important aspect of social identity to be taken into account when thinking about what religious experiences are like, why they matter to people, and how they shape social behavior? Is their argument about the centrality of race for understanding religion particular to the United States, or is it more broadly applicable to other contexts?
4. How do the authors define “cultural repertoire”? Why is a focus on cultural repertoires of religion *different* than a focus on religious belief?

SECTION I: RACED RELIGION AND US POLITICS

“White Christian Libertarianism and the Trump Presidency”

GERARDO MARTÍ

This chapter traces the history of White Christian libertarianism in the United States, and reviews the unstated and unquestioned assumptions embedded within it. Aside from poll numbers, insider accounts, and journalistic exposés, how are we to account for the legitimation granted by so many people to the Trump presidency and the depth of their continued support? Answering this question requires a new perspective on our American past—one that recaptures the workings of persistent racial oppression, revisits the shaping of conservative White Christianity, and re-centers the convictions of laissez-faire economic sentiments. While race, religion, and economics have long been intertwined in the American experience, analytically tracing these macro-level threads over time helps illuminate the robust restructuring and inventive remixing that undergirds support for Trump and will also likely persist well into the future.

For Discussion:

1. What is the definition of “libertarianism”? What libertarian economic views have been embraced by White Evangelicals in the United States?
2. What role does Prosperity Theology play in supporting libertarian views among White conservative Christians in the United States today?
3. How did proponents of White Christian libertarianism react to the Social Gospel movement, and why?
4. According to the author, White Evangelicals approach social problems through an individualistic and relational lens. What does he mean by this and why does it matter for White Evangelicals’ political stance? For their economic stance?
5. According to the author, how do the politics of the Reconstruction era help us to understand the political stance of White Evangelicals today?
6. Many have argued that White Evangelicals support Donald Trump for religious reasons. The author thinks that’s too simple, and takes an approach that focuses on the intersection of race, religion, and economic interests. Overall, what does the author conclude about the importance of religion in shaping White Evangelical politics over the course of US history?
7. Do you think that White Evangelicals are distinctive in their approach to politics, or no? What does the author have to say about the capacity of religious groups and movements to have a more egalitarian and multicultural approach to political engagement?

“Civil Religion and Black Church Political Mobilization”

OMAR McROBERTS

Civil religion is commonly understood as a feature of public culture. In particular, scholars of civil religion focus on soaring, singular presidential rhetoric that seeks to unify mass publics in the broadest terms. Some have pointed out that civil religion is also pluralistic, and that it may percolate up from multiple publics. This chapter focuses on civil religion as something produced by religious figures as they make claims on the nation and attempt to mobilize religious people for political action. In the field of Black religion, civil religious articulations have attempted to mobilize political action in part by identifying the particular historical juncture as the sacred time of action, when the opportunity for progress must either be taken or forfeited indefinitely. This chapter also identifies the “top-down” civil religious pronouncements of political elites which, rather than attempting to unify the society in the broadest strokes, appeal strategically to the particularisms of Black civil religious discourse.

For Discussion:

1. How does the author define “civil religion”? Where would you encounter civil religion in your daily life? In the news media? In popular culture?
2. The author is critical of normative and prescriptive approaches to civil religion; what is his critique? How is his own approach different?
3. What is the difference between civil religion and religious nationalism?
4. What organizations have been at the forefront of the Black ecumenical movement? How have these organizations worked to promote a sense of Black unity or peoplehood, according to the author? (Give specific examples.)
5. What is the Kairos Document? What similarities does the author see between the civil religion developed by Black religious leaders in South Africa and that developed in the Civil Rights movement in the United States?
6. According to the author, what have White commentators and scholars missed or overlooked about Martin Luther King, Jr.?
7. What is an eschatology? Does Black civil religion tend to rest on the idea that “the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice,” according to the author? Or does it have a different eschatology and sense of how the end-times come about, and what the result will be of human action in the here-and-now? Why does the author think these questions are important?

“Intersectional Politics among Atheists and Humanists of Color”

SIKIVU HUTCHINSON

The election of Donald Trump precipitated a right wing conservative religious backlash in American public policy. In the midst of this climate, freethinkers, humanists and atheists of color began challenging religious orthodoxy and faith traditions. They did so by developing their own brand of culturally responsive, social justice humanism that emphasized intersectional approaches to secularism. Departing from the “colorblind” ethos of conventional European American church-state separation focused atheist and humanist agendas, these critical interventions built on the lived experiences and social histories of people of color in predominantly religious communities.

For Discussion:

1. What is the demographic makeup of atheists and humanists in the United States? What challenges does this pose for secular social justice advocates, and what strategies do they use to gain legitimacy within communities of color?
2. How have traditions of feminine purity and piety affected women of color in the United States and how does this create challenges for secular social justice advocates in working with women of color?
3. According to the author, how do race and gender shape the advocacy agenda of mainstream American atheist and humanist organizations?
4. What organizations and groups represent atheists and humanists of color? On what issues do these organizations focus their activism and advocacy efforts?
5. What distinction does the author make between atheism and humanism? How is the African American humanist tradition distinct and different from the humanism embraced by contemporary White humanists?
6. The author is part of a community of activists forging a secular social justice network. What is the secular social justice approach and how does it challenge mainstream humanist institutions in the United States?

“Assuming Whiteness in Twentieth-Century American Religion”

RHYS H. WILLIAMS

This chapter analyzes two influential works in the sociology of religion, Robert Bellah’s “American Civil Religion” and Robert Wuthnow’s “restructuring of American religion.” Bellah’s civil religion reached across American social divisions to provide a web of religious meanings that could unite Americans across sectarian or confessional differences. Wuthnow examined the changing nature of divisions within American religion after World War II, arguing that they restructured from being along confessional lines to being a liberal/conservative division that cut across affiliational categories. What neither scholar engaged fundamentally was the extent to which American religion is raced. Bellah saw in civil religion a tool for transcending racial divisions. Wuthnow’s restructuring was in many ways a story of the “de-ethnization” of white America as a source of social division, largely ignoring race. This chapter considers how sociological theory might have differed if these works had wrestled with the reality that religion is caught in the structures of a racialized society.

For Discussion:

1. How does the author define “civil religion”?
2. What examples or expressions of civil religion have you encountered, either in your daily life or in the media or popular culture?
3. The author thinks that racial divisions are an inherent part of the founding story of the United States. How does this shape his understanding of what civil religion is, and its potential as a unifying force?
4. What is the author’s critique of Robert Bellah’s approach to civil religion? What about more contemporary scholarship on the subject? How does this chapter seek to address the problems the author has identified in prior scholarship on civil religion?
5. Robert Wuthnow argued that over the course of the twentieth century, American religion “restructured” into liberal and conservative camps; this has become the “culture wars” thesis. What are the “culture wars” about, according to Wuthnow?
6. Does the culture wars thesis help us to make sense of the experiences of Christians of color in the United States? What part of the American religious landscape does the author think has been ignored or distorted by focusing on the culture wars?
7. How does this chapter complicate our understanding of the link between religion and political identity in the US?

SECTION II: RACED RELIGION AND GENDER AND SEXUALITIES

“Race, Religion, and Jewish Sexuality in an Age of Immigration”

SARAH IMHOFF

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewishness in the United States functioned simultaneously as a racial classification and a religious classification. This racial classification was complex: Jews could be simultaneously White and racially other. For American Jews, gender and sexuality were integral to racialization. “White slavery” exposés suggested that both Jewish men and women not only engaged in sexuality improperly, but also spread that improper sexuality to other Americans. When Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor Stokes publicly advocated anarchism, many Americans saw them to be upsetting the norms of what good White women should do. And yet these existed alongside other texts praising Jewish women for their care for children and the home. Whiteness, the “Jewish race,” Judaism, gender, and sexuality all intersected to shape American ideas of what it meant to be Jewish.

For Discussion:

1. How does “Jewish” serve as both a racial and religious category in the United States?
2. How has the definition of “Jewishness” changed between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and today?
3. Why are historical perspectives necessary for understanding religion and race in the contemporary United States? Give an example from the chapter.
4. How did “White slavery” exposés depict the sexuality of Jewish men and women in a negative light, and how did this contribute to the racial and religious “othering” of Jewish people?
5. How did Emma Goldman, her anarchism, and her Jewishness upset norms of what “good White women” should do?
6. Compare and contrast the examples of Emma Goldman and Rose Pastor Stokes. How was their “Jewishness” similar? How was it different? How did people respond to them differently, and what does this tell us about what it meant to be a Jewish woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

“Race and the Religious Possibilities for Sexuality in Conservative Protestantism”

KELSY BURKE, DAWNE MOON, and THERESA W. TOBIN

This chapter draws from critical race and queer theories, histories of American conservative Protestantism, and empirical data from contemporary Evangelical groups to theorize the relationship among conservative Protestants, Whiteness, and sexuality. It shows that recent shifts in American Evangelicalism—including a growing internal LGBTQI movement and flourishing marital sex advice industry—depend upon White constructions of sexual norms. By analyzing how straight/cisgender Evangelicals describe sexual pleasure in online communities that offer sex advice alongside dialogue taking place within LGBTQI Evangelical support groups, this chapter posits that changing sexual norms rely on White entitlement to self-expression alongside persistent sexual shame confronted by racial and queer others within conservative Christianity.

For Discussion:

1. Before you read this chapter, what was your idea of the “typical” conservative Protestant and what their sexuality looked like? What did you learn about the diversity of conservative Protestants and their sexualities from reading this chapter? What, if anything, was surprising to you, and why?
2. What is critical race theory? What is queer theory? How can these theoretical perspectives help us understand the relationship between religion, race, gender, and sexualities in the contemporary United States?
3. The authors use qualitative methods to conduct their research. What specific methods do they use? How do these methods allow them to learn information about race and religion that might not be accessible using survey methods or other research methods?
4. In this chapter, the authors primarily emphasize conservative Protestants and Whiteness, even though not all conservative Protestants are White. Why do they interrogate Whiteness in this chapter? Why is it important to analyze how power shapes relationships among those who share a religious tradition?
5. Why are African American conservative Protestants more restricted in their ability to express expanded notions of sexuality publicly compared with White conservative Protestants? How does this shape their religious and sexual lives?
6. Why do the authors use the term “entitlement” to describe White conservative Protestant approaches to certain kinds of sexual expression? How do religion and race intersect to create different levels of entitlement for different groups of people?

“Gender and the Racialization of Muslims”

ASHLEY GARNER and Z. FAREEN PARVEZ

This chapter introduces a cross-national comparison of Muslim women in the US and France to examine how national context determines the racial processes and experiences of Muslim minority women. It presents the stories of Black American Muslim women and argues that they occupy a liminal space marked by non-belonging. As they navigate racial and religious stereotypes in both non-Black Muslim and Black non-Muslim communities, they find ways to protect themselves and their ideals of pious womanhood. French Muslim women, especially of the Salafi tradition, similarly strive to attain their pious ideals, often with paradoxical effects on gender roles. Women in both countries struggle with anti-Muslim racism and hate crimes, but the French context of militant secularism leads to a more direct conflict with the state and withdrawal from public space. This contrasts to the US, where Black Muslim women are first forced to confront racial hierarchies within their own religious communities.

For Discussion:

1. Before reading this chapter, how did you picture a Muslim woman? What did her skin look like? How did she dress? What did you learn about the diversity of Muslim women, both in terms of race and Muslim practice and identity, from this chapter?
2. The authors both use qualitative research methods, one in the US and one in France. How might an ethnographer's own racial and religious backgrounds shape their experiences conducting research in different national contexts, and in different kinds of racial and religious communities?
3. What do the authors mean when they say Black American Muslim women occupy a “liminal space” in their communities?
4. What are the main groups French Muslim women must struggle with in their daily lives? Why?
5. How does national context—in this chapter, the US and France—shape the religio-racial expressions of Muslim women differently?
6. How does secularism shape Muslim womanhood? What kinds of discrimination do Muslim women face due to negative stereotypes about their race, religion, and gender?

SECTION III

RACED RELIGION AND SOCIAL CLASS

“Race, Class, and the Colorblind Social Gospel Movement”

JANINE GIORDANO DRAKE

The Social Gospel movement was a colorblind movement that quietly reinforced the White supremacy of the early twentieth century. White social gospel ministers and Black social gospel ministers were trained in similar divinity schools and adhered to similar, if not identical, theologies of social sin and social salvation. They united together on occasion, but most of their time was spent in their respective, segregated worlds, where their priorities often looked different. African American ministers prioritized the problems of Black self-determination, including efforts to end lynching and expand African American opportunities for education and jobs. White ministers, especially in the urban North, prioritized reforms relating to the labor movement and a social safety net. By the 1930s, the White and Black Social Gospel movements had diverged in emphasis considerably. Until the civil rights era, a majority of White ministers respected, and thereby reinforced, the color line.

For Discussion:

1. What was the Social Gospel movement? What were some of its main goals?
2. What were some of the differences between White social gospel ministers and Black social gospel ministers? How did their focus differ? Why?
3. Why does a colorblind approach often make work for social justice, including from a religious perspective, more difficult?
4. The Social Gospel movement is often depicted as a progressive form of Christianity because it focused on poverty. Is this a fair characterization of the movement? Why or why not?
5. How might historians need to change their research methods, including the types of primary sources they draw on, in order to further incorporate race into their analyses of religion and class?
6. What could contemporary faith-based movements for social justice learn from the divide between White and Black social gospel ministers? How can White religious people working for social justice be better allies to the people of color with whom they are working?

“Racial and Class Gaps in Buddhist-Inspired Organizing”

JAIME KUCINSKAS

Underlying the mainstream appeal of mindfulness is an elite movement, which legitimized meditation as an antidote for personal, professional, and social ills. Although elite mobilization was efficacious in spreading and legitimizing mindfulness, the movement's focus on personal transformation, and its failure to apprehend its own raced and classed blind spots—as, for the most part, a group of white, affluent professionals—ultimately constrained its ability to foster deeper social reform. These limitations have surfaced due to a backlash from critics, racial injustice on the national stage, and vocal consciousness-raising by one of the movement's few Black leaders. This case illuminates the contexts and mechanisms through which privileged assumptions can arise, not only in the mindfulness movement, but also in other affluent, mainstream forms of American religion and spirituality. Based on the lessons of the mindfulness movement, this chapter proposes ways scholars can better identify privileged assumptions and gaps in future research.

For Discussion:

1. Before reading this chapter, how did you imagine an American Buddhist? Most American Buddhists are Asian, and many are from immigrant backgrounds. Did you know that a large minority of American Buddhists are White, US-born converts? How, if at all, does this change your image of American Buddhism?
2. If most American Buddhists are Asian, why is the mindfulness movement mostly made up of White, US-born Buddhists? How has this shaped the way mindfulness is depicted in the public sphere?
3. How did Buddhist elites spread mindfulness? Why were they so successful? What could other faith-based social movements learn from the mindfulness movement?
4. How has the social justice element of Buddhism been downplayed in the mindfulness movement? How do the backgrounds of the people participating in the mindfulness movement inhibit the movement's ability to create widespread social change?
5. What gaps in understanding result from the intersecting racial and class privileges among leaders of the mindfulness movement? How does this affect their ability to involve people of color in the movement?

SECTION IV

RACED RELIGION AND IMMIGRATION

“The Religious and Racial Minoritization of Asian American Voters”

RUSSELL JEUNG, JOHN JIMENEZ, and ERIC MAR

Since the 2000 Presidential Election, data has indicated that a majority of Asian Americans have shown support for candidates from the Democratic Party. This chapter examines the four key factors that have helped determine the Asian American presidential vote: immigration status, partisanship, racial and ethnic interests, and religion. The chapter uses statistical methods to analyze data from the National Asian American Survey, a pre-election survey conducted from August 2016 to October 2016. Results highlight how minoritization—as either religious or racial minorities—influences Asian American support for Democratic presidential candidates.

For Discussion:

1. The authors start the chapter with a quote: “Asian Americans, A Sleeping Political Giant.” What does this quote mean? What does it suggest about the potential power of the Asian American electorate?
2. Many Asian Americans are also first or second generation immigrants. How does immigration status shape voting for Asian Americans? What does this teach us about the relationship between immigration status and race?
3. Asian Americans come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. What are some of those backgrounds? How might this religious diversity both strengthen their electoral impact and serve as an obstacle to building a unified Asian American electorate?
4. The chapter is based on the authors’ analysis of the National Asian American Survey, a pre-election survey conducted from August 2016 to October 2016. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this survey?
5. What are some of the challenges associated with surveying religious and racial minority groups, particularly when many are first generation immigrants? Why is this nonetheless essential for understanding American religion in the twenty-first century?

“Religion, Race, and Immigration in Community Organizing among the Formerly Incarcerated”

EDWARD OROZCO FLORES

Faith-based community organizing facilitates immigrant integration into diverse traditions in religion and public life. This chapter examines how two faith-based community organizing groups, in Chicago and in Los Angeles, fostered organizing among racialized, marginalized groups. Community Renewal Society and LA Voice both supported the development of civic groups led by the formerly incarcerated. Both groups also drew from contrasting religious approaches to form multiracial coalitions. While Community Renewal Society drew upon religious displays from the historically Black Protestant church, LA Voice drew upon Catholic notions of ecumenism and dignity. Leaders mobilized members through progressive, prophetic activism, exhorting members to embrace “the other,” through campaigns to expand the rights of people from marginalized communities. This chapter argues that such coalition-building practices are examples of the limits of assimilation theory, and instead demonstrate the value of a racial formation perspective that examines how religio-political conflict shapes race.

For Discussion:

1. What is faith-based community organizing? How is it both similar to and different from other kinds of activism?
2. Why do some people believe faith-based community organizing has the potential to bridge divides between different religio-racial groups, including those with different immigration statuses? Based on the chapter’s findings, do you agree? Why or why not?
3. How does religious expression differ in the Community Renewal Society versus LA Voice? How are these differences related to the racial and immigration backgrounds of the people involved in the groups?
4. What is assimilation theory? What is racial formation theory? The author argues that his findings support the latter rather than the former. Why?
5. Faith-based community organizing is an example of religion in public life. How do race and immigration status intersect to shape the forms of religious expression that occur in public life? Why do some forms of public religious expression receive more media attention than others, and how might this be related to the racial and immigration backgrounds of those involved?

SECTION V

MEASURING RACED RELIGION

“Decentering Whiteness in Survey Research on American Religion”

JERRY Z. PARK and JAMES CLARK DAVIDSON

This chapter examines two related phenomena: the invisibility of racial minorities in major surveys of American religion and the mischaracterization of minority religions where racial minorities often dominate. It shows that survey research fails to account for the effect of racial position within American Christianity, which masks significant differences between Whites and non-Whites in various Christian religious traditions. Second, it demonstrates that most American survey instruments still rely on Christian-centric (specifically Evangelical) measures of religiosity, such that adherents of minority religions often appear less religious on these analyses. Using 2006-2016 General Social Survey data, the chapter disaggregates religious traditions along racial lines and compares religious service attendance, political party affiliation, abortion attitudes, and racial inequality attitudes. In each instance we note the higher religiosity of Black, Latinx, and Asian American Christians, as well as their differing views on political affiliation and social issues compared to Whites. We conclude with suggestions for future research directions.

For Discussion:

1. The authors argue that stratification in the United States is based on a religio-racial hierarchy. What is this religio-racial hierarchy like? What kinds of resources are distributed based on religion and race in our society?
2. Much of what we know about American religion is based on survey research. According to the authors, how do the standard survey measures of religiosity privilege Christian practices and experiences?
3. Why do small survey sample sizes make it more difficult to study non-Christian religious groups in the United States?
4. The authors propose several potential solutions to the problems they identify with contemporary survey-based research on American religion. What are these solutions, and what are the barriers to their implementation?
5. The authors believe it is important to “disaggregate” survey data and examine patterns of responses for different religio-racial groups. They take this approach in examining religious service attendance, political identification, attitudes about abortion, and attitudes about racial inequality. What do they find in their subgroup analyses, and why are their findings important?

“Beyond Black and White in Measuring Racial Identity among US Muslims”

BESHEER MOHAMED

This chapter proposes seven analytical categories based on race, ethnicity, and country of birth to capture racialized identity in one of the most diverse religious groups in the United States—Muslims. Using these categories in analyzing Pew Research Center’s 2011 and 2017 surveys of US Muslims illuminates important splits within White, Black, and Asian racial groups. While US Muslims overall have relatively positive perceptions of America, there also are significant differences in their views on issues such as racial disparities in the US and the US public’s friendliness toward Muslims Americans. In particular, Arab immigrants stand out as having an especially positive view of the country, while US-born White Muslims and especially US-born Black Muslims are somewhat more likely to report concerns. The chapter shows that it is important for studies to include demographic questions that make it possible to understand diversity within and between common racial groups.

For Discussion:

1. Before you read this chapter, what was your idea of the “typical” Muslim American? What did you learn about the diversity of American Muslims from reading this chapter? What, if anything, was surprising to you, and why?
2. How do standard practices in analyzing survey research lead social scientists to mischaracterize or misunderstand the experiences of Muslim Americans?
3. The author uses race, ethnicity, and country of birth to group Muslim Americans and analyze their social attitudes. Why is it important to take all three of these factors into account?
4. What factors shape Muslim Americans’ views of American society? Of racial inequality? Of immigrants and immigration?
5. What kinds of practical changes in survey research or Census-based research does the author recommend?
6. Does what you read in this chapter support or challenge the ways in which Muslim Americans are portrayed in the media and popular culture in the United States?

“Race, Gender, and Avowing (or Avoiding) the Stigma of Atheism”

JOSEPH O. BAKER

White Americans are more likely than racial and ethnic minorities to self-identify as nonreligious, particularly as atheists. Using the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Survey, this chapter compares Americans who self-identify as atheists to those who identify as “nothing” with regard to religious or secular identity while also saying they do not believe in god (“reticent atheists”). Results indicate that women, racial and ethnic minorities, and those of lower social class are all more likely to avoid the label of atheism. Further, the majority of both reticent and open atheists do not talk about their views about religion and god with religious people. There are clear dynamics of intersectionality in avowing or avoiding the label of atheism, such that women of color are much less likely to self-identify as atheists or talk with others about their secularity. At the same time, open secularity is becoming more common among younger generations over time, pointing to progressive secularization and a decline in secular stigma.

For Discussion:

1. What is a “reticent atheist”? In the United States, what kinds of people are the most likely to be reticent atheists? To be open atheists?
2. According to the author, why do atheists, whether reticent or open, avoid talking about religion, god, or atheism with religious people?
3. What is the definition of “stigma”? Is atheism a stigmatized identity in the United States? Is it equally stigmatized for everyone? Why or why not?
4. Women of color in the United States are the least likely to identify as atheist or to talk with others about their secularity. What is the author’s explanation for why the intersection of gender and race is particularly important for understanding how people experience and express secular identities in the United States?
5. What are the limits of current survey samples and questions for understanding how secular Americans self-identify and how they experience and practice their secular identities?
6. What are the implications of the author’s findings for how social scientists should change the way they conduct survey research on religion and non-religion in the United States?
7. In the United States, younger generations are, on average, less religious and more secular than older generations. How does the author think that will affect the stigmatization of secular identities?

CONCLUSION

“Centering Race in the Study of American Religion and Nonreligion”

PENNY EDGELL and GRACE YUKICH

In the concluding chapter, the editors reflect on the themes highlighted in the book's chapters, summarizing how their insights challenge dominant ways of theorizing, measuring, and evaluating religion, both in scholarly work and the public sphere. Drawing on the book's key points, the chapter sets an agenda for research on American religion in the twenty-first century, emphasizing how to better recognize religion as a raced phenomenon moving forward. It concludes by broadening the lens to consider how recognizing religion as raced has implications for religious leaders and institutions, journalists covering religion, political pundits, and citizen activists seeking a just and peaceful future in a religiously and racially diverse society.

For Discussion:

1. According to the authors, what kinds of religious experiences and beliefs are privileged in media portrayals of American religion? Can you think of examples from news media or popular culture that treat White Christianity—especially White Evangelical Protestantism—as the most authentically American religion?
2. How do the categories and concepts that social scientists use to understand American religion—like civil religion, or the culture wars—distort or hide the religious experiences of non-White Americans?
3. The authors argue that if scholars focused on non-White religious experiences there might be more emphasis on contention and religious mobilization around issues of structural inequality and that we might think of religion in less individualistic terms. What examples from the rest of the book support this conclusion?
4. The methods section of the book concentrated on three main concerns: sampling, categorizing people accurately and sensitively, and asking better questions. What specific recommendations do the authors make for better sampling practices, for better ways to classify both religious and non-religious Americans, and for asking better questions?
5. What new kinds of research would the authors like to see? What's their agenda for the field of scholarship on American religion?
6. After reading this, are you better equipped to be a critical consumer of news coverage on religion in the US? If so, how?