

Book Reviews

Giggie, John M. *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875–1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 315pp. \$99.00 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

In *After Redemption*, John Giggie provides a much-needed history of African American religion in the Mississippi and Arkansas Delta in the years between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the First World War and the Great Migration. During this time the region was teeming with racially based oppression and violence; and as a result, scholars have assumed that this was a static era in the history of African American religion and have consistently ignored this time period. In his work Giggie confronts this contention and shows that it was not the case. He convincingly argues that this was in fact a rich time of change, when “blacks found in their sacred beliefs and practices a mediating space through which to respond to ambiguities, horrors, and hopes of life in the New South” (xvii). He describes the ways in which many southern African Americans altered their spiritual lives in response to the social, political, and economic changes that were occurring at this time.

In compiling *After Redemption*, Giggie relied heavily on information from newspapers, both published and unpublished interviews of ex-slaves, autobiographies, and recordings of African American music and oral expressions. Though he acknowledges the difficulty that he faced in using these materials, he nonetheless explains why they were useful and describes how he attempted to mediate the problems he encountered. One advantage to using these materials is that the author was able to explore aspects of southern blacks’ spiritual lives that are often overlooked.

Giggie provides a new perspective on African American religion by taking seriously the ways in which the supernatural “threaded its way into the tapestry of everyday life” (5). One of the strength of Giggie’s work is the way in which he brings religious analysis to bear on elements of culture that are typically assumed to be secular. Though he does devote a chapter to the Holiness movement, Giggie adeptly illustrates the ways that train travel, fraternal orders, commercial life, and material culture are redefined by many African Americans as integral parts of their religious lives. Giggie says in his introduction that it was impossible to tell a neat, linear history that included all these seemingly disparate topics, but he does an outstanding job connecting all these themes. For example, he explains how the focus on material culture and consumerism was in part a response among women to the loss of influence associated with the increased popularity of fraternal organizations. Giggie similarly shows how the rise of the Holiness movement was in part a reaction to fraternal organizations and consumer capitalism. Although at first glance these seem like unrelated topics, Giggie brings to light unexpected and insightful connections.

In addition to incorporating many overlooked aspects of religious life, Giggie also offers a much-appreciated focus on gender. He pays a great deal of attention to the role of women in southern African American religious culture. He discusses women in every chapter and shows how they influenced the culture as well as the ways in which their religious lives differed from the lives of men.

Although showing how African Americans’ religious cultures changed in the Delta during this time is a significant contribution in and of itself, Giggie also makes two additional points that are important to the larger study of African American religion. First, he engages the

current debate over the use of the category of “the black church.” He acknowledges a historical propensity among scholars to portray black churches as monolithic and does not want to fall into this trap. By paying “particular attention to quarrels between and among ... churches over the proper definition of worship, sacred space, spiritual authority, and consumption,” Giggie paints a diverse picture of African American religion in the Delta and helps dispute the existence of a homogeneous “black church” (16).

A second, and related, contribution is that by appreciating the diversity of southern black religion Giggie points out that many of the changes that historians generally associate only with the Great Migration actually began much earlier and had their roots in the South. For example, the debate that occurred between “progressives” and “conservatives” over the political and social roles of black churches is often associated with the Great Migration. African Americans who were living in the North prior to World War I are often portrayed as the “progressives,” who wanted to “refine black religion” and make black churches a conduit for “financial success, social respect, and influence.” Northern blacks are depicted as fighting against southern migrants who wanted to maintain “practices of ecstatic worship and a popular faith in the supernatural” (179). Though he says nothing to imply that this debate was not rehashed among progressives and conservatives in the urban North, Giggie shows that this debate was occurring prior to the migration in the post-Reconstruction South. This complicates our picture of the northern debate by showing that southern migrants were not monolithically conservative and that the conflict between progressives and conservatives was not strictly divided between northern blacks and southern migrants. It also shows that this conflict was not primarily a reaction to life in the urban North.

In this volume Giggie makes a number of important contributions to the study of American religious history. By focusing on a period of history largely neglected by scholars of African American religion, Giggie challenges the fundamental periodization of African American religious history. He also participates in a larger move among scholars to redefine the South as a place of religious innovation and diversity and does so by illuminating ways in which religion in the region adapted and changed and as well as how Southern religion came to influence the North. In *After Redemption*, John Giggie begins to fill a number of gaps in the historiography not only of African American religious history, but in American history more generally.

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Makdisi, Ussama. *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*. The United States in the World. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008. 265 pgs. \$35.00

Imagine this scenario: A small band of zealots who consider themselves exemplars of a religious culture obsessed with purity descend upon an unsuspecting and thriving multiethnic and multireligious world, determined to change it. In *Artillery of Heaven*, Ussama Makdisi nicely turns the tables on the conventional wisdom of our decade by weaving a narrative in which the zealots are American missionaries and the unsuspecting pragmatic pluralists are the citizens of the Muslim Ottoman Empire.

One of Makdisi's primary goals is to combat Samuel Huntington's influential "clash of civilizations" thesis. Rather than relying on an alternative mythology of, for example, a commonality located in "the Abrahamic tradition," Makdisi claims that the careful and exacting use of historical methodologies can undermine such mythologies. History, he argues, can illuminate both moments of cultural conflict and the transformations of culture that result—thus deeply contextualizing the conflict itself and undercutting the assumption of perduring civilizational values: "[W]hat is conceptually most distinctive about the origins of a sustained U.S. engagement with the Middle East," Makdisi writes, is "the plural nature of the encounter itself and the diversity of its sources" (6), not competing sets of unchanging values that lead these cultures into unavoidable conflict.

Makdisi's case study is the death of As'ad Shidyaq, a Maronite Christian who in 1825 converted to the Protestantism of missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Imprisoned by the leaders of his community, he died in prison five years later and with his death became, from the missionaries' viewpoint, "their celebrated martyr and . . . a vindication of their mission" (3). The book's partition into three sections highlights the concept of cultural change. Part 1 lays out the context from which the American missionaries and the Maronites both emerged, Part 2 narrates the conflict over Shidyaq, and the final part traces how both missionary and Maronite culture changed, partly as a result of that conflict.

In Part 1, Makdisi employs the writings of two cultural leaders, Puritan divine Cotton Mather and Mather's faraway contemporary, Maronite patriarch Istifan Duwayhi. Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, "an epic of conquest and Christianity in New England" (20), contrasts with Duwayhi's narrative of Maronite Christian survival in the delicately balanced and hierarchical, yet usually tolerant, patchwork that was the Ottoman Empire (32). New Englanders' geographical circumstances at the turn of the eighteenth century allowed for their triumphalism; on Mount Lebanon, the Maronites' allowed for their appreciation of the practice of coexistence. From this Makdisi draws an interesting comparison: both cultures showed concern for communal purity.

In Part II, Makdisi recounts how the group of American missionaries who set out to evangelize the land of Christ's birth began their course toward conflict with the people whose cultures they planned to replace with their own. They soon learned to gravitate toward non-Muslim minorities, given that proselytizing Muslims was against the law. This is why a narrative about American-Arab encounter focuses on the Maronites, illustrating Makdisi's claim that historical encounters are not between civilizations but between particular individuals. The Maronites were part of the Ottoman Empire but should not be taken as representative of it. By the same token, the missionaries were unrepresentative of the United States at their time, though they often constituted all that foreign peoples ever knew about it.

Despite the many failures of the home mission to the Native Americans, the missionaries heading to the Holy Land believed they would be welcomed (69)—perhaps even greeted as liberators. Though far from having achieved purity at home, they showed especial disgust for what they called the "mingled people" (71) of the Ottoman Empire, and planned to enforce the same tactics of cultural annihilation they had tried on Native Americans. Unlike the Native Americans, though, the Ottoman culture was, Makdisi writes, "infinitely more cohesive and resilient than anything missionaries in America had previously encountered" (71). The missionaries found little success, except with Shidyaq, their Arabic tutor. Shidyaq converted and began to insist on proclaiming his beliefs in public. The Maronite authorities, in order to quell the danger they believed Shidyaq posed to the community, accused him of insanity and

imprisoned him. Because the Ottoman authorities rarely intervened in minority groups' internal affairs, Shidyaq "ironically" became "a casualty of Ottoman tolerance if ever there was one" (129).

By 1830, with Shidyaq dead and five years of mission gone by, "there was still not a single Arab Christian convert" (143–144). But in the third section, Makdisi shows that the seeds had been sown for less tense encounters. In 1860, another Maronite convert to Protestantism, Butrus al-Bustani, penned a defense of Shidyaq and faced little retribution. His hagiography painted Shidyaq as an important member of his own culture and repudiated American triumphalist exceptionalism. In fact, Makdisi argues, Bustani went so far as to "evoke an unprecedented ecumenism, and later a new liberal pluralism[,] as intolerable to American missionaries as it was to the Maronite Church" (181). In Bustani, Makdisi argues, "A cultural clash had . . . produced its antithesis" (212).

Particularly insightful is Makdisi's evocation of changing values—the American values of equality and toleration, though deeply held by many today, were simply not valued the same way by early-nineteenth-century missionaries. Cultural clashes do occur, not because unchanging belief systems get set on a collision course, but because of the inability or unwillingness of historical actors to understand one another's culture. And if the writings of Bustani are a guide, conflict does not always lead to more conflict but can instead lead to reconciliation and cultural renewal.

It should be noted that lessons from the encounter between American missionaries and the Maronites are not entirely exportable. For example, the American mission to native Christians in Persia that began about a decade later took the opposite trajectory of starting off well and then becoming more and more tense. Further, missionaries there began to talk about their own misgivings over whether and to what extent to change native culture almost immediately, which if nothing else complicates portraits of unrelenting American zealotry.

Makdisi provides an exemplary model of missionary history. His discovery of a trove of untapped Arabic sources on the Shidyaq affair gives hope that such a recovery can be possible in other situations. Beyond mission history, he provides a model for how transnational history can uncenter traditional historiographical centers—in this case New England Puritanism—without devaluing them.

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Callahan, Richard J., ed. *New Territories, New Perspectives: The Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase*. Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2008. x – 243pp. \$44.95.

The Gateway Arch and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, Missouri, are service to one particular interpretation of the significance of the Louisiana Purchase. They tell the story of westward migration and settlement of Anglo-American pioneers who forged their way onto the North American interior. The book in discussion—the product of a conference held in honor of the bicentennial of the purchase—offers essays that challenge this narrative and provide supplemental narratives of the peoples and religions of the region.

New Territories, New Perspectives is a collection of nine essays from scholars of disciplines as diverse as the people groups presented in the essays. In fact, it would seem that the appreciation for diversity is the spirit that is the bedrock of the conference and of the book (221).

The arrangement of the essays is such that it presents the diversion of narratives. Peter Williams's essay on built culture on the frontier demonstrates the standard tale of Anglo-American frontier exploration. As he shows, the development of the Prairie Gothic architecture for churches illustrates the innovations of pioneers in building the houses of worship. This tale of settlement as a product of westward expansion would certainly be the theme of the early chapters. Even chapters discussing religious sensibilities and practices of Native Americans and African Americans acknowledge that these people groups had originated further east (89). The latter chapters of the book view the Louisiana Territory as a corridor linking the North American interior with the Caribbean. Whereas the earlier chapters discuss mobility on a latitudinal axis, the latter chapters view the longitudinal axis and specifically movement upward from the Gulf of Mexico.

To suggest that one single element binds these essays together would be akin to any homogenizing historical narrative of the frontier. Unfortunately there is little that holds these essays together. Yet there are at least three elements that one can infer that are pertinent to the study of the geographies of religion. The first is the consideration of one shifting his or her scope to various geographic frames of reference. The second is a recognition of and appreciation for the diversity of people groups and their respective religions. Third is a critical exploration of the quintessence of American culture and geographically where that culture is seated. Particularly, we should interrogate the multiculturalism agenda at work in this book.

Readers of various disciplines will appreciate and benefit from Richard Callahan's introduction. He aptly addresses the debate within the study of American religion when he questions the Puritan-centered narrative of American religious history. As he identifies, dissenters from this tale have opted for regional studies to challenge the prevailing interpretation. Callahan argues that the story of Puritan settlement on the frontier has significant limitations when one takes the Louisiana Territory as the starting frame (6). The narrative must begin with Spanish and French occupation and the exchanges they had with Native Americans. Puritan New England is a periphery when one changes the focal point. Likewise, Paul Johnson argues that historians and cultural geographers must view the Louisiana Purchase through the lens of New Orleans (151). This city was so vital to American trade with the Caribbean that it was the prized acquisition of the purchase. Through the Crescent City the influx of Voudou and other African spiritual beliefs and practices made their way. And it was the role that Voudou played in the Haitian Revolution that ultimately led to Napoléon Bonaparte selling Louisiana to the United States. As a result, the story of American religion is much more complex. This is an important point for historians and cultural geographers to keep in mind, and this book is to be commended for bringing it to readers' attention.

Since the reorientation of perspective allows for the inclusion of more narratives, scholars can and should tell of the diversity in the Louisiana Territory and of interaction between groups. First there is the recognition of and appreciation for respective religious beliefs and practices. Douglas Daniels's essay on African-American spirituality and jazz music is an excellent example of such. Scholars should also identify instances of cultural exchange and syncretism. Exchange can be seen in Porterfield's essay, which states that ideas of destiny by various subcultures complemented each other to develop a larger sense of national destiny (54). Syncretism is evident in the piece by Elaine Lawless, who argues that the interaction between blacks and whites in Louisiana in mixed-race religious revival provided an opportunity for elements of African spirituality to be refashioned in charismatic, Pentecostal expressions such as glossalalia

(136). The points of contact and cultural sharing need further exploration, and these essays provide good examples on how to accomplish such research.

Charles Long's essay on New Orleans is an amalgam of themes discussed in this review. More than the others, his essay causes us to raise some important questions. First, he argues to transfer the focal point of the territory away from St. Louis and to New Orleans. As he claims, the Crescent City better exemplifies American multiculturalism (203). The Louisiana Territory was a zone in which all sorts of peoples interacted regularly, and more frequent engagements occurred in densely populated areas such as New Orleans. In his call for geographic reorientation, he also redefines American culture as being distinctly multicultural. Thus he seats the quintessence of American culture in New Orleans, as opposed to St. Louis. As I have stated above St. Louis is symbolic of Anglo-American migration, whereas New Orleans is a hub of mobility from multiple axes.

My disagreement is not about which city we use as our exemplar in defining American culture as much as it is about how we are defining American culture and American religion. The reorientation to the center of the country, to borrow from Callahan's expression, implies that the center holds a certain quality of cultural standardization. Therefore, if we use New Orleans as our cultural standard, we define America by its multiculturalism. This is a noble task. However, Porterfield demonstrates that conflicting narratives of respective group destinies resulted in violence on the frontier. Likewise, John Stewart tells of the historic violence between bands of African Americans who dressed as Native Americans during the New Orleans Mardi Gras (198-99). We should be careful not to overly romanticize the multicultural past for risk of inaccurately celebrating a half truth, just as we see in the "whiggish" tales of Anglo-American settlement. Indeed, multiculturalism is a present reality that we must embrace, but we must do so with the appropriate perspective of the past.

The idea and implications of this book provide a wealth of opportunity for studying the geography of religion and belief systems in and around the Mississippi valley. Perhaps we should also further explore what is meant by the "center of the country." In terms of physical geography, the Louisiana Territory occupies the center. In terms of culture, we should ask how this space that was a periphery to the Atlantic seaboard and to the Caribbean, New Orleans withstanding, came to be known as America's "heartland." And by extension we must ask how the heartland assumed cultural authority in American religion, or if it did at all. James Shortridge has devoted much of his career to exploring the first of these questions. As historians and cultural geographers of religions and belief systems, we too should search for answers.

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