

Introduction

Managing Race, Managing Religion

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Thirty feet high, arms folded, with a steady, piercing gaze, Martin Luther King, Jr., now stands on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Completed in 2011, the King memorial seals the embrace of the once-controversial leader by those across the political spectrum. Barack Obama presided at the memorial's opening, but it was Ronald Reagan who signed into law a bill making Martin Luther King Day a federal holiday after it passed with bipartisan support in Congress. Ornamenting King's tall figure are fourteen engraved quotations from his sermons, speeches, and writings. Justice, love, and peace are recurring themes. "We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." "True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice." Amazingly, nowhere among these quotations is there mention of God, sin, Jesus, heaven, or hell. King the Christian preacher is absent. Even more astounding, there is no mention of the plight of the African American community for which King so vehemently fought. The only mention of race is in a quotation suggesting that King advocated forgetting it: "Our loyalties must transcend our race." King's mainstream success, it seems, has come at the cost of his own religious and racial identity. Or, put another way, the careful management of race and religion are the prerequisite for accepting

the public significance of a fundamentally raced religious figure. That there is significance to the pairing, race and religion, managed together, is the thesis probed in this book.

Martin Luther King, Jr., did not speak in secular, race-neutral language. He preached, and he preached from his position as a black American. He preached about the law of God, the damnation of sinners, and divine omnipotence. He preached and spoke from the Bible. In his final speech, delivered on April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, King imagines a conversation with God, invokes the classical American form of the jeremiad (troubles today, possibilities tomorrow), cites Amos, describes his miraculous survival from an assassination attempt, prophesies his own death, and concludes, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!” King speaks in the first person plural about black Americans: “We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God’s world. ... We are saying that we are God’s children.” In short, from his days as a young preacher coming up in the Baptist church where his father ministered to his last days supporting a public sector union, King’s critical voice was not just a moral voice. It was a theological voice, a black theological voice. This is the voice muted and managed by the secular and post-racial regime of America in 2011.

Unveiling the King monument, the first black president also carefully managed his deployment of the language of religion and race. Obama hailed the “slow but certain progress” brought about by King.¹ Because of this progress “people of all colors and creeds live together, and work together, and fight alongside one another, and learn together, and build together, and love one another.” The listener would hardly know that King was particularly concerned about black people, or that King himself was black. Further, race and religion are conjoined, “colors

¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/16/remarks-president-martin-luther-king-jr-memorial-dedication>, Accessed January 19, 2015

and creeds,” in the harmony that is to be America. Of all the activities we people of different races and religions do together, the ultimate is loving – a wonderfully clear marker of the normative Christianity that remains even after any deeper or broader religious vocabulary has dissolved. The management of race and religion is not administered from some neutral ground. It continues the very specific religious, and racial, heritage of the United States. Indeed, Obama provides his own reconstruction of King’s political theology: “It was ... that belief that God resides in each of us, from the high to the low, in the oppressor and the oppressed, that convinced him that people and systems could change.” According to Obama, King’s was not a Biblical faith or a faith rooted in tradition but a simple humanism, a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every human being – a secular faith, or a secularist faith, a faith suitable to our secular age.

When Obama mentions, once, King’s advocacy for African Americans (a race strangely distanced from King, not to mention from Obama himself, in the speech), it is a story with the moral of perseverance in the face of disappointment and hardship. King moved from a fight for “civil and political equality” to a fight for “economic justice,” Obama states, because the former was not achieving enough results for African Americans. Obama adds that, today, he himself is carrying on this fight, enumerating a number of his policy priorities: “world-class education,” “health care ... affordable and accessible to all,” and an economy “in which everybody gets a fair shake.” In other words, the age of race-based advocacy is over, and even King knew that.

Twenty eight years earlier, fifteen years after King’s final speech, Ronald Reagan’s remarks at the signing ceremony for the Martin Luther King Day legislation present a quite different articulation of the racial, the religious, the universal, and the American. Reagan focuses on King the black man, and he describes a past (made to sound oddly distant) in which blacks “were separate and unequal,” attending segregated schools, taking bad jobs with low wages, and

required to use separate facilities.² King was committed to nonviolence, Reagan reports, because he believed “that unearned suffering is redemptive.” Reagan concludes, “[E]ach year on Martin Luther King Day, let us not only recall Dr. King, but rededicate ourselves to the Commandments he believed in and sought to live every day: Thou shall love thy God with all thy heart, and thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself.” In contrast to Obama, whose King was post-racial and post-religious, Reagan’s King was a black man who believed that the Ten Commandments were the heart of Christian (or American?) faith. For Reagan, people were, indeed, born with a race, but racial injustice was a thing of the past. And for Reagan, American unity was brought about by a shared Christian moral vision – ultimately a white Christian moral vision – that allowed for national crises to be resolved peacefully. In short, religion was managed by being nationalized while race was managed by being naturalized.

These are but a few recent examples of race and secularism in America. Why race and secularism and not race and religion? Because we are interested in the processes by which race and religion are excluded or managed. We are interested in how these processes are intertwined. And we are interested in how power infects and inflects these processes. In other words, we do not take race and religion to be simply facts about a person, aspects of their identity that correspond to boxes they check on demographic forms. Such a view, we contend, is the product of a specific historical moment, and such a view maintains the power of specific forces. It is a view at home in our world of organized differences, of individuals reduced to arrays of categories for micro-targeted marketing, not only of products but of politics. It is a view suited to our culture of cultural diversity, managed by specialists and administered by state institutions,

² <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/110283a.htm>, Accessed January 19,

private companies, and television hosts. It is also a view of religion and race that is too often projected backwards, in our historical scholarship. In contrast, we seek to uncover racial and religious formations that are rendered illegible under the current regime, and to show their political potency.

Scholarship on religion and scholarship on race have been moving in the same direction, from different positions. Scholarship on race has turned away from adjudicating the biological or socially constructed nature of race and instead has turned towards an examination of racialization, that is, the sets of ideas, institutions, practices, and technologies that establish and maintain a racial regime – and towards an examination of how that regime was inhabited, or resisted. In the United States, this means that race is not just about black people. It is about the styles of thinking and acting, and the legal, political, and social systems that construct a racial line between black and white. This approach further invites reflection on whether those or related mechanisms are in play when other groups are seemingly racialized: Native Americans, immigrants, or Muslims. And it invites reflection on the purportedly post-racial that may in fact serve to maintain subterranean racial regimes. Similarly, recent interest in religion has turned from documenting religious beliefs, communities, or practices to exploring the ways that the very possibilities for what religion can be are historically contingent. Secularism names the regime that determines what does and does not count as appropriate religion for a particular sphere – for example, what sort of religious language can be used by a national politician, or what sort of miracles can be witnessed by a Lutheran pastor in Minnesota. Secularism evokes a religious domain that is managed by power, circumscribed by non-religious forces. The analogy for race: racial minority communities are managed by power, circumscribed by non-minority, i.e., white, forces.

We hypothesize that race and secularism are entwined. Put more starkly, whiteness is secular and the secular is white. The unmarked racial category and the unmarked religious category jointly mark their others. Or, put another way: the desire to stand outside religion and the desire to stand outside race are complementary delusions, for the seemingly outside is in fact the hegemonic. The chapters that follow test these waters in a number of different places and times, and they understand our hypothesis in a variety of ways. They explore a various religious and racial regimes, from slavery and segregation to prisons, from Asian immigrants to black Muslims, from elite post-secular post-blackness to black religious quietism. And they explore America from inside and out: from the central mythologies of race and race overcome to the transnational exchanges of racial-religious regimes between the US and Africa and between the US and the rest of the Americas. Before embarking, let us first say more about how the study of race and secularism together can productively advance conversations both in the study of religion and race and in American Studies. Then, we will map out some historical signposts where race and secularism are co-articulated in US history, recounting the trunk of paradoxes that the chapters to follow will further complicate.

Why has this book not been written before? Why has whiteness not only characterized the secular, but also, all too often, critiques of the secular? The seminal works animating conversations about secularism take their starting point from European intellectual history, or from complicating that history.³ Perhaps this is because secularism is approached through secularization, the historical process through which religion recedes from public, and eventually

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

private, presence. Social theories of secularization see it as a process that accompanies modernization: the rise of science and the compartmentalization of social functions reduce the role for religion. This is told as a European story that, at most, echoes in the periphery. But this is not a story about secularism: it does not track the technologies through which religion is managed because management, with its implied agency, is not a part of the story of secularization. A focus on secularism does not imagine a fall from a pre-modern unified social world to differentiated modernity (a theological narrative itself!). Rather, it takes the autonomy of the religious to be always contested. While such contest may spill from center to periphery, from metropole to colony, or vice versa, that is just one of many stories that can be told about it. The contest over the autonomy or management of the religious may also be connected with other technologies of governmentality, such as the management of race.⁴

Scholarship on secularism sometimes accompanies another story about the history of European ideas. With the rise of Protestantism, and with the Wars of Religion, religion comes to be seen as fractious.⁵ To avoid violent conflict, secular reasoning is substituted for theological reasoning in conflict-prone arenas, such as international law and public morality. This is told as a European story because of the specifically European Christian history at its core. But secularism as a response to religious strife, or, better, as a response to strife attributed to religion, has no necessary connection with one place and time. It was on the minds of the American Founding Fathers as they drafted the Bill of Rights, just as it was on the minds of the Council of Historians

⁴ For a story of this connection as a story of modernity, see J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

deciding on the text to be inscribed on the Martin Luther King, Jr., memorial, and on the minds of Supreme Court justices ruling on sodomy laws. There is no need to take European intellectual history as paradigmatic.

Yet there are more significant problems with the discourse on secularism that has recently flourished in the academy. That this discourse so often is one of intellectual (or, occasionally, literary) history is at odds with broader currents in religious studies scholarship that privilege religious practice and embodiment. With this in mind, we assert that secularism should not just be addressed as the management of discourse but also as the management of practices and bodies; not just as an elite exercise of power but as the management of lives of ordinary people. Taking such an approach provides yet another reason to de-center Europe from the secularism conversation, for it discounts the privilege of the supposed intellectual centers. Furthermore, shifting the focus of secularism studies to practice and embodiment makes space for accounts of agency. It is not just that religious ideas are excluded, it is that the way religion is lived is managed by the forces of secularism – and that lived experience often mismatches secularist ideals. In this mismatch are the complex lives and wills of individuals and communities, embracing and contesting the construction and management of their religion. Such an approach has been embraced in the study of racialization for at least two decades now, exploring practice, embodiment, and what might collectively be labeled the weapons of the weak; the chapters that follow expand this approach to secularism, and to the secularist-racializing knot.

That knot is crucially important, and points to an element of secularism drastically understudied. Secularism as intellectual historical phenomenon conceals the way secularism and race together manage bodies and lives. The academy and its funders support such a separation.

During the Civil Rights Movement the Ford Foundation funded the apparatus of racial liberalism, containing the radical energies of protesters through the prospect of grant money if only they would work within the system, if only they would not demand too much – if only they would accept the meaning of race as given.⁶ Today the Ford Foundation funds the Social Science Research Council’s Religion and the Public Sphere initiative, curating discussion often explicitly about secularism for an audience of academics and a broader public. With essays commissioned by academic scholars of religion several times a month for its web site, The Immanent Frame, this project has magnified the visibility of discussions of religion and secularism across the humanities. Strikingly, these essays feature virtually no discussion of race. We ask whether studying the management or exclusion of religion without also studying the management or exclusion of race captures a symptom and conceals a disease. We ask whether it is ever possible to talk about secularism without talking about whiteness.

America is a prime site to study secularism in practice, and to study the intersection of secularism and racialization. As imagined, or fantasized, America is a place of religious and racial diversity, a place where the freedom to be who you want to be has allowed for varied religious and racial communities to call for and achieve recognition of their distinctiveness. Together with the rhetoric of freedom is the reality of management, the subtle technologies of control that create the horizons of possibility for both religious and racialized lives. America presents these technologies both bluntly – in the cases of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration; in the cases of blasphemy laws and Muslim persecution – and more subtly, in less infamous though no less unjust ways. The racialization of Native Americans, “ethnic” European

⁶ Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2013).

immigrants, Latinos, and Asians all present variations on the central black-white racial binary. The response to, and constitution of, such groups as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and the Nation of Islam all present fruitful sites for investigating secularist inflections, always already racialized. The essays that follow begin with the ever-present, ever-powerful black-white binary, but also consider less familiar racial, and religious, sites.

American Studies, as a discipline, has pioneered the careful, subtle analysis of the varieties of racialization in the United States and has paid particular attention to the way that racialization enables flows of capital. Furthermore, the last two decades have seen American Studies scholarship turn towards the transnational, concerning itself with flows of people, ideas, and capital between America and other parts of the world.⁷ American racialization does not happen in isolation, but as part of a global network, tracking capital flows that pass easily across national boundaries. Yet American Studies scholarship has had relatively little to say about the management of religion, or the relationship between secularism and racialization. In tracking the late capitalist commodification of identity, American Studies scholars carefully probe racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, but often overlook religious identities. The chapters that follow serve as an antidote, adding religion to the mix.

Race and secularism show up together from the beginning of the American story. While the Constitution is a fundamentally secular document, never mentioning God or religion, the Declaration of Independence binds the claim of American autonomy to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," and proclaims "a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." In this religiously committed Declaration there is no talk of race. Famously and confoundingly, "all

⁷ See, for example, Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe (eds.), *Re-framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011).

men are created equal.” It is in the secular Constitution that the US racial regime is first legally formalized, with Indians and two fifths of slaves (“other Persons”) not counted for the purposes of legislative representation. In this founding moment, so often remembered and mythologized, the racial regime is codified as religion is excluded and the religious regime is codified while race is excluded. This is not to claim causation, just to note the first in a series of possible entanglements.

Historians have shown that the secularism evinced in the First Amendment’s religion clauses – “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” – was management of religion by Protestants, for Protestants. For more than a century, the religion clauses applied only to the federal government, not to the states. Oaths were still sworn on the Bible, blasphemy was criminalized, and many states financially supported churches. Christianity, and especially Protestantism, was thought to be important to cultivating civic virtue. In other words, the government was not giving freedom to religion, but managing religion by cultivating good religion: religion advantageous to the government. This management of religion by state governments was curtailed by the expansion of federal authority resulting from the Civil War. For example, the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, laid the groundwork for the application of the First Amendment religion clauses to states. This extension of Constitutional religious protections to the states was not complete until the middle of the twentieth century - the same time that the Supreme Court began applying the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the legal apparatus that supported segregation, ruling it

unconstitutional.⁸ A new, ostensibly more just way of managing race was tied together with a dramatic shift in the way religion was managed. In short, there are evocative points of intersection between the American disciplining of religion and the American disciplining of race.

Christian-fueled social movements had a complicated relationship with the management of race. While upstate New York was a hotbed both of the Second Great Awakening and the abolitionist movement, the latter only occasionally took on the form or content of religious revival, and it would be an overreach to tell a causal story. But both, we might suggest, are examples of reactions to attempts at managing religion and race, or excluding religion and race, from public life in the mid-19th century North. They are reactions to secularism and racialization. The same could be said of the Civil Rights Movement a century later.⁹ The Cold War consensus had tamed religion, in the democratic faith of a John Dewey and the politically palatable Protestantism of Reinhold Niebuhr, and seemingly tamed racial discord, through the inclusion of African Americans in the military and in wartime industry. But the revivalist mass meetings of the Montgomery Improvement Association and its progeny exposed the nation to novel religious and racial expression, and demanded response. Social movements that challenged the secularist, white consensus not only demanded specific rights or religious allegiances but challenged something more fundamental about the American political project: its envelope for managing difference.

⁸ David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹ David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

While secularism is often thought of as clearing space for the absence of religion, and so controlling religion externally, as it were, secularism also affects religion internally, setting the terms in which religion can be spoken, and heard. This aspect of secularism, too, can be read together with the dynamics of racialization in the United States. Waves of Catholic immigrants from Ireland, and more recently from Latin America, were denied whiteness as they were denied participation in the secular (i.e., Protestant) American consensus. The Catholic Church in the United States responded in a variety of ways, from theology (for example, John Courtney Murray's qualified defense of American religious and racial freedoms) to architecture (for example, the construction of the National Shrine in Washington, D. C., with its ethnic chapels).¹⁰ Black religion, too, exceeded the bounds of acceptability set by white Protestantism, and was alternately denigrated and praised for its emotional excesses or authentic spirituality – both highlighting its status outside the norm.¹¹ Black congregations interested in flaunting their higher class status rejected “uncontrolled” styles of worship, creating religious communities more closely modeled on the respectability of white Protestants.

The possible nexuses of race and secularism vary regionally, and with the movements of people. To take one example: the Great Migration of African Americans to urban centers of the North in the first half of the twentieth century disrupted the relatively stable religious landscape of the rural South and opened the door for a plethora of religious diversity and innovation. In other words, when we reconsider classic secularization narratives – urbanization and industrialization lead to a decline in religiosity and differentiation of social spheres – from the

¹⁰ Thomas A. Tweed, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

perspective of racialized communities in America, those narratives are intriguingly inflected. African American religious communities in the North provided resources to welcome newcomers from the South, to orient them to their new homes – and to recruit them to new religious communities. From storefront churches to congregations composed largely of West Indian immigrants to the followers of Daddy Grace to the early black Muslims and black Israelites, rather than secularizing African American life the encounter with modernity seems to have broken the secular management of the religious that led white elites to tolerate sleepy Southern churches.¹²

If there ever was a qualitative change in American secularism, it happened in the 1960s and 1970s – contemporaneous with the qualitative change in American race relations. Before, secularism primarily entailed the management of religion: the embrace of the liberal Protestant consensus of elites and the marginalization of other religious communities. After, the discourse and practice of secularism shifted from management to exclusion. Religious beliefs were excluded from the public sphere: in academic political theory via John Rawls' 1971 *Theory of Justice*, in public activism by Madelyn Murray O'Hair's *American Atheists*, and in the muted, hollow religiosity of Richard Nixon (a Quaker). At long last, the Warren and Burger Courts made real the previously nominal wall of separation between church and state, and this wall image extended from church and state to church and society. Christianity itself was transforming,

¹² Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Eddie S. Glaude, "Babel in the North: Black Migration, Moral Community, and the Ethics of Racial Authenticity," in *A Companion to African American Studies*, eds. Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

with evangelicalism's move from margins to mainstream, accompanied by a focus on individual relationships with Jesus Christ rather than communal religious experience or social concern.

Contemporaneously, American racial liberalism was forced to transform as well. The Protestant ethos of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference met competition from the more youthful, more militant, more secular Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. As the 1960s advanced and as progress on race issues in the South was slow and in the North even slower, black power came to replace colorblind love as the rhetoric of choice among activists. Even though the Black Panthers' social service programs often took place in churches, black nationalists were increasingly suspicious of the power of religious communities to address racial injustice. This suspicion culminated in James Forman's interruption of the Sunday service at Riverside Church in New York City, reading a demand for \$500,000,000 in reparations from white churches and synagogues, to be administered by secular black organizations. While these demands were largely rejected, they led to some unexpected alliances, such as the Episcopal Church's funding of the Malcolm X Liberation University in North Carolina (much to the consternation of many lay Episcopalians in North Carolina).¹³

Dovetailing the rise of the black power movement was the development of black theology. Following the organization of a network of black church leaders that supported black power with advertisements in the *New York Times*, James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) proclaimed that African American religious thought affirmed blackness as godliness, and affirmed the struggle for black liberation as redemptive – a struggle that was not necessarily non-violent. Further, Cone proclaimed white

¹³ Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

churches to be pseudo-religious, to be dispensing a religious message that had no relationship to the gospel of Jesus Christ – a message that thus was essentially secular, or, as the secular is sometimes described in theological terms, satanic. What white churches proclaimed as theological was actually the interests of white Americans dressed in religious language. In other words, Cone inverts the common perception of black power: he held that secularism infected everything except the black power movement.

With the end of de jure segregation, combatting racial injustice no longer primarily meant opposing unjust laws. Racial liberalism began to mean diversity and inclusivity: in universities and corporations, and in electoral politics. As the 1970s progressed, the civil rights movement spawned movements for women’s liberation (*Ms. Magazine* was founded in 1971), gay liberation (marked by the Stonewall riots, 1969), the American Indian Movement (marked by the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz), and others. Elites had once responded to protest by offering benefits to African Americans. Now the elite response was an embrace of cultural diversity, affirming the value of difference in all its (legible) forms. Jodi Melamed has labeled this phase of American racial management “neoliberal multiculturalism” – neoliberal because it fits so well with the dominant economic regime of the age. Race, gender, and sexuality become identity groups to which one may or may not belong, like an alumni association or bowling league. To this mix we may add religion, reduced to an identity group, another color in the rainbow composing the American nation; another trait of the atomized subject; another niche market for corporate profit.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

How have these new techniques of managing religion and race affected religious communities themselves? Mainline liberal Protestantism, overwhelmingly white, continues to decline. Mega-churches synthesizing the best, or worst, of white liberal Protestantism, evangelicalism, and African American religion into a hi-tech, post-racial goulash have flourished. Such churches represent the careful choreography of religion and race within a sacred space, not just from the outside. At the same time, an anti-secularist discourse has flourished among evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics. Richard John Neuhaus, author of *The Naked Public Square* (1986) and editor of *First Things*, represented this response. Neuhaus moved from religiously inspired peace and civil rights activism, one form of anti-secularist agitation, to a conservative Catholic critique of secularism and multiculturalism, another form of anti-secularist agitation. In the 1980s and 1990s, secularism was named explicitly as a problem, associated with the loss of a moral compass, the loss of traditional values, and, implicitly, the loss of white cultural consensus. Although these anti-secularists came in many stripes, they all shared a passion for an imagined America, one in which the “Judeo-Christian” moral fabric went unquestioned. This anti-secularism was not limited to whites: Alan Keyes, Clarence Thomas, and T. D. Jakes represent a strand of black moralizing, anti-secularist conservatism that, at the same time, is critical of playing “identity politics” with blackness.

As black elites began to be educated in the same classrooms, work for the same organizations, and golf at the same courses as white elites, black political positions came to more closely mirror those of white liberals and white conservatives. The haunting, illegible cries of racial injustice expressed in a theological idiom were muted. The closest analogue to an anti-secularist strand in the discourse on race came from the class of black public intellectuals that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s: figures such as Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, and, most

recently, Melissa Harris-Perry. Each of these figures, perhaps not coincidentally, claims expertise on black religion. Yet because the images of these figures are over-determined by their media presence, now amplified through social media, this class of black public intellectuals seems less a space from which the multiculturalist consensus is critiqued than an adjunct to that consensus. Moreover, other racialized communities have largely refrained from employing a critique of racialization. Immigrant rights advocates may employ a language of hospitality and neighborliness, though often divorced from larger religious currents, while Islamophobia has become the banner under which activists decry the persecution of Muslim Americans.

This is the context in which Barack Obama rose to national prominence. Liberals were worried that conservatives had monopolized the use of religious language in American politics, and the “right wing fundamentalist” support that was seen to propel George W. Bush to the White House needed an antidote. Michael Lerner, with his *Tikkun*, and Jim Wallis, with his *Sojourners*, attempted to provide this liberal religious voice, but failed to gain broad traction. What, or rather who, was needed appeared on the stage of the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Barack Obama told his life story, woven around the themes of faith (both in God and in America) and hope (the “politics of hope” compared favorably with the “politics of cynicism”). Obama concluded that “God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation [is] a belief in things not seen; a belief that there are better days ahead.” Liberals had found their own alternative to dogmatic secularism, to a cultural and political wall of separation. They found it in a black man, for racial difference remained the site from which religious difference could speak, seemingly unmanaged.

But religious difference was not really unmanaged in Obama’s speech. It is even a stretch to say that there was anything theological about Obama’s speech. He did not mention Jesus, or

talk about sin, or commend love of the neighbor. He did not mention anything specifically Christian. He simply mentioned God, faith, and hope. In other words, even in this seemingly post-secular speech, the theological only appears in a carefully managed form, entirely legible to a secular audience. In contrast, the power of “right wing” critiques of secularism, and of the civil rights movement critique of secularism, was their illegibility from the perspective of the secular, thus implicitly calling into question the legitimacy of a secular framework. Obama’s carefully managed remarks on race in his speeches, like his remarks on religion, have drawn much acclaim. Nowhere in his 2004 speech does Obama mention his race, or speak of black Americans in the first person plural. He describes his father as “a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya.” This is part of his narrative of cultural diversity, and of America as a nation that embraces many peoples. The only remarks he makes in this speech about African Americans are in lists of the many problems of the many peoples of America. Yet, just as Obama’s speech was read as deeply religious, it was also read as deeply black. To embrace managed race and managed religion, instead of avoiding both race and religion, is as racial and religious as one is permitted to be in our current secularist, multiculturalist moment.

This background frames how Martin Luther King, Jr. is represented today, the context in which the King monument in Washington, D.C. was constructed. Race and religion are carefully controlled: precisely the opposite of King’s disruptive and transformative appeal to religion and race. This is the potential that scholarship on race and secularism in America has today: to be potential by refusing the naturalness of today’s racial and religious formations. Doing so is a threefold task: first, exploring the ways that religion and race are managed at particular places and times; second, exploring how the management of religion and race are entwined; third, exploring the ways that this management is refused. The chapters that follow conduct such

explorations, doing so both within and beyond the backbone of the traditional American historical narrative recited above. As such, the chapters are each critical: denaturalizing the obvious and extolling the illegible, and so challenging the hold that the powers of the present have on us, here, now.

But the chapters that follow do more. The exclusion or management of religion prompts us to remember the potency of that excluded or managed. Rather than mourn the extent of neoliberal hegemony, as contemporary “critical” scholarship has a habit of doing, remembering the religious – or the theological, as the unmanaged religious is sometimes called – points to traditions of imagining otherwise.¹⁵ Revealing the contingency of the present is not enough. Flagging that which is illegible in the terms of the present is not enough. What the recovery of the religious, beyond secularism, offers is a constellation of ideas, practices, and relationships currently illegible, but potent, potentially transformative. This lesson gleaned from studying one managed difference can be brought to others. When we turn from religion to race and read it as unmanaged, when we stare blankly at the illegible networks of ideas, practices, and relationships of racialized worlds, we recover something powerful, something potentially transformative. In short, the study of race and secularism does not end with the documentation of managed difference. It begins there, and from there strives to unveil worlds apart, worlds of possibility, worlds of justice.

There are three clusters of essays in this volume. The first orients the conversation by reflecting on the nexus of race and secularism through political theory and through the history of religions. George Shulman approaches secularism via the self-conception of the nation-state.

¹⁵ Cf. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).

Shulman shows how the conception of sovereignty relied on by the nation-state has not only theological roots, as demonstrated by Carl Schmitt and the discourse on political theology, but also racial roots. The state of exception, which Schmitt considers the foundation of sovereignty, is, in the American case, a state of racial terror. Both theological and racial roots of American sovereignty are often less than visible – potent but repressed. Shulman then identifies a strain of African American thought that resists this racial-religious sovereignty, what he terms the political thought of black insurgency. Josef Sorett examines how, even within black America, racial and religious categories are managed differentially across time, with flows of racial and religious meaning interrupted by incommensurable theoretical frameworks. Moreover, Sorett probes the reflexivity inherent in the study of secularism, as theories of secularism change along with the practice of secularism – along with theories of race. Tracking these conceptual movements at the site of African American religious historiography, Sorett pushes theorists of secularism to interrogate their own historical – and racial – presuppositions.

The second cluster of essays examines three case studies in light of the theoretical questions raised by Shulman and Sorett, and in light of the scholarly context described in the pages above. These chapters are each readings in the broad sense: close examinations of a text, of media representations, and of religious practice. They demonstrate the critical potential of reading the ostensibly secular with attention to repressed religion, and of reading the explicitly religious with attention to how that religion is managed by the secular. They proceed historically, from slavery to the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr., to the contemporary world of Black Muslims in Philadelphia. In telling the story of Henry “Box” Brown, a slave who literally mailed himself to freedom, Edward Blum recovers a historical actor who challenges our assumptions about nineteenth century secularism. Brown challenges those assumptions, Blum argues, because

of his experience as racialized subject. Offering both historical context and close reading of Brown's account of his miraculous escape, Blum shows how the heavily policed categories of superstition, religion, and the supernatural are articulated differently, and subversively, by the escaped slave. Erica Edwards tracks the representation of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s image in popular culture since his death. Edwards is particularly attentive to the way that media manage identity in our neoliberal era. She tracks how television shows portrayed the unifying, and eventually hollow, figure of King, demonstrating how media function as contemporary technologies of governance to manage and mute dissent. Dissent in this case names racial and religious difference illegible in our secular, multicultural era. Joel Blecher and Joshua Dubler's chapter examines Salafism in Philadelphia, a movement that embraces the politics of quietism, discouraging race-based mobilization and direct confrontation with the state. Blecher and Dubler argue that the Philadelphia Salafis subtly but powerfully challenge regnant secularism through their expansive religious-ethical commitments. Moreover, these black Muslims explicitly accuse ostensibly religiously-based activists promoting racial justice of buying into the cultural norms of our secular age.

The third and final cluster of chapters inflects the theoretical and historical narratives explored in the previous chapters by approaching the same group of issues from novel perspectives. Cooper Harris posits that invisibility, a key concept, or technology, for American racialization, has a long religious genealogy. Developing this claim in dialogue with the seminal literary exploration of racial invisibility, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Harris unveils deep connections between the means through which race and religion are embodied. Tracking Ellison's own varied intellectual resources and expanding to the cultural echoes of invisibility today, including drone strikes, Harris ponders what it might mean to understand race as an

unseen but hegemonic theology, making visible and concealing. William Hart's chapter examines the fetish, the frenzy, and voodoo as three sites of racialized resistance to secularism – and as three sites of secularist cooptation of race. The story he tells is one of the black Atlantic, tracking these three religious sites in three geographical locales: West Africa, Haiti, and the US South. This chapter thus pushes the volume to consider the American experience in transnational context, and through this context we can see America anew, see both how it is exceptional and unexceptional. Moreover, it inserts colonialism into the race and secularism knot, suggesting that readings “in America” are incomplete without attention to America's own post-colonial status. Willie James Jennings broadens Hart's queries even further. He views the pressing problematic for examinations of race and secularism in America not simply as colonialism but as settler colonialism, and distinctive species of colonialism that has recently attracted significant scholarly attention. Settler colonialism does not just manage economic resources but requires the management of bodies and spaces, performed almost always by theological discourse. In this context, viewing not only the United States but all of the Americas as subject to settler colonialism, Jennings asks what secular space might mean. Probing colonial imaginings of the American landscape, Jennings finds a religious organization of space which seemingly secondarily, but perhaps primarily, serves to also organize race. In other words, Jennings examines the ways in which the management of race and religion both operate through geography, and he shows that geography binds together racial and religious regimes. An ostensibly secular space is in fact a space of whiteness, a space for whites.

The conclusion, by co-editor Jonathon Kahn, ponders the implications of the account of race and secularism that has developed over the preceding chapters for religion itself. If secularism is the exclusion or management of religion, and if secularism and racialization are

entwined, how might religious communities vision otherwise: on their own terms, provocatively, and justly? To formulate a response, Kahn takes James Baldwin as a guide. It is by acknowledging impurity and imperfection, yet continuing to cultivate the theological imagination, that the post-secular can become something more productive than the always already compromised post-racial.

Tracy Fessenden's Afterword synthesizes themes that emerged in the chapters of the book while locating them in a broader framework of intersectional analysis. If thinking race and secularism together attune us to pressing questions of justice, how might this nexus be complicated when gender and sexuality are added to the mix? Are they similarly managed by contemporary neoliberalism, and is this management similarly made possible by the repression of religion? Furthermore, how does America's location as superpower, as empire, make the concerns raised by this volume all the more pressing?