

terms today) Jew who followed all of the biblical commandments and would have been horrified at being called a supporter of Reform Judaism.

To speak of “Otherness” and “the Other” in this period is to use a term that has no meaning in the mid-nineteenth century; to call these Jews “hopelessly German” (and to praise American Jews for “freeing themselves from the ghetto mentality”) is to reveal one’s prejudices; to describe these Jews as “learning the mechanical trades” is to ignore the many pages about them as peddlers and merchants; to describe some of the discussions of this period as “anticipat[ing] modern debates on political correctness” is to introduce anachronism; and to claim that “by the 1870s, Jews found themselves locked out of the social clubs that had previously accepted their membership” is to focus on a miniscule slice of American Jewry, as “most” did not belong to a social club and “most” (best we can tell without surveys) of those who did joined a Jewish club (4, 33, 7, 14, 81, 4, 27, 101).

A most confusing statement is that “the Civil War years ... produc[ed] an antisemitism that appeared suddenly with the stresses of a bloody war and disappeared thereafter” (44). Much attention is given to the anti-Semitism of the post-Civil War period (maybe too much, as it seems to have been largely against the richest Jews), so it certainly did not “disappear.” Equally baffling is the use of the word “most,” as in “most American Jews” (6). How can we possibly know what “most” American Jews in 1850 or 1880 did?

Ambivalent Miracles: Evangelicals and the Politics of Racial Healing.
 By Nancy D. Wadsworth. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014. viii+ 311pp. \$39.50 Cloth, \$39.50 Ebook

doi:10.1017/S1755048315000334

Jerry Z. Park
Baylor University

When we meet people from a background different from ours, to what extent does that encounter become political? To what extent can we avoid political conversation in community? These are the overarching

questions asked in the latest work on religion and race relations by political scientist Nancy Wadsworth. In the network of American Christian churches, the theme of “racial reconciliation” has garnered considerable interest since the 1990s and continues to this day. *Ambivalent Miracles* is a multi-method examination of the evangelical Protestant subculture that draws political engagement implications not yet explored in the study of religion and race relations.

Wadsworth’s contention is that white evangelical awareness of racial inequality and the means to overcome it took decades to reach and remains potent within a small but growing sub-community of evangelicalism. Using content analysis of the leading evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*, Wadsworth connects the near-total absence of any mention of racial injustice during the 1970s and 1980s to the lack of (or opposition to) political involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The picture grows more interesting in the 1990s, when evangelicals witnessed greater political successes while the Promise Keepers movement invoked the cultural strategy of racial reconciliation, a call to dialogue between white and non-white Christians over matters of cultural difference, to address the problem of racism in American society. Notably, this strategy avoids political intervention and addresses inequality through dialogue in relationships.

It is this tendency toward solving social problems through relationships that becomes a crucial observation made in a sociological study of white evangelical attitudes about race in 2000. In a novel turn, Wadsworth contextualizes Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith’s *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* as it affected the evangelical community. While scholarship on religion and race relations has dwelt on the attitudinal effects identified by Emerson and Smith, Wadsworth takes a different tactic by invoking the analytical concept of “custom” as articulated by Paul Lichterman to add greater depth to the dynamics (and limits) of evangelical culture. Analyses of custom allow readers into the day-to-day experience of evangelicals that affected the way they acted upon their beliefs. Customs included a deliberate avoidance of any hint of politicized action in solving racial inequality via etiquette, unspoken rules about the boundaries of dialogue allowed in resolving racial tension between groups. Further, Evangelical custom dictates the necessity of the miraculous in bringing about social change. Because they believe in God, and God enters into human history in unexpected (i.e., non-politically-invoked) moments, evangelical ways of talking about and actively resolving racial inequality eschew political

engagement. Thus, their solutions revolve around strategies that have minimal political impact which, unbeknown to evangelicals, serves merely to replicate the very problem they hope to solve. This behavioral component is no less important than the discourse that helped shape it.

Since non-political engagement is part of evangelical custom, the strategy to build multi-racial churches is both apropos and tellingly limited. But in the last empirical chapter, Wadsworth draws us into her three-year visit with a Colorado multi-racial church. There she shows us that political engagement is easily avoided in the formation of these communities. However, if the group is to thrive and retain its members of different racial backgrounds, these congregations cannot help but eventually require alternative ways of thinking about social problems that have led church members to see issues in different perspectives. For the members of this church, it meant not only experiencing conflict in dialogue, but collective efforts to support minorities facing racialized inequities including deportation and poor-quality education.

One must appreciate the sheer amount of effort that went into assembling the evidence for *Ambivalent Miracles*: content analyses of 40 years of a periodical, a multi-year ethnography of a local congregation including a short survey, and historical study that traces both the rhetoric and customs that shape evangelical approaches to social issues. The theoretical contributions would seem like a minor tweaking of Emerson and Smith's earlier work were it not for the extensive empirical work involved here. Further, Wadsworth deftly articulates evangelical discourse to allow for the growing presence of non-Black minority voices in this subculture. Not surprisingly, Asian and Latino evangelicals more often resemble their white counterparts on many matters of social inequality.

Ambivalent Miracles raises important follow-up questions: are other religious communities, besides African-American Protestant churches, any better at linking political action to their scripts? Apart from religious communities, what other kinds of communities have effectively impacted social problems whether local or national? Since Evangelical Protestantism is only a fraction of American Protestantism, and segregation (among other race-related social problems) remains to this day, what else might explain the persistence of structural inequity that extends beyond the evangelical boundaries that clearly limit their awareness and action?

Ambivalent Miracles joins the growing library of works that address various facets of race relations within American Christianity. It is suitable for various classes and seminars in the politics and sociology of race, the

sociology of religion, religious and ethnic studies. The writing is engaging; this book is an important work that extends the research on religion and race relations.

***Extremism in America*. Edited by George Michael. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014. 348 pp. \$74.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048315000358

Robert W. T. Martin
Hamilton College

In an era of increasing “lone wolf” terrorism, it is important to be reminded of the larger world of radicalized movements from which it often, but not always, emerges. *Extremism in America*, edited by George Michael, takes up this timely issue with a survey of various extremist movements. Such groups are of growing interest to students and scholars, and readers of this journal will note that over half of the chapters focus on religious movements, or those with a heavy theological influence. In general, each chapter focuses on a particular group (the New Black Panther Party, for example), and then provides a wealth of historical background, especially well-suited to those new to the field, such as beginning or intermediate-level students. All of this suggests the volume could be useful in appropriate college classrooms, or for the scholar moving into this diverse field.

The book, however, does suffer from a number of shortcomings, including many of the usual problems found in edited collections: uneven and often unconnected chapters, odd inclusions, and even more surprising exclusions (the KKK, for instance, is barely discussed). Connecting the various chapters — each submitted by a different expert — and perhaps filling in some gaps are usually the tasks of the editor, but the introduction and even the conclusion here do little of this synthetic work. And since Christopher Hewitt’s “Historical Overview” chapter is (to this reader’s mind, inexplicably) left until the end, students will likely have trouble tying together the various movements described in the book. What’s more, while the book is meant to put the extremist groups “in context”