

'challenge practices that are neither just nor fair' (p. 124) and follow four rubrics: work hard to achieve ones highest goals (pp. 126f). Keep the faith as well as victims of the lynching culture did (pp. 129f). (James Cone made the point clearly when he wrote that the cross 'points in the direction of hope, the confidence that there is a dimension to life beyond the reach of the oppressor': *The cross and the lynching tree*, Maryknoll, NY 2011, 162.) Sims wants her readers, too, to be alert to white supremacy in all its guises (pp. 132f), and, finally, to learn to forgive (p. 137).

One of the most important contributions of her study is to reveal once again just how important to black (and by implication to all) Christians is an existential understanding of the crucifixion. The 'lynching tree' and the cross seem essentially conflated among those who were touched and affected by lynching and oppressed by the culture of white supremacy. Christian blacks understood lynching as crucifixion and, since being enslaved, had sung 'Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?' It was a question about the present as well as the past. If they were there, Christ was here – now. True, evil had yet to be overcome; captives still waited to be freed. Christ still had to come again and his crucifixion with them meant that he would; that is, they would prevail at last through him. But the memory of lynching among far more black people than whites want to think about is still a psychological stigmata. An elderly Christian whom Sims interviewed remembered that as an eleven-year-old boy, a group of white men had put a noose round his neck and 'led me away to be crucified'. He was saved by a local landowner, but the terror lived on. He felt it still through the events that led to the crusade to ensure that Black Lives Matter (p. 3). The lynching tree, writes Cone, 'is the window that best reveals the religious meaning of the cross in our land' (*The cross*, 166). The people whom Sims interviewed would agree.

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Organised secularism in the United States. New directions in research. Edited by Ryan T.

Cragun, Christel Manning and Lori L. Fazzino. (Religion and its Others, 6.)

Pp. viii + 321 incl. 21 tables. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2017. €99.95. 978

3 11 045742 1; 2330 6262

JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046919000757

The product of a conference on nonreligion and secularity held at Pitzer College in 2014, this collection of fourteen essays focuses on the institutional structures and community-building activities of contemporary secularists, humanists and atheists in the United States. Most of the pieces document the growing visibility of nonbelievers in American culture over the last two decades; they offer new empirical data on the mission of various secular organisations such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association; they assess the tensions and sometimes rancorous divisions within the contemporary secular movement; and they attend closely to emergent practices of secularist identity formation through online networks or through new congregational ventures such as the Sunday Assembly. Much of the best work on the history of unbelief, atheism and secularity is richly dialogic with the history of Christianity,

but that is not a conversation foregrounded in these pages. With its primary focus on organised secularism as a contemporary social movement, the volume offers only modest material for historians. Michael Rectenwald reaches back to George Jacob Holyoake's initial codification of 'secularism' in the 1850s: namely, the promotion of a this-worldly moral programme free of other-worldly preoccupations. As Rectenwald suggests, the fractures within nineteenth-century British free thought, epitomised in the divide between Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh, portended enduring tensions within the secularist movement on both sides of the Atlantic. Also, Charles Louis Richter offers an insightful examination of how atheism has been figured as a religion in its own right in American musings on cults as well as in American jurisprudence from the 1920s through the 1980s. The threat of 'secular humanism' as a surrogate creed in the public schools was one of the primary motivators of the New Christian Right. Beyond the Rectenwald and Richter essays, the volume also contains some helpful contributions to thinking about the history that immediately precedes the rise of the 'New Atheism' of the last two decades. That proximate history includes Madalyn Murray O'Hair's *American Atheists* and Paul Kurtz's Council for Secular Humanism. Still, the collection's primary offerings remain in the domain of the sociology of contemporary secularism and irreligion, and it is especially worth consulting for those interested in that area of inquiry.

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