

issues. To this the leaders of the discipline answered that their first task was to achieve internal consensus—or, in Kuhnian language that they came to favor, a paradigm—and afterward they would bring their conclusions to the public. Could they, in the interim, speak only to one another? Postwar government support, with its focus on the advance of disciplines, allowed much more emphasis on communication among insiders than had been possible in the 1930s, when private foundations organized social research to solve pressing problems. Haney suggests, though without exploring this in detail, that postwar sociological writing was not directed exclusively to disciplinary colleagues, but often to other experts, especially in government agencies. The most compelling theme in this interesting book is how sociologists in the early postwar period found new reasons to be cynical about democracy. They bypassed the general public to speak in venues where, they hoped, social rationality might be possible.

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JUDITH WEISENFELD. *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929–1949*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2007. Pp. xiii, 341. \$24.95.

Over the past decade, scholars have increasingly examined the intersection of religion and film. Most have concerned themselves with how religious experience is represented in the cinema. Others have examined grand themes in ostensibly secular movies (like *The Matrix* [1999] and *Star Wars* [1977]) as religious motifs. A few, like John Lyden's *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (2003), have even examined movie-going (film consumption) itself as religious experience.

In this theoretically rich volume, Judith Weisenfeld achieves a provocative study of religion and film by pursuing a somewhat different concern with the location of religion in American popular culture. While most studies of African American and U.S. religious history assume the site of religion to be either churches or religious communities narrowly defined, Weisenfeld subtly yet powerfully advances an altogether different approach by examining the technological domain of the film industry and performance as sites where religion is made. The author is ultimately concerned with how movies, as a "technology of race," derive their ability to produce religion from the "power and the privileged gaze of the camera to invest skin color with moral meaning" (p. 4). In this way, American film has functioned as a technological means of making religion.

This book demonstrates how three decades of cinema manufactured religious experience in order to represent religion as a racial characteristic of blacks (e.g., African Americans as a morally pedantic or naïve race) and to portray America proper as a normatively white Christian nation. Readers will be struck, however, by the complexity that defines the volume's every move.

Weisenfeld shows how even the most controversial movies, steeped in anti-black stereotypes, were lauded by various black and white reviewers for giving visibility to African Americans and for portraying black religion as sufficiently universal to embody a broadly relevant portrayal of human aspiration, passion, and struggle. Rather than merely critiquing the over-determined representations of racial subjectivity, Weisenfeld keenly theorizes the production and reception of race movies in order to explain why black and white audiences voraciously consumed religion through the silver screen and how they came to be so deeply moved and persuaded by these cinematic encounters. The volume also captures the nuances that differentiated Hollywood from independent filmmakers; the latter were somewhat more willing to represent black identity in relatively progressive terms.

The book's first two chapters examine *Hallelujah* (1929) and *Green Pastures* (1936) to explain how film producers, inspired by the success of Broadway's black-audience or black-cast plays like Nan Bagby Stephens's *Roseanne* (1923) and Ridgley Torrence's *Simon the Cyrenian* (1917), shifted their focus to films that dramatized black religion. In chapters three and four, the author further maps the cultural history of these movies when she analyzes the efforts of filmmakers like the African American Spencer Williams to reconcile the modernity of urban life with the quaint, regressive ethos (read as southern, Protestant, and rural) of "traditional" black religion. At stake was the moral meaning that inhered around "entertainment culture," a worldliness that staunchly challenged institutional black religion as the solely legitimate domain of black entertainment. Especially vexing was the fact that these films flagrantly portrayed the "fast life" of drinking, dancing, gambling, and sexual freewheeling, simultaneously representing the danger of modern living and glorifying the pizzazz and excitement of the city. The final two chapters consider representations of black religion during World War II (Weisenfeld argues that the most "universal" portrayal of black religion, surprisingly, was produced by the U.S. military to propagandize black participation in the war effort) and the moralistic representation of racial boundaries and racial passing. With finesse and nuance, the author unravels the complex, ironic uses of liberal racial ideology at work in films like Alfred L. Werker's *Lost Boundaries* (1949), which refused to cast blacks as interracial black characters due to the overlapping influences of censorship, angst over policing boundaries of race, and the moral stakes of representing truth and honor.

The volume is also attentive to historically contextual themes like southern migration to the urban north, the rise of film censorship, and consternation over federal segregation of the military, all the while keeping a steady eye on the primary subject at hand. The extensive selection of photographs depicting pivotal scenes and broadsides that promoted the movies is outstanding, enabling the reader to experience the visual cues and graphical depictions of race and religion integral to

this history of visual media. The book's underlying aim of resituating the locus of religious experience, moreover, holds great import for future studies of American religious history. The intriguing narrative will enrich undergraduate courses across fields of study in the humanities, and the volume's sophisticated style of mapping race and religion in popular culture will challenge and rarify graduate seminars while advancing future scholarship on the subject.

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RONALD SMELSER and EDWARD J. DAVIES II. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2008. Pp. xii, 327. Cloth \$75.00, paper \$21.99.

Over the last half century, Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies II argue, many Americans have embraced a mythical version of the Nazi-Soviet conflict in the East, a vision in which the Wehrmacht, and even the Waffen SS, are understood as essentially noble and apolitical institutions that fought a "clean" war against the USSR and were led by selfless military geniuses. The authors are understandably disturbed by the popularity of these accounts of the Eastern Front, both because they are wildly inaccurate and because they whitewash German war crimes in which the military and its leadership were active participants.

After the war, the Western Allies initially tried to hold the German military accountable for many of Nazi Germany's war crimes. But this policy changed with the emerging Cold War. The former Wehrmacht officers had impeccable anticommunist credentials and a personal knowledge of the Soviet army at war. U.S. authorities asked Franz Halder, former leader of the German General Staff, to assemble a group of Wehrmacht officers to write accounts of the war in the East. Known informally as the "Halder Group," these officers managed to rehabilitate their reputations while building a decades-long place for themselves in American and West German military planning.

Halder also published pamphlets that blamed the German failures and crimes in the East entirely on Adolf Hitler himself, thus exculpating the Wehrmacht. Other German military memoirists presented similar portraits of their prowess and innocence. A number of German popular histories and novels lauded the bravery of the German military in the East. This material soon found its way in translation to the United States, where it gained a following among both military professionals and amateur military history buffs.

In the United States, popular historians, whom Smelser and Davies label "the gurus," helped spread the mythic view of the Eastern Front through a series of books and websites that even celebrated the Waffen SS. The gurus were, in turn, followed by people Smelser and Davies call "romancers," war gamers and historical re-enactors who enjoy taking on German military roles. Their views of the war in the East have received wider

circulation through such institutions as the Military Book Club and the History Channel.

The authors present a discomfiting portrait of American views of the Eastern Front. They are to be commended for exploring sources such as websites and war games that, while not usually studied by historians, are places where Americans encounter and enact World War II memory. But the authors' analysis of their material is not entirely convincing. Smelser and Davies argue that the purpose of the myth of the Eastern Front was "to wipe out the memory of the Soviet Union as our ally during World War II, as well as to integrate our former enemies, the Germans, into the defensive structure of the West, and in doing so revalidate ourselves historically" (p. 81). This explanation works very well for the U.S. military's embrace of the Halder Group. However, the imperatives of geopolitics cannot so easily explain the attraction of the myth of the Eastern Front to a broader U.S. public, especially since the end of the Cold War.

At the heart of their analysis, Davies and Smelser present an extended comparison between neo-Confederate views of the Civil War and mythic views of the Eastern Front (pp. 80–89). This is an excellent analogy. But the authors present only similarities between the two cases. As with any historical analogy, the best comparison would necessarily involve tracking differences as well, two of which, in particular, Davies and Smelser underplay. First, neo-Confederate views of the Civil War usually argue for the essential justice of the Confederate cause as a whole. In contrast, most (though not all) apologists for the behavior of the German military in the East try to distinguish between the ills of Nazism and Hitler himself on the one hand, and the supposedly "clean" efforts of the German military on the other. The second major difference between the two Lost Causes is that one, the Civil War, directly involved the United States. Indeed, neo-Confederate myths helped underwrite the post-Civil War return of white supremacy in the South. For most Americans, the myth of the Eastern Front can serve no such clear instrumental function. A richer explanation of the American embrace of Eastern Front mythology would involve considering it in a broader cultural-historical context than this book provides, including, for example, U.S. views of World War II, Germany, and military conflict in general.

None of this, however, should take away from the book's accomplishment. In carefully tracing the ways in which Americans have misunderstood the war in the East, Smelser and Davies have made a significant addition to the growing literature on the public memory of World War II.

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