

race-and-religion-in-what-s-now-the-united-states

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SPEAKERS

Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Megan Goodwin, Krusty the Clown, Simpsons, @alexengelberg @rynnstar, Detox



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101 a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. This season our work is made possible in part through a generous grant from the New England Humanities Consortium and with a ad-additional support from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We are grateful to live, teach, and record on the ancestral and unseeded lands of the abenaki, wabanaki and Aqua Cisco peoples.



Megan Goodwin 00:40

What's up nerds?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:42

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst! A scholar of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and history-- and one curlier half of our killjoy duo.



Megan Goodwin 00:53

You do you have fantastic curls! Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, gender-- and the other ginger half of our killjoy duo. All right, nerds. Have we got some joy to kill today! Gonna do some thinking about race and religion and why you aren't really understanding religion if you're not also thinking about race.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:14

This is above all, and frankly, as our podcast title suggests, an introduction to these topics. We're building- we hope- on stuff we've said before on the pod while focusing in on and saying some new stuff about the intersection of race and religion. But- theory for theory's sake is nonsense talk. So we're gonna split up the next two episodes vis-a-vis case studies. Today, we're thinking about the US race and religion (mostly with Megan at the helm). And next episode we're gonna think about race, religion and Islam internationally- mostly with me taking charge- because this is what we do and sharing the load is good praxis.



Megan Goodwin 01:55

Yeah it is.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:56

Hmm. What's on tap? We've got ales, pilsners, stouts. And oh, yeah, a lesson plan!



Megan Goodwin 02:07

Beer jokes- nice. Gonna start big, nerds! Here's the thesis. We built America out of religion and race, and specifically through an economy of white Christian supremacy. American's understanding of race is tied directly to religion and vice versa, whether y'all know it or not- and- not exaggerating. Don't worry, we are going to walk you through it. And in fact, I am going to borrow a trick from Ilyse and give you a SHOCK AND AWE timeline of race and American religion.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:35

I'm so flattered that my black humor joke about overwhelming students with information to prove the theory holds has caught on: SHOCK AND AWE ALL THE NERDS MEGAN!



Megan Goodwin 02:48

Got it. But to get it started, let's just say that Americans' understanding and- I should be more specific, people who live in what is now the United States'- understanding of religion has never been separate from race. And, when most Americans say "religion" without a modifier what they mean is white mainstream Christianity. This is, as our muse David Schitt would say, incorrect.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:11

Incorrect. Let's dive in. Keeping It 101, ON TODAY: the segment where we do some professor work. Wait, alright, so Megan, I know we already said that even if you're done with religion, religion isn't done with you. And I thought that was about hospitals, and calendars, and all sorts of other fun legalese. But WTF? What do you mean that race is also about religion?



Megan Goodwin 03:41

It is though! We- okay so, remember when we talked about social construction?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:46

Yeah, I do. You said that social constructs are ideas that we make up, place value in- monitor, police, teach each other. But, that doesn't mean that it doesn't matter, or that it's fake, because social constructs (like race and gender) have real world consequences, big and small. That a short enough summary?



Megan Goodwin 04:06

That was great. Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:08

So, let me guess, is this the bit where you remind us what race is and tell us what that has to do with religion?



Megan Goodwin 04:15

Also, yeah, mystery is gone. You know me too well. All right. So when we're talking about

race, we are talking about a social construct. We specifically have taught ourselves that skin tones, behaviors, languages and ways of speaking, foodways, attitudes, geographies, demeanors, all of these thousands of things that make up thousands of different kinds of people can be distilled into a single, essential identity. We learn how to "do" and understand race from culture. Race also functions as a way of maintaining boundaries of difference in social control. And at the same time, race inspires radical resistance, creativity and new ways of understanding and being in the world. Religion plays a key role in the construction of race in what's now the United States and by "plays a key role," I mean: "had to figure out how to keep enslaving black folks and trying to wipe out native folks after forcibly converting a bunch of them." So I know history and shock-and-awes (or, shocks-and-awe? Is it like attorneys general? I don't know.) Anyway, I know this is usually your thing. But I'm going to try my hand at a fast and furious timeline of race and US religion today. So buckle up nerds.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:22

Again, you can have my black humor trademark, and you may do all the history I have begged for over the years, because... [imitating Vin Diesel] it's all about family.



Megan Goodwin 05:32

I love you so much. Yes, good! All right, here goes my-my shock and awe. So several hundred years ago, a bunch of Christian European dudes (Brits, Spanish, French, Dutch all of whom we now think of as white) founded what's now the United States by showing up in the "New"- (scare quotes, bleugh disgusting) "New World," murdering a bunch of native folks and laying claim to the land. Then, many other Christian Europeans stole a bunch of black Africans from their homes, forcibly transported them to what's now North America, and violently enslaved them and their children. A significant fraction of these folks, by the way, were Muslim. So there have been Muslims in what is now the United States since before there was a United States.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:19

Yes, important.



Megan Goodwin 06:20

And we'll come back to that one, mm. Originally, white Christian Europeans justified genocide against native people and enslaving black people because black and Native

people were not Christian. They were "strangers," they were "heathens." But then white Christian Europeans forcibly converted more and more native and black folks to Christianity. So, Christianity couldn't be the reason it was okay to kill native folks (and or force them off their land) and Christianity couldn't be the reason it was okay to forcibly enslave black people and their children. So this literally, is when we see the concept of race emerge in what's now the United States. "Scientific" (again, here are scare quotes, nerds) "scientific" arguments start emerging that black and native peoples are essentially "biologically different." And they just so happened to be different in a way that makes them essentially inferior to Christian Europeans. This is the moment- it's a series of moments, really- where whiteness becomes an identity, where whiteness becomes not only the "norm," (more scare quotes) but also privileged as essentially superior to all other races, which in turn gets used to justify more white Christian European imperialism and violence.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:31

Yeah...yeah. But, before we get moving, I actually would like to nudge us NOT to scare quote scientific. This is what science was doing then. This race theory and racist theory was the hypothesis, the evidence, the end goal, this was real science. This was modern science. This IS modern science. And this very real science still shows up in other real science, namely, medical science.



Megan Goodwin 08:01

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:01

So, I guess this is one of those places. Megan, I want to say, I totally agree with you. And it's gross. And it's shameful. But this wasn't just fake science. And this wasn't, um, people just being mean and bad. This was the Truth, capital T, backed up with evidence and facts, and eventually, labs, and definitely every Ivy League and land-grant university was doing this kind of science. So- so yeah, I think it's important that we name this as facts and within whole systems: social, scientific, legal, cultural, because it helps us see how oppressive all this was, and is, and how formal and tangible race was and is.



Megan Goodwin 08:47

Yeah, yeah. That's really helpful. Thank you. So I think what I want to scare quotes is my

assumption that science is "objective", right? That it is not shaped by culture. Because you're right, science (no scare quotes) was absolutely doing this work. And it wasn't like, wink, wink, nudge, nudge, "we're using this to justify imperialism!" This was the production of knowledge that was available at the time (this is still largely the production of knowledge that is available) and [science] thinks of itself as objective, even as we know that it is socially constructed. So yes, thank you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:23

And it's a whole other day, and I don't want to- I don't want to interrupt our flow. But I do want to say that even if we recognize now that what science was doing then is racist, science, like lots of academic disciplines, is based on cumulative knowledge. So the things we know now, were often likely based in- in experiments, lab situations, um, and systems that were inherently built on racial terror. And we could talk all about like the field of Obstetrics essentially butchering black women, but I want to just make sure that we're hearing that all those places where we know stuff from comes from- from real scientific inquiry.



Megan Goodwin 10:03

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:09

So, okay, anyway, divergence done.



Megan Goodwin 10:13

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:14

And as we'll talk about next week, there are global iterations of all of these systems. But since we're talking about the US today, let's call this what it is. Cuz I know a little bit about history. This- this, all of this that you've talked about so far is the USA before the USA IS the USA. This is before the Declaration of Independence, (penned by a bunch of slavers) before the Revolutionary War, before the Constitution, (also penned by a bunch of slavers).



Megan Goodwin 10:43

Yup.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:43

The thing that those white men dressed as natives wanted to earn when they dumped all that tea into Boston Harbor? That new nation state they wanted to build? Based on these principles of racialized religious superiority. And sure, freedom! But not for everybody. So like we've said before, and as Sylvester Johnson so clearly puts it, the freedom of these folks relied on the unfreedom of others. So how those founders decided who should be free and who shouldn't, was unequivocally bound to "correct religion" and "correct race." So, yeah, even though as you've taught me contemporary white supremacy isn't just about religion, Americans' understanding of race is directly tied to religion (and specifically to white European Christians violently oppressing and exploiting black and native peoples).



Megan Goodwin 11:30

Yeah. Yeah. Gene Denby from NPR's "Code Switch" says white supremacy is embedded in the source code of our nation. And I think about that a lot. Race and religion and US history hold each other's horrible hands.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:44

Okay, so you promised us a timeline. So let's see, if I'm thinking about this correctly, America starts the whole thing: our project of colonization, and then the US as a country starts by privileging both whiteness and Christianity and doing unthinkable violence to folks they decided were either not-white or not-Christian or both. Then what happens? Shock and awe me with some more history, Megan!



Megan Goodwin 12:07

Yes, I shall shock you, shock you, shock you with that deviant behavior. Uh, so America basically creates whiteness out of a need to enslave and do violence to black and native folks. So we see more violence next. More genocide next. Lots of Christians who have recently decided that they're white, arguing that Jesus would have wanted them to own slaves, and later that Jesus would have been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, you know, that sort of thing. But also, at this moment on the timeline we see amazing pockets of resilience and resistance and creativity, biblical arguments against slavery made by black

and white Christians alike, religiously inspired revolts against slave owners by folks like Nat Turner, insistence by people like Zitkala-Sa that native traditions are valid and important and deserve to survive alongside Christianity. We also see surges of religious innovation in the 18th and 19th centuries, so called Great Awakenings, new religious movements, some that tried to live into racial equality, (like the Shakers) and some that used science to argue for white supremacy like the (Church of Christ, Scientist). Early Mormonism is actually really interesting (I think Mormonism is fascinating across the board). But early Mor-Mormonism is really interesting example here, because you get a new religious movement that is explicitly anti-black and anti-native, that also gets racialized as not-white. Critics of early Mormonism called LDS [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or Mormon Church] "barbaric" (yet more scare quotes) because early Mormon theology like some Islamic traditions, permitted polygyny (or the marriage of one man to multiple women). There are some really interesting- and by interesting, I mean racist as fuck- illustrations and anti-Mormon literature, where you see these super white folks depicted in orientalized, racialized ways that invoke stereotypes about Muslims and the mystic east. Like truly, truly no human has ever been whiter than Joseph Smith. Why is he being drawn as like, swarthy and be-turbaned, whilst lurking in a stately pleasure dome?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:03

I mean, I think the answer you want is just Orientalism.



Megan Goodwin 14:06

Yeah.



Detox 14:06

It's our secret word of the day!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:09

Which is in super short order, uh, nerds, the idea that the so called Orient or East is the bizarro world Occident or West. So everything that the West is, the East isn't, and vice versa. We'll do more of this next week. But it's a big smoothie of stereotypes about race and religion and region and gender and sexuality. And oh look, it's intersectionality again.



Megan Goodwin 14:29

It's a disgusting smoothing and I don't want it, I don't want it. But it is- it's always intersectionality. And as always, race and American religion get tied up in things like imperialism and capitalism. American understandings of "the east" include things like "eastern religions," (more scare quotes) Buddhism and Shinto especially, as Chinese and Japanese workers immigrate to the United States to do low wage and often quite dangerous labor. But, while American corporations were happy (are happy) to exploit Asian immigrant labor, they were less happy about Asian immigrants becoming American. So we see two major pieces of racist immigration legislation passed in 1890. And then again in 1924, that restricts Chinese- and then Asian immigration more broadly- into the US. This means not just fewer Buddhists and Shinto practitioners coming into the US as well, but also a half-century of almost no Muslim immigration to the US. Hey, Ilyse! Why would limiting immigration from Asia affect Muslim immigration to the US?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:29

Well, because most Muslims in the world live in what the State Department classifies as Asia.



Megan Goodwin 15:35

Huh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:37

Current estimates are that roughly two thirds of all Muslims live in Asia. And the gag during the British Empire was that whoever was emperor was ruling the largest collection of Muslims the world had ever seen in one, uh, under one throne. So, again, let's stick to the US we can do this racialization of religion globally next time. I don't want to get us off track.



Megan Goodwin 15:57

Okay, okay, you got it. So all right, uh, racist immigration laws passed to keep specifically Chinese and Japanese immigrants from coming to the US also meant accidentally(?) (question mark) limiting Muslim immigrants to the US. But while they're very few Muslim immigrants to the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we have black Americans in the early 20th century, reimagining Islam and religion broadly in ways that rewrote history as outside or beyond slavery. So we're thinking about groups like the Moorish Science

Temple, Nation of Islam, groups that celebrated blackness as sacred, as a connection to the divine. Outside those movements, though, white Americans talked about the Moorish Science Temple and Nation of Islam as cults (and you know how I feel about that word, and this is a lot of why). So they get treated- these groups get treated as dangerous threats to the country. So much so, that the FBI conducted extensive, intrusive surveillance of these groups (Again, remember the cults episode when we told you "cult" gets used to discourage and punish religioracial difference? Yeah, it's, it's like that.). So then, we get the 1965 Immigration Act, which rescinds quotas on Asian immigration, leads to an influx of "eastern religions" like Hinduism, which in turn leads to a bunch more eastern influences: new religious movements like ISKCON (It's the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or more popularly known as Hare Krishnas), we also see an influx of Muslims from South Asia and the Middle East. 1965 is a really important moment in the history of race and American religion for a lot of reasons. But one that we both care about, is that it's when the racialization of US Islam shifts dramatically. Before 1965 most Muslims in the US were black, and most Americans thought of Islam as a black religion. And then within a decade or so after the 1965 Immigration Act, Islam was racialized as South Asian and Middle Eastern. So, lots more to be said here. But I just did like 400 years of history, and I am tired. Have I shocked and or awed you?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:00

I am both shocked, and awed.



Megan Goodwin 18:03

Excellent.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:03

I mean, that was really a lot at once, maybe too much? So let me see if I get it in... I don't know, let's say an orderly, numbered list.



Megan Goodwin 18:12


Love it!




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:13


Okay, so first, Americans' understanding of race has never been separate from our


understanding of religion.


 Megan Goodwin 18:21
That is correct.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:22
Second, US religions are always racialized. But, that means if we don't hear religion being talked about in specifically racialized terms, it's like 10,000% fair to assume that people mean something like "white Christian."


 Megan Goodwin 18:37
Yeah.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:38
White, mainstream Christianity.


 Megan Goodwin 18:40
Yeah. Yeah, I do a lot of yelling about this on Twitter. Yes, that is correct.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:45
Right, cuz like neutrality is also, right, this idea that like Christianity is a neutral term, and then we add white or black to it, assumes that Christianity hasn't been racialized as white, which it has.

 Megan Goodwin 18:56
It absolutely has been racialized as white in courts, in journalism, in all sorts of places. So right, the the leaving whiteness unmarked there is also a racialization of religion.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:08
Right. Okay. So first was Americans' understanding of race has never been separate from


religion. Two is: US religions are always racialized, even if we don't think they are. They are.


 M Megan Goodwin 19:17
Yes.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:18
The third thing that I think you said is that racialization isn't fixed? So Islam, for example, gets imagined as black in the US for centuries, and then quickly becomes (quote, unquote) "Brown" with increased immigration from South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.

 M Megan Goodwin 19:34
Yep.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 19:35
And then you have this weird example- or this, I mean, it's not weird, but it's fun and slippery example- of Mormonism, which is overwhelmingly white demographically, especially when it gets started, but at its outside was racialized as Muslim or Eastern as a way to critique polygamy.

 M Megan Goodwin 19:53
Yeah, yeah. Actually, uh, increasingly, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is a "not-white religion." But we still very much imagine it as looking like Joseph Smith and Mitt Romney. Uh-

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:06
Gotcha. So we know that this racialization isn't fixed.

 M Megan Goodwin 20:10
Precisely, right, that- that coding religions in a certain way racially, doesn't mean that they'll stay coded that way forever, and it can actually change really quickly.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:20

Yeah. And I think- I think a key example of that for me is this global understanding of Islam and terrorism and Middle Eastern. Like that- that was not overnight. But that- and it certainly wasn't just a post 911 phenomena- but that location of, the geographic location of where Muslims are really from,



Megan Goodwin 20:41

Right.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:41

is a- is a quick, popular imagination that it hadn't been before.



Megan Goodwin 20:46

Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:47

So I want to say that the takeaway stuff is specific to the US, that America's understanding of race has never been separate, that US religions are always racialized, and that racialization isn't fixed. Those are specific to the US here, but we're going to see similar contours when we look beyond our own shores in the next episode. Race and religion are tied up and racialization is definitely not fixed "over there," either.



Megan Goodwin 21:12

Yeah, yeah. And saying that, like, race and religion are inherently tied up in our understandings of, like, whiteness, and how the country functions, all of that is true, but obviously doesn't mean that white supremacy is unique or exclusive to the United States. It's just that race, like gender, like all of these social constructs, operate in ways that are specific to the cultures that construct them, so.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:42

Be the archive, it's Primary Sources.



Megan Goodwin 21:46

Primary Sources [singing]!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:48

It's good practice to center us as subjects that interpret theory, but when we talk about race, we're specifically talking as two white ladies. So what work is Primary Sources doing today, Goodwin? How are we talking about whiteness?



Megan Goodwin 22:00

Okay, well, so two ways for me. First, and most problematically, I am always thinking about whiteness as a thing that I never had to think about until very late in my education/life, like I knew race existed, I just kind of thought it happened to other people. And I truly don't think I started grappling with my own complicity in white supremacy until after Michael Brown was murdered in 2014 and the people of Ferguson so publicly called for justice. But like, equally problematically, I think about my family, and especially my dad (who does not listen to podcasts, unlike Lloyd). My dad is a 70 something white Irish Catholic dude from Philly, with all the explicit and implicit anti-black biases you'd expect- though not excuse- from someone of his social location. And I don't just mean the hate speech, although that's there. I mean, like his insistence that there's a difference between poor and broke. This is what I heard a lot growing up. His family was broke, while they were growing up, but they weren't "poor," he explained to me, as his father had explained to him. It took me an embarrassingly long amount of time, honestly, to realize that he was basically saying some folks are, like, "naturally" without financial stability, and those folks just like happened to be not-white. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And like, I- I can know all of the history of how Irish Catholics basically became white through anti-black racism, but showing my dad those books doesn't fundamentally disrupt his racism (our conversation about the Electoral College and the Three-Fifths Compromise did not go particularly well also). So, uh, honestly, I don't know what more I can do about that beyond making sure he doesn't say that shit when I- where I can hear him anymore. Uh- yeah, yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:52

Yeah, ugh, families are often our original problematic faves.



Megan Goodwin 23:58

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:00

I think I want to come at whiteness today by chatting about, um, Jewish reluctance to name themselves as white, especially in a post Holocaust United States. Um, and I think that's a good foil in some ways to Irish Catholic demands for whiteness, and like embracing of whiteness, whereas I think white Jews- and here I'm referring often to Ashkenazi Jews in the US- don't, there's a real resistance to that label. And I was frankly explicitly given advice not to check the box for white when filling out forms or FAFSAs or applications. There is a deep dissonance I have found in and between race and religion and ethnicity and conditional access to white privilege, vis-a-vis safety. But, and like no- and like not experiencing discrimination, even as white passing is frankly always an option for the sorts of Jews that I come from which is to say again, the Eastern European Ashkenazi kind.



Megan Goodwin 25:03

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:06

So on the one hand, I want to make sure that we're saying that like, uh... that the collapse- for me anyway, this is- this is the real moment of the collapse of race and religion being really real, that white equals Christian. And here I'm calling back into my own primary source about Freud's Christmas tree and the way it did not protect him.



Megan Goodwin 25:27

Oh I'm obsessed with that tree.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:29

But at the same time, even if the collapse of white and Christian is real in this country, that doesn't mean that Jewish people aren't white. White Jews are white, especially in the US. But Jewishness and anti semitism are at an odd nexus of racialized religions and white privilege for many Jews and demographically, this is most Jews in the United States. So while there are limits to privilege in real experiences of hate, a lot of the stickiness of Jewishness comes down to a collapse (at least in my vantage point. And the reading I do y'all) between Christian and white, which mostly goes to our point today that in the US, religion and race are all sorts of bound together. And- and yeah, I think it's hard and

frustrating and challenging, when my- I'm often- often I'm like a Pied Piper, for Jewish students at the University. And they will often ask, but am I white? And it's like, yeah, look at you. Yes. Look at where you're from, look at where you live. Look at the communities you have access to look at the way police treat your body. Look at the legal recourse you have.



Megan Goodwin 26:32

Right. Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:34

And yet, when, um, a swastika was drawn outside of our campus's Jewish center, that does not mean that that hate crime did not happen and did not happen to that very student who asked if they were white. And so while antisemitism often feels like racialized hate, and it is, it's not the same thing as- as anti-blackness.



Megan Goodwin 26:57

Right.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:58

And so I think that space that Jews inhabit can be really complicated. And in my own life, I've seen that and been frustrated by it.




Megan Goodwin 27:04


Right, right. And like, obviously, I have no space to- to speak for or on behalf of Jews, but I also follow some cool folks on Twitter who are not white and Jewish. Mostly because you have said, "hey, you should be following these people." And I have seen a lot of really thought provoking conversations happen around the erasure particularly, like, black women, Jews. So.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:30

Yeah, and black queer Jews too. We can link to some of those really rad black Jewish thinkers in the show notes.


 Megan Goodwin 27:39
Yeah, let's do that. I like that.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:40
Well, that was Primary Sources.


 Megan Goodwin 27:42
Primary Sources! [singing]

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:45
Control the narrative control everything. It's Story Time.

 Krusty the Klown 27:50
Hey, kids it's story time.

 Megan Goodwin 27:53
That's straight up "1984," it's not wrong but yikes! Today's storytime-

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:02
history, come on!

 Megan Goodwin 28:03
I know I know. I love your jokes. Just also like very much he who controls the present controls the past, he who controls the past controls the future. I'm just saying, it's not, not Orwellian. Today, storytime is from Suad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States*. Khabeer writes (pg. 24), "For many, the categories of 'Muslim' and 'American' are not racial categories: Muslim is a religious designation and American is a national identity. Yet paradoxically, many non-Muslim U.S. Americans' understanding of who Muslims are in relation to the United States is framed by the question, 'Why do they hate us?' The question is an indicator that these categories function as 'racial projects' [and she citing Omi and Winant here]. 'Muslim' is not simply a label of faith but

rather a racialized designation, which mediates access to and restrictions on the privileges of being an American, itself also a racialized category." For me, this gets at the heart of what we've been saying, race is not religion, and religion is not race, but "American" is a racialized and also a religious category. White Christians count as unquestionably American in a way other groups do not. So when many Americans say "religion," what they're thinking of looks a lot like white mainstream Christianity. And when too many Americans say Muslim, they assume the person they're talking about must look a certain way that is not white, and be a certain way that is fundamentally not American.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:37

Yeah, I teach this incredible book in my course called Islam and Race, and this is a fan favorite quote, actually, in final exams.



Megan Goodwin 29:46

Hm!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:48

What Dr. Abdul Khabeer is doing here is laying bare the ways that American mainstream- you know what? I'm going to just say- it's laying bare the way that American- like, THE American mainstream belongs and demands Christianity, it demands whiteness and it holds hostage mainstream belonging to anyone deemed beyond those bounds.



Megan Goodwin 30:13

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:13

And I think it's easy to forget that religion can be one of these (quote, unquote) "disqualifying" racial categories, but it is yeah.



Megan Goodwin 30:24

Anyway, Muslim Cool is an amazing book and you should read it. The end.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:33

Don't pack up your stuff yet nerds, you've got homework!



Simpsons 30:36

Homework, what homework?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:38

Alright nerds by now you know that talking too fast is kind of our thing. So if you missed anything, don't forget about the show notes where we stash links, citations, things you may have missed and we do our best to make sure that there's no paywalls or if there is (because accurate citation), we find you other, not-paywall things, plus transcripts! Alright, Goodwin you're up, what do you want to assign today?



Megan Goodwin 30:56

Well, I already did this, but I'm gonna do it again. Suad Abdul Khabeer's "Muslim Cool." We got you a link to the book. We also got a CNN explainer teaser clip that will be up on the website. Uh, we're gonna suggest you listen to Straight White American Jesus pod, because pods help each other out. So, think about why Americans like to think about Jesus as a white American dude, and what that says about us as a country. I also really want to recommend the Feminists Talk Religion podcast, they are doing interesting work and are affiliated with the feminist studies in religion- larger project. I 100% always want to assign you Emily Townes, specifically when we're thinking here about, uh, early creation of racial categories I want you to look at "In a Blaze of Glory." And I actually, I'm assigning myself reading here because I haven't looked at Katharine Gerbner's "Christian Slavery" yet, but it's on my syllabus for this semester. So let's all read it together and then check back in. And then I'm also going to recommend Timothy Marr's "Cultural Roots of American Islamicism," and specifically his chapter about comparisons of Islam and early LDS (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The Mormons.) Yeah, that was- that was only like four things I'm growing.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:04


I will also keep it short then, but sticking to the US this time, I'm- I'm still gonna stick to my background on Islam. A few things, and frankly, I may hide more in the show notes because Megan said I can't list everything I want today and I write the show notes. So...


Um, I'm going to recommend, uh, the volume, uh, edited by Carl Ernst, who happens to be my mentor, called "Islamophobia in America," that is and isn't about racialized, um, identities and racialized hate. The whole thing is worth your- it's worth your time and it has chapters by folks you and I adore like friend-of-the-pod Juliane Hammer.

 Megan Goodwin 32:43
Yes, please.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 32:43
And the essays are frankly, like, crisp, clear, teachable and accessible. I'm going to call out specifically Edward Curtis's piece, since I think it is the most topical, which details anti-black Islamophobia and a post 911 context and it's totally online. I really like, um, Nadine Naber's work all the time on Islam race, Arab identities in the US. And she's got an edited volume co-edited with Amaney Jamal called "Race and Arab Americans Before and After 911" and I've got, um, a digitally available, uh, chapter there too. I can't recommend highly enough, since you recommended "Muslim Cool," I'll recommend, um, "Sapelo Square" which is co-run by Suad Abdul Khabeer of Story Time fame, it's a digital- uh, digital humanities project that's got everything that you can imagine podcasts, videos, interviews, scholarly essays, news clippings, archival matter, and it centers black Muslims in the US. I'll stop there.

 Megan Goodwin 33:47
I love that. I realized actually have one more so I'm going to cheat and give you more homework. If you've been listening to the pod for a while you obviously know that we also think you should read Judith Weisenfeld and Sylvester Johnson on all of this stuff but I want to specifically point out Johnson's co-edited volume "The FBI and Religion."

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:03
Oh, yeah, that's great.

 Megan Goodwin 34:05
It's super good. Uh, it's co-edited with Steven Weitzman. I use a bunch of these chapters in class. And it really gives you a sense of the ways that religion gets policed in the United States, along racial lines and that- that racialization of religion has been going on for a

long time. So check that out, too. Ha! You made it We made it. It's done. Please clap wildly wherever you are for our transcription Captain Katherine Brennan, whose work makes this pod accessible. And as usual, come yell at us (or with us) on Twitter.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 34:34

You can find Megan on twitter @mpgphd. And Ilyse, that's me, @profirmf or the show @keepingit_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com. That's where we store all of our show notes. And with that, peace out nerds.



Megan Goodwin 34:54

Do your homework on the syllabus.



@alexengelberg @rynnstar 35:13

Black neighborhoods are over-policed, so of course they have higher rates of crime and white perpetrators are under-charged. So of course they have lower rates of crime and all of those stupid stats you keep using are operating off a small sample size. So shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up, shut up.