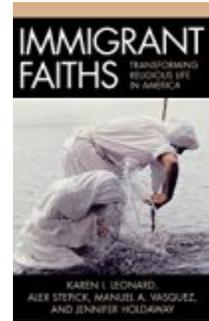


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vázquez, Jennifer Holdaway, eds. *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2005. 259 pp. \$59.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-0816-5.

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Published on H-Amstdy (February, 2007)



Crossing National and Religious Boundaries

Ironically, *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, an excellent anthology that presents many new models for studying religion and migration in America, displays one of the most classically flawed conceptualizations of “religion” in its title: with the prominence of the term “faiths,” its front cover reiterates the traditional nineteenth-century Protestant focus on religion as that which is *believed*, a conceptualization that has long since been critiqued, not least by many of the scholars writing within this volume itself. Nonetheless, *Immigrant Faiths* provides a collection of rich case studies on the dynamics of migration and religious life in the United States. The essays, which come from a range of disciplines including history, sociology, and religious studies, make up a volume that represents work affiliated with the International Migration Program of the Social Science Research Council.

The collection is framed by an introduction from editor Karen Leonard and by broad essays from two of the volume’s other editors, both of whom attempt to assess the state of the field. The opening piece, by anthropologist Alex Stepick, examines how religious issues have affected migration studies, while the closing essay, by religionist Manuel A. Vázquez, assesses how the question of migration has influenced scholars in religious studies; the two studies complement well.

The book’s main body of essays represents a wide variety of work. Chapters by Derek Chang and Danielle Brune Sigler bring an historical angle to the project as a

whole. Chang’s piece, on American Baptist Home Missions among Chinese immigrants and ex-slaves in the late nineteenth century, examines the overlap of civic and religious discourse in the group’s activities. Similarly, Sigler addresses complexities of race, religion, and leadership in her biographical study of Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace, an immigrant from Cape Verde who founded the Holiness-influenced United House of Prayer for All People.

Transnationalism is another major theme of the volume; it receives strong treatment in Kenneth J. Guest’s “Religion and Transnational Migration in the New Chinatown,” which chronicles how religious communities are part of the complex ways that recent Fuzhounese immigrants in New York relate to their new daily life in America and to their home villages in China.

Although some of the volume’s contributors make a point of unpacking the idea of “religion,” such discussions could have been more nuanced. Stepick, for example, argues that Nietzsche is “dead wrong today, at least for immigrants” (p. 11), an observation that is not really news in religious studies; indeed, as Leonard notes in the introduction, one of the goals of this anthology was to move beyond traditional Western conceptions of religion, taking into account the general demise of the “secularism” hypothesis. For the most part, the volume succeeds in this area; in particular, Ronald Nakasone and Susan Sered’s essay, “Ritual Transformations in Okinawan Immigrant Communities” attends to rich compli-

cations in the identities of Okinawan immigrants and argues against faith-oriented conceptions of religion. Similarly, Guest notes that the practices of Fuzhounese immigrants cannot easily be reduced to any singular tradition (p. 150). Even Nakasone and Sered, however, rely upon somewhat older literature in their overt theorizing of religion. It would be interesting to see how various essays in this volume might work in conversation with Thomas Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (2006), which was published after *Immigrant Faiths* went to press.

Another way in which this volume moves beyond older paradigms of religious studies is in its attention to domestic religion and to other non-congregational instances of lived religion. Pyong Gap Min's "Religion and the Maintenance of Ethnicity among Immigrants: A Comparison of Indian Hindus and Korean Protestants" is particularly strong in this area; similarly, in "The Protestant Ethic and the Dis-Spirit of Vodou," Karen Richman examines the nuanced varieties of religious practice among the Haitians of Palm Beach country, including "performance events" centered around cassette players with recorded "letters"; she notes how "creative uses of cassette tape and video recorders have resulted in a reconfiguration of the boundaries of the ritual performance space, allowing immigrants to continue to serve their spirits back home" (p. 175).

At the same time, there is plenty of attention to more public religious practices, including Marie Friedmann Marquardt's "Structural and Cultural Hybrids: Religious Congregational Life and Public Participation of Mexicans in the New South" and Thomas J. Douglas's "Changing Religious Practices among Cambodian Immigrants in Long Beach and Seattle." The overlaps of civic and religious life emerge throughout the book, as in Marquardt's description of a "human-sized paper maché replica of the Statue of Liberty with a huge red question mark wrapped around its body" (p. 198), which had been made and used by one congregation's youth in public protests; this anecdote illustrates the question of how immigrants' re-

ligious identities are performed in the public square, and how their identities as Americans are performed within church buildings. Questions of civic life and national (or transnational) identities were thus a recurring theme, one that was highlighted in the volume's framing essays and that should come to the fore more explicitly in future work in this field, particularly in light of the major protests concerning U.S. immigration policy in May 2006, and given the continuing post-9/11 challenges facing many immigrant communities.

As other reviewers have noted and as Leonard acknowledges, it is unfortunate that the book does not contain any case studies on Muslim immigrants.[1] Likewise, although this was specifically a volume tilted towards the "new" religious communities entering America, more transhistorical comparisons with studies of Jewish, Irish, Italian, and other earlier waves of immigration would have provided a deeper conversation. A few of the book's authors, notably Stepick and Min, do employ such comparisons, to good effect.

Some of the ground not covered here has already been taken up in *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States* (2003), edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John L. Esposito, also published by Alta Mira Press; these two volumes might complement one another well in a classroom setting. Similarly, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (1996), edited by Barbara Daly Metcalf, provides strong work on the Muslims who are missing from this volume. Overall, *Immigrant Faiths* is a valuable and timely collection of essays, with nuanced case studies and assessments of the flexibilities and complications of immigrant religions; it will be useful in the classroom and the library alike for scholars of religion, migration, and American Studies.

Note

[1]. Sarah Stohlman, review of *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, ed. Karen L. Leonard et al., *Sociology of Religion* 6.3 (2006): 334.

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Citation: Jodi Eichler-Levine. Review of Leonard, Karen I.; Stepick, Alex; Vázquez, Manuel A.; Holdaway, Jennifer, eds., *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*. H-Amstdy, H-Net Reviews. February, 2007.

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