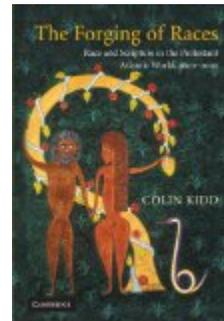


**Colin Kidd.** *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 309 S. \$27.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-79729-0; \$84.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-79324-7.

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## C. Kidd: The Forging of Races

Colin Kidd, Professor of Modern History at the University of Glasgow, specializes in ethnic identities in the British Isles during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well as in Scottish political culture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. A prolific scholar, two of Kidd's most important earlier works, 'Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689-1830' (Cambridge 1993) and 'British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800' (Cambridge 1999) exemplify Kidd's dexterity in analyzing the intersections of political discourse, intellectual history, and identity outside of the paradigm of nationalism. Kidd's latest publication continues his exploration of ethnic theology initiated in 'Identities Before Nationalism', simultaneously on a broader scale and in much greater depth.

'The Forging of Races' is a meticulous examination of the relationship between race and scripture in the North Atlantic. Kidd's premise is that theology played an enormous and previously underanalyzed role in shaping the development of racial discourse, so much so that in order to more fully understand race as a cultural production of modern intellectual discourse we must recognize that race began as theological construct. While the book does not quite revolutionize our understanding of race as the jacket suggests, and the pressing of scripture into the service of racial ideology has been ably examined by many scholars, including George Stocking, Thomas Gossett, Audrey Smedley, Winthrop Jordan, George Fredrickson,

and Robin Blackburn, Kidd's rigorous survey, including a panoply of English, Scottish, French, German, and American writers spanning four centuries, is by far the most detailed and most comprehensive.

With the Age of Discovery, early modern European thinkers were forced to grapple with squaring Christian scripture, which had for centuries served as Europe's central text of historical and natural authority, with the confrontation of the novel demographic realities of the New World system. Before the Enlightenment ushered in scientific discourse as a way to conceptualize and construct racial difference, humanity's ethnic, cultural, and religious differences that would come to be framed as biological races in the nineteenth century were first and foremost the purview of theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. How did, in European eyes, newly encountered peoples fit into the biblical story of creation and Noachic genealogy? Kidd penetrates the byzantine trajectories of the monogenesis versus polygenesis debate of the modern period more deeply than previous scholars. Monogenesis, the theory of a single origin of humankind, presupposes a unity of humanity and is consistent with the biblical stories of Genesis and the Flood. The heretical underpinnings of polygenesis, the notion of separate creations of fundamentally disparate peoples - or races - did not prevent its expression in the early modern Atlantic, yet a coherent racist ideology failed to develop during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the expansion of slavery notwithstanding.

Kidd's careful examination of early modern mediations on race and scripture overturns the notion that the establishment of racist doctrine necessarily required the Enlightenment critique of biblical historicity and authority. It is true that the letter and spirit of Christian theology, predicated on the brotherhood and shared origin of humankind, logically countermanded the notion of inherently distinctive races that came to prominence with the elaboration and escalation of racial "sciences" in the political climate of the nineteenth century. However, Kidd's detailed analysis reveals that scholars and clerics in the early modern North Atlantic still managed to interpret scripture in both antiracist and racist ways. Furthermore, Kidd argues, the extent to which the Enlightenment "witnessed the emergence of a body of science...which enjoyed complete autonomy from religious presuppositions and biases" (p. 84) has been exaggerated and that in the Protestant world "the Enlightenment was a further wave of the Reformation" during which many intellectuals were not attempting to "overthrow Christianity, but to re-establish it on firmer foundations" (p. 83).

The complexity and variety of the interpretations and rationalizations of scripture defy generalization and the level of detail of often contradictory reversals of argumentation make this work a painstaking intellectual history. Summarizing the book's disparate and wide ranging intellectual threads ranging from Thomas Blount's 1656 *Glossographia* and Davis Hume's 1748 "Of National Characters" to nineteenth century Theosophy and

twentieth century Black counter theologies, Kidd concludes, "This book does not...advance any grand overarching thesis about the relationship of race and theology.... Nevertheless, doctrinal preference was a crucial determinant of racial attitudes, albeit not in any simple or straightforward way. Traditions of scriptural interpretation...played an enormous role in...shaping the discourse of race in the early modern and modern eras.... On the other hand, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a countervailing force - the impact on religion of a powerful race concept" (p. 272.)

Despite Kidd's many examples of writers who contorted sacred histories to support racist thinking, his work stresses the theological roots of antiracism. He contends that "the second half of the twentieth century has seen the abandonment of the racialised worldview of the nineteenth century" (p. 272.) Citing the example of the role of the church in the dismantling of South African apartheid, Kidd suggests that we have come full circle to some extent, from the early modern Europeans who were constrained by Christianity's scripture and foundational premise of the unity of humankind as they bumped up against the rest of the world's demography and cosmology, to a contemporary Christian theology that once again functions as a constraint upon "racist temptations." As always though, Kidd's argument cuts both ways. Kidd ultimately warns readers to be wary that "some of the themes of sacred ethnology continue, on the eccentric fringes of Protestantism, to provide the doctrinal fuel of militant religions of race hatred" (p. 276.)

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