

## Book Reviews

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Editorial note: Book reviews are lightly edited for clarity and typographical errors.

## Reviews

WEAPONIZED WHITENESS: The Constructions and Deconstructions of White Identity Politics. By Fran Shor. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

This short collection of the author's essays, some of them revised versions of earlier publications, uses key turns of phrase to shed new light on enduring issues in whiteness studies. With two caveats, even those scholars familiar with the literature may find new ways of thinking and writing about the subject via their engagement with this book. First, portions of various essays are positioned within contemporary news stories that no longer resonate as much as they once did. These pieces seem to lose a sense of immediacy that they may have packed upon their initial publication. Second, informed readers will have to sift through a good deal of familiar conceptual material on whiteness.

Shor's main argument throughout the essays is that whiteness was the founding organizing principle of the United States of America, a powerful motivating force that has yet to run its course. The nation's earliest wars were racialized, Shor asserts, and that pattern has continued all the way through the country's most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Riffing on Martin Luther King's iconic quote, the book asserts that "The long arc of racial injustice... bends towards whiteness" (9).

Aspects of society that had never been racialized anywhere else in the world quickly evolved as such in this country. State-sponsored law enforcement and military forces like slave patrols and the Buffalo Soldiers existed solely to enforce and entrench a national racial caste system designed to be permanent and unchanging. That nonwhite groups have carved out independent and oppositional identities in resistance to such forces reflects their magnificent, multi-century struggles.

Although these multiracial freedom struggles, which sometimes include white allies, may give life to an illusory notion of national progress, they do not actually represent any particular slippage in the foundational national character of white supremacy. In fact, these protest movements face fierce resistance by the most powerful segments of white society, even as they incorporate the support of thousands of white allies.

In Shor's framework, Trumpism and majority-white support for it is nothing new, but may serve as an inflection point for whites who can no longer envision themselves

aligned with a particular brand of white grievance that is too explicitly associated with Nazism. It may drive an extraordinary number of whites into roles where they serve temporarily as allied appendages to the black vanguard, to use the author's terminology.

But, Shor warns, the white ally will always struggle with a kind of double-consciousness between her own privilege and the arc of justice that would replace it, and only the destruction of whiteness could really serve as a precursor for such radical change. In a sense, the term white ally is an oxymoronic one. Shor's prescription for the affliction of whiteness is a hoary one; he calls for whites to reject racial identity politics in exchange for a more powerful class solidarity. Otherwise they will continue to chase guns and god as compensation for their lost privilege, as once observed by President Obama. Only when citizenship and democracy exist without racialized privilege will this country reach its potential.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICA'S CONCENTRATION CAMP LAW: Civil Liberties Debates from the Internment to McCarthyism and the Radical 1960s. By Masumi Izumi. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019.

This ambitious and elegant study braids together stories from the 1940s (the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War 2), the 1950s (the passage of anti-subversive acts creating plans for concentration camps confining U.S. domestic dissenters as well as "aliens"), and the 1960s (the creation of protest initiatives that would lead to the repeal of the central piece of such repressive legislation). Haunting the stories is the example of the initial wartime internment and incarceration of Japanese American citizens as well as Japanese nationals in the U.S., which provided legal, political, and bureaucratic frameworks for subsequent plans for preventive detention. Moreover, later protests against any authorization of concentration camps also hearkened back to the policies of the 1940s, and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) became a leading presence in those protests.

In the initial chapter of the book, Izumi offers an arresting account of the removals and confinements of the Japanese, particularly on the West Coast of the U.S. during World War 2, a story now well-told though too little known popularly. The care with which she fills in context characterizes the book as a whole, making it ideal for undergraduate course use. The attention to detail in the several signally important court decisions allowing government policies to continue is vital because it shows how often courts ruled narrowly, not providing blanket assurance that preventive detention was constitutional. Izumi evenhandedly acknowledges that security concerns joined race in justifying repression, and that the mostly liberal actors in implementing detention policies did fret over the liberties they compromised. Such precision makes still more impactful Izumi's insistence that the policies nevertheless amounted to a "racist purge" (40), which she counts as an example of what Etienne Balibar calls "differentialist racism" (33).

The second of the book's sections focuses mainly on the passage of the 1950 Internal Security Act especially Title II, which made "legalizing preventive detention" (44) its goal. Izumi masterfully captures the sad drama in which liberal forces attached to the Truman Administration tried to outflank cruder anti-Communist legislation offered by conservatives only to have much of that language animate Title I of the final product while adding their own strategies for incarceration. (A similar worst-of-both-strategies result would occur in the Communist Control Act of 1954 as the differences between liberalism

and conservatism on these matters was small and both vied to be seen as toughest on the nation's supposed enemies. In particular the association of left politics with specific racial and ethnic groups made the persecution of the Japanese seem a useful lens to approach the issues involved. Ultimately repression stretched to fit "virtual alien enemies" (85).

While examples from the incarcerations of the 1940s were called on by lawmakers and judges in the 1950s mostly to mount justifications of preventive detention, the shifting political climate of the 1960s brought new possibilities. With massive social movements from civil rights, to Black Power, to opposition to the war on Vietnam rising, the ability to define those opposing the U.S. state as a marginal, easily confined group of only 12,000 or so persons ebbed. But those in the social movements rightly feared being spied on and rounded up. Persistent "rumors of concentration camps" spread among dissenters and were especially well-publicized by the Black Panther Party. The rumors were only that, in the sense that the camps planned and funded in the early 1950s had not received appropriations after 1957, but the logic of surveillance producing an "index" of those deserving incarceration remained intact and menacing.

Campaigns to repeal Title II urgently enlisted activists, including younger Asian Americans, who encouraged the older leadership of JACL to participate. When this call was answered the long connections to the 1940s led to opportunities to recall the persecution of the incarceration era and positioned JACL as critical in imparting moral authority and political skill to repeal campaigns. By the time these succeeded in 1971, even President Richard Nixon had accepted that the "concentration camp" strategy was a liability in implementing successful repression of radical movements.

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REALIST ECSTASY: Religion, Race, and Performance in American Literature. By Lindsay V. Reckson. New York: New York University Press, 2020.

Lindsay Reckson's *Realist Ecstasy* argues that realist writers at the turn of the twentieth century turned to ecstatic bodies in order to imagine bodily and social arrangements outside of those enforced by Jim Crow America. An ambitious project, this book brings together literary, performance, and secularism studies, suggesting that a nuanced understanding of regimes of power requires theoretical approaches that attend to both texts and bodies in movement. With chapters on W. E. B. Du Bois, Stephen Crane, the Ghost Dance, early photography, and Nella Larsen, *Realist Ecstasy* investigates the relationship between the visual, the performative, and the written in order to theorize the simultaneous hypervisibility and ghostly presence of America's legacy of slavery in post-Reconstruction America.

Reckson's book is beautifully written, and helpfully maps out several innovative theoretical approaches to Jim Crow America and American realism. Most productively, Reckson theorizes ecstasy as a methodology of being-beside that assumes disunity and instability of secularism, history, and the body. This formulation of ecstasy should help scholars of the turn of the twentieth century resist static formulations of narrative or power. To accomplish her ambitious theoretical goals, Reckson sketches a "hauntology of realism" that encourages readers to consider American fiction and scholarship as fundamentally haunted by pasts and persons excluded from the progress narrative of American history. In looking at post-Reconstruction America, the idea of haunting illuminates America's inability to fully recognize and contend with its history of violent racial subjugation.

Reckson is an expansive and creative theorist, and through her five chapters she also offers exciting reads of both canonical and understudied texts. Through her first three chapters she charts how ecstasy “unsettles realism’s normative techniques” (162). For instance, in her second chapter, “Archival Enthusiasm,” Reckson turns to Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*. In this reading, Reckson draws on an “archive of practice” (a move that animates much of the book) to read Jim Conklin as embodying—in death—the instability of bodies despite the Jim Crow imperative to fix those very bodies (72). In the final two chapters, Reckson shifts her focus to texts that identify the ecstatic body as a site for the “recirculation of colonial and racial fantasies,” including James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (162).

*Realist Ecstasy*’s innovative approach to ecstasy also reveals something about how Reckson approaches religion. In conversation with a significant move in Religious Studies toward the study of embodiment, *Realist Ecstasy* imagines religion as a kind of performative, but for Reckson, that performance’s truth-value to observers and believers is bracketed. Hence, her ability to theorize ecstasy without discussing God. Indeed, in the introductory section “Being Beside; or, Ecstasy as Method,” the word “God” (or related words—divine, divinity, Creator) only appears once. Ecstasy for Reckson is fundamentally about being beside the self and boundaries between the self and community, and *not* about an interaction with the divine. Thus, *Realist Ecstasy*’s most exciting interventions are not with her study of the content of religion, but rather the tropic function of religious images, gestures, and performances.

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