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Joanna Brooks, American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African and Native American Literatures

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American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures. By Joanna Brooks. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. viii, 256. $49.95.)

After an epidemic of yellow fever decimated Philadelphia in 1793, the civic leader Mathew Carey, one of thousands of whites who had fled the city, produced a commercially successful history of the scourge. Carey paid particular attention to the racial dynamics of the epidemic, noting the faulty (and by then publicly disproven) theory that blacks were immune to yellow fever and, as a result, were available to care for stricken city residents. Portraying the African Americans who had stayed behind as criminal and exploitive, Carey omitted entirely their experience as victims of the epidemic. Two black civic and religious leaders, Absolom Jones and Richard Allen, immediately countered Carey's "partial and injurious" history with their own account.

One might imagine Joanna Brooks's *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* in the tradition of Jones and Allen's historical record straightening. Her detailed, lucidly presented narrative of contexts, communities, and texts (including that of Jones and Allen) is notable not only for its thorough explication of an important and varied set of texts that have been little studied but also for its focus on the role of religion in early communities of color. Protestant Christianity, Brooks claims, helped shape the sense of agency and resistance that informed the written records she examines: "the earliest black and Indian authors established themselves as visionary interlocutors of secular nationalism and the American Enlightenment" (p. 3). Brooks's text represents a corrective both to older historical generalizations that have already been widely challenged and to recent works that critique exceptionalist, ethnocentric histories of early America but fail to look seriously at the role of religion, specifically at Protestant Christianity, in the production of early literatures.

R. W. B. Lewis's *American Adam* (1955) made official the popular image of early America that dominated English literary and religious traditions. This construct, absorbed by decades of graduate students in literary studies, drew on Puritanism to figure early America as an Eden—vacant and ordained for divinely sent inhabitants—and early Americans (all of whom were imagined as Europeans) as Adam—new, fresh, innocent, ahistorical, and unique. Lewis's biblical paradigm provides a starting point for Brooks not because it still needs

debunking but because the American Adam provokes alternatives. Brooks turns, instead, to Lazarus. The two Lazarus stories she discusses both concern facing and overcoming death and thus allow room for the central features of eighteenth-century African American and Native American experience—that of upheaval, trauma, near extinction, and survival.

In subsequent chapters, Brooks often calls upon the Lazarus figure. Not only does she examine explicit occurrences in hymns, sermons, and spirituals, but she also uses Lazarus as an interpretive paradigm for making sense of the role of performance and ritual in early African American and Native American Christian religious expression. Brooks considers four writers in depth: Samson Occom, a Mohegan tribal leader and Presbyterian minister who, after a sharp break with New England missionaries, helped found a pantribal separatist Christian settlement called Brotherton; John Marrant, an evangelist, black loyalist, and exile to Nova Scotia, who settled (with fifteen hundred other free black loyalists) at Birchtown; Prince Hall, who established a Freemason community of northern blacks; and Richard Allen and Absolom Jones in Philadelphia. Occom, the only Native American in the book, is treated in the greatest detail; he is the subject of the longest chapter and of the appendixes, which document his overlooked work as a hymn writer and editor. Brooks establishes both why and how the hymnal became important in the Brotherton community as she explores the actual practice of singing, including the hybrid cultural forces and meanings that shaped those practices.

Through her nuanced readings, Brooks reveals the persistent, complex presence of religion in early American communities of color. She argues, for instance, that Freemasonry's secrecy, its Egyptian origins, and its mystical, politically resistant activity were particularly meaningful for northern blacks and that these eighteenth-century contexts should be understood as the platform for early black nationalist discourse, such as David Walker's *Appeal . . . to the Coloured Citizens of the World.* Such fresh looks at works that have been recovered but not as yet thoroughly analyzed or contextualized, including Prince Hall's published speeches delivered to the African Lodge, commend the book to scholars of early American studies.

The minor disappointments of this noteworthy study concern not what it does but what it does not do and what it seems at times to assume. *American Lazarus* focuses not on the "religion" of the title but on the Protestant Christianity of the Great Awakening, and primarily on African American, rather than Native American, literatures. Since

Brooks is interested in "beginnings," an examination of earlier religious forms and traditions, or, perhaps, an acknowledgment of their importance, would have further enriched this work.

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Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement. By Carol Faulkner. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Pp. viii, 200. $39.95.)

Seeking the One Great Remedy: Francis George Shaw and Nineteenth-Century Reform. By Lorien Foote. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 224. $39.95.)

The surging wave of antebellum reform receded after the Civil War, leaving emancipation accomplished but equal rights for women and African Americans unrealized. In part because the 1860s, like the 1960s, was a decade jam-packed with events overlaid one upon another, historians have had difficulty explaining the social failures of the postbellum period. Each of these new books makes a well-researched and valuable contribution to sorting out the story of reform in that era.

Carol Faulkner's *Women's Radical Reconstruction* considers abolitionist-feminist women who threw themselves into the cause of freedmen's aid after slavery was abolished. Although their efforts to provide former slaves with clothing, shelter, education, and employment were increasingly co-opted by national organizations led by men, these women, Faulkner argues, were the practical, rank-and-file workers without whom the freedmen's aid movement could not have functioned. Many women resented male pretensions to leadership and struggled to expand women's rights while at the same time serving freed African Americans. Faulkner contends that the women in the freedmen's aid movement, unlike most of the men, resisted laissez-faire assumptions and sympathized with ex-slaves who could not achieve immediate economic independence. Many women called for universal rights as well as material aid, and they envisioned an activist role for the federal government. Their goals were unrealized in the political realm, however, and by the end of the 1860s, dwindling re-