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***Humanism: Essays on Race, Religion and Popular Culture***

Anthony B. Pinn. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. 184 p. \$29.95 CND (Paperback).

How would Camus have written a book about religion? While nihilistic and existentialist Camus may have had little to do with religion, Anthony B. Pinn's critical analysis about the possible formations of humanistic religion is aptly grafted upon Camus' "The Myth of Sisyphus." Sisyphus's eternal effort to roll a boulder up a hillside, for Pinn, embodies humanity's effort to collectively struggle in the world without God to vanquish injustice and nihilism. Pinn describes Camus' mythological story as "a life stance, a philosophy of life... that recognizes a metaphysics but in such a way as to ground those questions of knowledge and being in the empirical" (147). What does this philosophy of life or system of values, which is inherently material and worldly, look like? Pinn's book takes us on an amazing wonderland journey through African-American humanistic experiences of religion, race, and popular culture, in the formation of a godless community—or, put differently, a community not based on any transcendental foundation like God. Indeed, this chimerical community is bent towards material, transient, and incomplete humans whose happiness and prosperity stem from the earthly formation of humanism as an experience humans possess in this world.

Pinn offers a variety of possible interpretations on religious, cultural, and racial emblems to evince how humanism can trim, contrive, and craft an earthly community which is not in supplication of any transcendental message of salvation. Pinn's engagement with religion, and how it has been modified within African-American communities, is a representative example of his refashioning of humanism within the empirical fabric of our contemporary world. Pinn makes an apt distinction between religion and theism to prove that religion in itself is not problematic, because "religion is a binding together: an approach or system for attempting to make life meaningful. It is a framing of human experience so as to answer the large ontological and existential questions of our existence: who, what, when, where, and why are we?" (96). Religion, he argues, is a godless theism because it consists of people's practices and behaviours, which are principally inherent in this world and contribute to the wellbeing of the community of believers. Religion has little to do with any possible transcendental sources. This materialized interest in religion is also dominant in Pinn's adulation



of hip-hop culture as a symbol of African-American attempts to mingle religion with cultural products to dilute its transcendental aspects. As Pinn states, "the godless should continue to interrogate and critique theistic orientations, and adherents of theistic positions should continue to challenge humanists/atheists, lest the godless collapse into fundamental atheism" (116).

Pinn's description of humanism is deeply marked by the existentialism of Camus and Heidegger, whose philosophical articulations of being as constant worldly existence have wielded significant ontological blows to classical metaphysicians who have sidelined natural and material phenomena in favour of an allegedly ontological and foundational noumenon. This denounced noumenon—the transcendental truth of natural objects—is the God rejected by Pinn as a restraint or dispensable and unnecessary element of theism (61). Simply put, Pinn's humanism is an ode to the life that is to be extolled on the earth, but also resonates as a farewell dirge for well-maintained fundamentals timelessly promoting salvaging principles. The top-down formation of theism is indeed superseded with the bottom-up experience of religious practices.

Pinn's reading of humanism is tame and friendly, because, unlike most humanistic accounts, it does not intend to root out religion and religious experience, but rather enmesh them into the conduit of the socio-political setting of daily life. What still remains untold and unexplored, however, is how this humanism, built upon the exclusion of believers in anything transcendental, can protect and honor the rights of humans whom it principally ostracizes. Moving from his exploration of African-American communities' encounter with religion, race, and popular culture towards Muslim minorities in the Western hemisphere, one might wonder how this meticulously crafted account of humanism and construction of modernity can defend the rights of racialized communities who are still fond of ahistorical narratives of their religion, and identify themselves with these narratives? Doesn't Pinn's leap of faith into a more flexible narrative of humanism buttress, for example, Oriental humanism seeking to give more weight to the politics of whitewashing salvation of what is perceived as benighted and resilient subjects of racialized minorities like Muslims?

Anthony Pinn's *Humanism: Essays on Race, Religion, and Popular Culture* is an interesting journey into African-American intellectual contributions to the refashioning and re-molding of religion, race, and popular culture.

From Martin Luther King's articulation of black bodies as objects of beauty to Jay Z's and Kanye West's rap music, Pinn introduces the cerebral moments of the materialization of racial, religious, and cultural products among African-American communities. However, Pinn is still unable to address how his schema of humanism can undermine Oriental, colonial, and imperial narratives of humanism that amplify the plights of racialized subjects of Muslims' hue.

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***Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli***

Ted Merwin. New York/London: New York University Press, 2015.  
256 p. \$26.95 CND (Paperback).

In his second published monograph, professor and journalist Ted Merwin uses interviews, archives, and popular representations to tell the history of the Jewish deli in America. Calling on food studies and an eclectic mix of sociological theory, he builds a narrative in which the deli starts as a "third place," but becomes a kind of "lieux de memoire": from a space of civic engagement and mutual support, it grows into a site bound up with nostalgic and un-nuanced readings of the past. Both modes feed into the formation of Jewish identity, yet the role they play in its negotiation is substantially different. Merwin organizes his material in four meaty chapters, sandwiched between a thick introduction and conclusion.

Merwin has fun with etymology in chapter one, "According to the Customer's Desire." The Latin "delicates," he tells us, means "dainty, alluring, and voluptuous;" as "pure delicates," it exclaims of the "delicate boy." Only in the Renaissance does "delicatessen" become attached to food, while the first English use appears as late as the 1880's. The original delicatessens of Europe were purveyors of fine foods, including the spiced and cured meats of the charcuterie. In this form the delicatesses were brought to America in the mid-nineteenth century, with the wave of central European immigrants. As sit-down eateries, the Jewish delis of New York grew out of kosher butcher shops, where sales of prepared foods led to the introduc-