

Dr. Judith Weisenfeld

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Judith Weisenfeld teaches in the Department of Religion at Princeton University where she is the Agate Brown and George L. Collord Professor of Religion and Associated Faculty in the Department of African American Studies and the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her research focuses on early twentieth-century African American religious history, and she has been especially interested in the relation of religion to constructions of race, the impact on black religious life of migration, immigration, and urbanization in African American women's religious history, and religion in film and popular culture.

Transcript

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

I am Ahmad Greene-Hayes here with [Judith Weisenfeld](#). Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Judith Weisenfeld

You have my permission.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Wonderful, where do you currently work and where have you worked throughout the course of your career?

Judith Weisenfeld

I currently teach in the Department of Religion at Princeton University, and I am affiliated at the university with the Efron Center for the Study of America, the Department of African American Studies and the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies. I have also been involved with what is now the Center for Culture, Society and Religion. Before Princeton I taught at Vassar College for seven years in the Department of Religion, and there I was also affiliated with the Program in Africana Studies. Before that I taught at Barnard College in the Department of Religion and Columbia University Graduate School, Department of Religion.

I also was one of the founders of the Program in Pan-African Studies, which is now the Department of Africana Studies at Barnard.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Thank you. Where were you trained and in which disciplines?

Judith Weisenfeld

Trained? I am untrained! [laughter] Do you mean Graduate School?

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yes, Graduate School.

Judith Weisenfeld

I went to Princeton for graduate school and my degree is in Religion. I think there was a certificate in Women's Studies at the time, I cannot remember. I do not think there were graduate certificates, but I took courses in other departments. My degree is in Religion.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

At Princeton in religion and elsewhere across the university, who were your teachers, advisors and mentors?

Judith Weisenfeld

I came to Princeton as a graduate student to work with [Albert Raboteau](#) who had arrived a couple of years earlier and joined the faculty at Princeton. At that time, the department was organized around subfields, and you were admitted into different subfields and do your work under that umbrella primarily. At the time, the subfield was called Religions of the Modern West. Most of the people in this subfield were Anglo American or European American religious history. The other faculty member in the subfield at the time was [John F. Wilson](#) who was a scholar of English Puritanism and Anglo-American Puritanism. He went on to edit one of the volumes of the papers of [Jonathan Edwards](#). He also had a project on Church and State in American History. So, those were the two faculty members, and I worked in some ways about equally with both through the program.

Then, sometime close to when I was finishing up [Cornel West](#) returned. I was long out of coursework, there was very little coursework, but I did have him in conversation. Actually, the

other person who was key to my dissertation down the road was [James Melvin Washington](#) at Union Theological Seminary, who was an outside reader for the dissertation.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Can you tell me a little bit more about your experiences with Albert Raboteau and the others you have mentioned?

Judith Weisenfeld

Yes. I came to work with Al and there were very few programs where one could specialize in African American religious history. As an undergrad I had been a religion major and done the breadth and depth thing that we emphasize undergraduate religion programs do. Where, one learns a lot about different religions, methodological approaches, and then focus on something for advanced work. In my case, my advanced work as an undergraduate was — I was in school during the height of the protests demanding for colleges and universities to divest from South Africa, from apartheid.

Through coursework I became interested in South Africa, the history of religion in South Africa, and I did my senior thesis on the on the influence of [James Cone](#), in particular, in Black theology and more broadly on Black liberation theology in South Africa, anti-apartheid religious work. So, it was actually through this that I became interested in African American religious history, and there were just very few options.

So, I was so fortunate to be able to work with Al. He emphasized the importance of a really broad understanding of African American history. So, to not limit oneself and to assume that religious history was always a route to broader questions, but to kind of balance things at the same time. There were very few standing courses for graduate students at the time. So, I did some general period history courses in the History department. But a lot of our work was through reading courses, so individual tutorials with a faculty member then through graduate sections attached to undergraduate courses. I did a lot of general American African American history with Al. We read through [W.E.B. Du Bois](#) and I cannot even remember what was on that syllabus. But I also sat in on an undergraduate African American history course. I also did extra readings with graduate students. But the opportunity to sit with him in his office — I think that year he had become Chair and there used to be an office, the Chair's office, that is now the manager's office. But, just to sit there and talk about Du Bois was really great. I was also in our graduate section of African American religious history with the cohort just before my cohort.

So, [A.G. Miller](#), and [Timothy Fulop](#), the three of us were adjacent cohorts, and then [Yvonne Chireau](#) came. But I was out of coursework by then. General African American history was important for him. One of the things that always struck me about him was the diversity of

sources he brought to bear on his teaching and in his research, so sitting with him and reading a novel. Reading [Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*](#), for example. That kind of engagement with this literature and imaginative thinking, and the emotional content that literature could bring, was vitally important for what one could do with the other kinds of textual sources in the archive.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is really helpful and amazing.

Judith Weisenfeld

I want to say one thing about John Wilson though, because I did a lot of work with him, and he was someone who I did not expect to work so closely with (because I did not know who he was, he was not why I was there). But he was just available and open and willing to read with me. So, I had several side interests, one of which was Latin American liberation theology and Latin American religion and politics. I did some of that work in the Politics department. I cannot remember what it was, but I said that I really want to do X and he was like “sure, I do not know anything about that, but I will do a reading course with you.” So, I would get a book, read it, and give it to him the night before. Then we would have this amazing discussion where he could talk about it. The way we referred to it, he would ‘Wilsonize’ book. That openness is something that I am not as good as, ‘Wilsonizing’ or speaking so intelligently about anything you put before me as he was. But that posture towards what we do, that spirit of inquiry was very important for me as well.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yeah, it sounds a bit like you had to co-create a curriculum for the study of African American religion. I am curious how that experience led you to your dissertation project and how those scholars helped you get to that point?

Judith Weisenfeld

I wrote in my application that I wanted to work on the so-called sects and cults of the Great Migration. I had coursework with [Robert Baum](#) who is a historian of religion in West Africa and a visiting faculty member at Barnard when I was an undergraduate. I took all his courses, and he advised my senior thesis.

So in the course of two years, just by accident, everything I was interested in changed. In a course he taught on Religion in Racially Stratified Societies, a comparative U.S. and South Africa course, I read [Raboteau's *Slave Religion*](#) and [Fauset's *Black Gods of The Metropolis*](#). I became completely — I mean obviously, reading Raboteau shaped me, but knowing about Father Divine really grabbed me. So, that is what I came in wanting to do. Then, after doing so much work in earlier history and just thinking about history and sources, a couple of things happened. I thought, maybe I will do something in the 19th century, Reconstruction and I had done a paper on a Black teacher in the American Missionary Association in the Reconstruction South, and I thought there might be more to do there. So, that was one option.

Another was, literally my first day in Firestone Library in the third-floor African American studies reading room (although it's not there anymore) where I used to go to read the new magazines and other things, I happened on a book called [Black Film as Genre by Thomas Cripps](#). I had long been interested in film studies and discovered this genre of religious race films from the 1940s. So, I thought that is something else I could do. I had set aside the new religious movements of the Great Migration because I thought, at the time to revisit Fauset, to reopen that story, would actually require an ethnographic updating. That is, a sort of “where are they now?” was what I thought was needed, in the absence of other kinds of sources which did not appear to me to be available. So, I thought that I do not want to do that because I do not like talking to people. Or ethnography was not what I wanted to do. So, I pitched these two other projects to Al, the Reconstruction American Missionary Association teachers and the film. He was very clear that he did not think those had merit. He would say in a very subtle way, that there was not much there. He would say, very softly as he spoke, “No. I do not think there is anything there.” and I took that seriously. Some of my Graduate School fellows, however, did not take it seriously and continued to try and prove to him certain things. But I just moved on. So, I was quite lost on this, and the program was really short. We had four years of funding, and when that four year of funding was over, we would not even have graduate student status. So, my undergraduate loans were going to come back and all this stuff, so there is a lot of pressure.

[Jim Washington](#) kept saying to me, “You need to write about women.” And I was trying to with the with the teachers in the Reconstruction south. But what else? So, he says to stay on track with that and find something. And it was an accident. I was at the Amistad collection; I was on a trip recruiting for Princeton Graduate School. I went on the trip because it was going to get me to an archive, and I was looking at some material they had there, from [Mary McLeod Bethune](#), and it was an address book. In the front of it, her assistant or secretary pasted a sheet of paper which typed on it said, “Women to whom Mrs. Bethune must send postcards from Europe.” So, some trips she had gone on. On that list was [Cecilia Cabaniss Saunders](#), [Harlem YWCA](#). I thought, “Oh I have never heard of this thing.” So, that was the nugget of it, and it turned out to be a kind of compromise project for me I do not think I did justice to it. But it was a great one in which I learned just a tremendous amount about religion and migration in the period, Black religion and politics in the early 20th century North, about women and social movements. I was attracted to it in part because at the time in the field, the questions about Black women and religion were all about ordination. So, everyone was thinking about that, and I did not feel equipped nor was I

super animated by the idea of denominational work. Denominations are fascinating, political structures, social structures, and obviously, religious structures. But I did not want to get into the weeds of that kind of thing. So, the YWCA provided a fantastic...

Her meeting point networking node for women who had deep commitments to their denominations and how they engage politics, and some questions of gender and race were clearly shaped by these denominations. But they came together in a space that was more generally Christian and Protestant. I found that really fascinating. So, that is how I got to that project.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yeah, that is fascinating, just to hear that that back story and to think about the time period, the moment in which a project like that could emerge.

Judith Weisenfeld

And Al approved it!

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Exactly. So, I guess you have kind of hinted at this throughout your most recent response, but I am curious to hear more about how you would describe your research agenda or, what questions are really at the forefront of your work and where do those interests come from?

Judith Weisenfeld

I think there are two tracks and I have been on a pendulum with them. I put the book on the YWCA together with my last book about where I did return to the [Black new religious movements of the Great Migration](#) and finally wrote that book. There, I was interested in the nature of something we might call “urban religion” or “religion in cities.” How city worlds shape Black religious life in particular ways; the population density, cultures and politics. When I first started with the dissertation, I was especially interested in politics. I became, and I still am in lots of ways, not less interested in politics, but more interested in thinking about African American religious history in ways that are not inevitably, tied to politics. Like Black religion in America is not just about something that is always going to lead to the civil rights movement or something like that. That is also a kind of moment I came up in, where to make the case for the importance of studying African American religious history in various arenas, including Black studies, it had to have a politics to it that did certain kinds of things. And over time, I thought, yeah, these are

true but there are also lots of other stuff to say, and I know that is a commitment you have as well. So, religion and cities, and that kind of political imagination or, Black religion in the early 20th century. I am attracted to that period because it is one of migration. I have to think about why but the 1930s are just so interesting. The interwar period because of some of the ways maybe, Black political hopes are raised and dashed in a particular way that produces a lot of creativity, in that moment of migration and organization. And I am interested in cities because I am from New York, I grew up in Queens and was born in Brooklyn. So that is just the history of my place. I am a native New Yorker. “They can’t take that away from me.” So, that just interested me, New York in particular. That is where that comes from.

Again, encountering the new religious movements as undergraduate, the religious creativity that came out of it, is this hard to say precisely why then, why there? I tried to make some arguments in my work, but if that is where that kind of creativity was happening, as we knew at that time, that is what attracted me to it.

Again, in your work you make a case that it is not only happening there in that moment, and obviously not just in that moment. The other set of things I am interested in, kind of reluctantly — here I am again — is in how religion and race work together to co-constitute each other, so that is a broad topic, and to think then about how the conjunction of religion and race has shaped black religious life. So, one can pursue religion and race in all sorts of venues and, not to reduce race to Black people, but, what the very particular experiences of Black people in an American system of religion and race has been? That is the purpose of studying religion and race for me, to unpack what it has wrought in this particular context. So, I did a project on [African American religion and film](#), in which I talked about some of those religious race movies I learned about that first day in the library. A major component of that book was to chart how American popular culture, in the form of early sound films, so in the early 20th century, produced racialized discourses about African American religion that had political and social consequences. So, it is a cultural history of a certain kind of racism about religion.

I also looked at how Black film makers used the medium of film to, sometimes present religious topics, sometimes to challenge those discourses, and sometimes with the goal of making religious arguments that did not necessarily attach themselves to racial politics. The project I am working on now, on early American psychiatry and ideas about African American religion is a similar thing.

Thinking about how [religion, race and medical discourses](#) about mental normalcy and deviance, come together from the late 19th century, probably through the late 1940[?] (like, 1880s to 1940s). What that does. What I am finding is, certainly in the early period, that claims about a propensity for insanity and religion, as a driver of those Black religious forms and ideas, that become really powerful discourses for political and social marginalization.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is really helpful to hear. Kind of a through line between your work, and where those interests emerged for you. Several folks I have talked to so far point to the Northeast in particular New York, Union Seminary and Princeton as a starting place for the institutionalization of African American religious studies. On the one hand, that is an argument. Then, pointing to HBCU's in particular, as another kind of avenue where these discourses are happening, but not necessarily in that more "institutionalized" fashion. You were kind of in the midst of all of that being at Princeton, but also having worked with some students at Union Seminary, I have heard. And at Barnard. So, I am just curious if you could comment on that a bit more.

Judith Weisenfeld

If we talk about African American religious studies, one thing that umbrella does for me when I use it, is to think about methodological diversity. So, even though Al Raboteau studied literature before studying theology and history. And that, literature was always important to him; he taught religion and literature as a course and incorporated literature there. Moreover, in some ways he was interested in music and wrote a little bit about the musicality of sermonic form. He did not write a lot about gospel music in particular. But he was a singer as a child in a church choir. I did find it kind of bristling against the scope of his conception of that. So, I was interested in the visual arts. As well as other kinds of popular culture. So, I found among a set of the scholars I was studying with, some boundaries that I do not necessarily draw. I think it is just interesting to think about what that kind of umbrella does. Does that mean, for them they might engage ethics and theology, or anthropology (I think Al was interested in ethnography).

But definitely when I think about people like Al, he came with a whole set of colleagues that he was working with and so his students got to know them. That is how I became so close to Jim Washington, [David Wills](#) at Amherst. [Randall Burkett](#), who at the time I cannot recall what he was doing but he ended up at Emory. [Richard Newman](#), who was at the New York Public Library when I first met him. At the end of his life, he was working with [Henry Louis "Skip" Gates](#) at Harvard, running some programs there. [Will Gravley](#), who was at the University of Denver. I am missing somebody but, that set of men were all deeply committed to archival research and mostly textual sources. I think over time they got more interested in things like art history. Al was interested in art, but not the kind of popular culture I was interested in. So, a lot of the movies I write about are just the bad movies, but there they are.

I lost the train of your question. That intense focus on the archival work was formative for me. On the one hand, it oriented me towards a kind of history that separated me from ethics and theology.

I do not have those commitments, but in which I had read a lot and was interested in certainly. I wrote about Cone and was very interested in womanist theology. But there was a way in which that, we are doing history here, created some distance. At the same time, Jim was at Union Theological Seminary and very involved with the American Society of Church History, as had been John Wilson. So, the doing of Church history was a value within those circles. That is how

the Union and Princeton connection happened. Cornel was also moving back and forth at various times. So, Jim Washington, when I started teaching at Barnard, founded what he called the Robert T. Handy Seminar in American Religious History. His teacher and John Wilson's teacher (or maybe his colleague) was [Robert "Bob" Handy](#), who retired from the seminary.

We had this great Church historian and historian of American religion, but mostly of Protestant churches. Jim wanted to recognize him in the shape of the PhD program in Church history at Union. Robert Handy was alive and came monthly to this seminar, where we read works in progress and dissertation chapters from Union and Columbia students or faculty. It was really wonderful. So, Jim saw himself really situated in Church history, with a particular focus on Black Church history.

I always took that super seriously because nobody knew more about that than Jim Washington did. He knew every shred of document, he probably would joke he had it in his basement, or his apartment or his office. So, after he died, I was at Barnard and asked to teach some courses to fill in. I got to think through more carefully about what it meant to think about African American religious history in a in a seminary context where people are there to do Black Church history. So, it was interesting to try and teach a little bit more broadly in that context, too. Jim also had that kind of openness. Because he understood his commitments and his faith so well.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

This is fascinating. Just to think about methodological orientation, personal commitments, theological commitments, and then how that plays out. And how institutional networks are shaped. I am interested in hearing, on this question about "Black Church history" versus "African American religious history," how for you, in your view did Raboteau in particular shape the field in that way? What lessons that you take from him, having been under him for so long?

Judith Weisenfeld

One of the reasons I was excited to go Princeton and to work with him — one of many — is that he also wrote about Black Catholics and was at the time Catholic. I grew up Catholic and it was helpful to me, it was meaningful to me, to have an advisor who came to the study of African American religious history -- given the predominance of Black Protestantism -- from someplace else. And was able to do a creditable job. To become this great scholar of the expanse of experience, in lots of ways. I mean, he did not write about everything, but he certainly came to some understanding and deep appreciation of the degree to which Protestant forms and institutions were and are at the core, but also understanding: one, that is not everything, that is not all there is; and two, that coming to it from outside can generate questions that insiders might not have and unpack some of the assumptions about how we got here, that sort of thing. So that was a model for me, and it was important for me as someone who grew up Catholic. Also, my

mother is an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago and my father grew up Orthodox Jewish and is very scornful of all religion.

So, “what am I doing here studying this stuff?” kind of thing was a question, although at the time the field was dominated by scholars who were not Black. And that was another thing, here Al was teaching — Al and Jim at the time, and [Charles Long](#). My other option for Graduate School was UNC Chapel Hill. Charles Long was there at the time when it was a brand-new doctoral program, so I was not sure about what was happening there in general. It is kind of amazing to think that they had just gotten off the ground and were like two years into it. Then he left shortly after so I would not have had someone in the field there. I am trying to think if there are other places at universities. Then Jim, the Church history program, and there were other Seminary and Divinity school programs, not necessarily PhD ones.

So, there were relatively few Black scholars of African American religious history at the time, and their locations in institutions. This happened with my generation as well — Al’s first set of students — we did not necessarily go on to places where we were teaching graduate students. So, there were limited options. But with him I got everything.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

The problem of scarcity. That is something we do not think enough about, perhaps the interracial nature of the shaping of the field. I think there is a lot there to unpack and it seems to me at least that there were some fruitful connections being made, and the question of what role did white scholars and white historians, play in “making the field possible” — and even that language feels awkward, but there is something there we should think about.

I am curious to hear too, in the spirit of this project and being one that thinks about folks like Raboteau, Cone, Long, etc. as scholars and teachers, but also using the language of intellectual or archival ancestor. I have been giving people the opportunity to take liberty with that language and if you could speak to them, what would you say in light of your experiences with them and where the field is today. What, what would you say to them?

Judith Weisenfeld

About anything? About the field?

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

About the field, about their contributions, questions.

Judith Weisenfeld

I am just thinking about the ones who are not with us in body anymore. I visited Al a week before he died. He could not communicate. He could not talk at the time. But when I mentioned certain people, he did perk up. But one of the things I said to him during that visit was that I was grateful for the kind of welcome he gave to me. That, I felt safe in being able to explore my interests, even though I have just recounted how he kind of bounded me and was like, “no, no, no.” That was his style. A lot of times, everything I do, I think, is this just something that I originally learned from Al? You know? So, I felt like that about that generation of scholars, that they knew everything. Even though of course, we are finding new things. There was a welcome, safety and comfort about what we were doing that really impressed me — and Jim as well. That is something that I am grateful for.

I never met anyone with the voracious need to know everything that Jim Washington had. I think I once asked him, “How do you do that? How do you know all this stuff?” I asked Cornel West that too, “do you have a photographic memory, Cornel?” He said no, but I do not believe it. It is not really asking them things, but more of thanking them. But the things I had learned from Jim that I try and keep up, and you may recognize some of this, was that he had a real sense of humor about the stuff we were working on. He had a taste for collecting the quirky, silly things that you are not ever going to write anything about. That is my funny side collection of references to people getting into fistfights in churches, or something like that. So, I have things like that.

I can talk about some other influences though. I was quite influenced by [Karen McCarthy Brown](#) who was part of that early Afro American religious history group at the AAR. Again, I was not an ethnographer, but got to talk with her a lot about her ethnographic method. She also had an ability to really see, a therapist's ability to pull out of people what was lurking beneath and what the really powerful questions were. If I could ask Al and Jim anything, it would be about some of these boundaries they had around what we do, how we do, and what are appropriate topics. To have them think about whether they might expand their sense, if they had to do it again. Or how might the kind of work that the people who came after them, and that is being done now by you and others, how would they take that in and how would they rethink some of the ways we frame the field.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Jim Washington is this figure, who a lot of people refer to, and apart from, I believe what is a book of African American prayers I have come across then a collection on King's speeches and writings, I believe, do you know what he was working on at the time of his passing?

Judith Weisenfeld

I should, but [Quinton Dixie](#) will know. Because he inherited a lot of Jim's books and papers and may in fact be working on finishing that up. Of course, [Frustrated Fellowship](#) was his monograph on that National Baptist Convention Progressive National Baptist convention. That Black Baptist world was everything to him. But I do not know. I think it may be something about religion and the civil rights movement. That was when he —

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

1997.

Judith Weisenfeld

Now it's like “Oh yeah, religion in the civil rights movement.” But there was not a lot of stuff then and it was contentious as well. I was on a panel at a conference at [Stanford in 1999](#). It was like, “what is going to happen in the year 2000 and beyond in African American life?” I cannot remember if Condoleezza Rice organized it, she was the Provost at Stanford at the time. But it came out of [Clay Carson](#) and people who were doing Black history there at the time in the King center. And somehow David Wills was asked something about this conference, to which he said, “I cannot believe you have a conference on the future of Black America and there is not a single session on religion.” So, they asked him to put together something about African, African American religion. It was David, myself — I cannot remember if there was a fourth person — but [Larry Mamiya](#) was on it, who I later became colleagues with at Vassar. He is another figure, he had worked with [C. Eric Lincoln](#) on the [Black Church in the African American Experience](#) and was then working on a project about Imams, [Black Muslim leaders](#), which I think he was still working on when he died. So, there was a panel — actually, my remarks at that panel became the thing I wrote for the first issue of the [Journal of Africana Religions](#), I think it has roots in that session. At another session on the civil rights movement, I remember David or someone else who was there from that crew of people who worked on African American religion, saying something about, why are we not talking about religion? And there were a lot of ministers there and Clay Carson was, like, it really was not that important in this.

It was quite heated; I remember this session. So, for Jim at that time to be doing that work, when he died — although again, earlier I said, we do not need to make everything about leading to the civil rights movement to justify what we study — it was still a time when there were very few ways of thinking about religion, with nuance, in the civil rights movement, except the fact that he was the *Reverend* Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is really helpful just to think about that kind of work and what does it mean to be scholar/practitioner and how those roles emerge, converge or overlap.

To think about just wrapping up, in light of where you have seen the field go and come from, where would you like to see it go from here?

Judith Weisenfeld

I am interested in several things. One, just more diversity — and not just for diversity's sake — but accounting for the real complexity of Black religious life. And again, your work does that. When I was working on the early research for [New World A-Coming](#), I went back to [Miles Mark Fisher](#)'s essay in, I think it was in *The Crisis*. Where he is making the case for including the sects and cults in the next U.S. Census of Religious Bodies. And he said, not as an endorsement of them or anything, that they have social influence, so we need to account for the fact that they are there. We need to account for the fact that people participate in them. Then I read this piece so many times (it is included in [Milton Sernett](#)'s collection — and he is another person we can talk about as well, among those really important white scholars in the early years and I would say by and large one of the things they did was help to collect and foreground source material, maybe more than anything). In that essay, Fisher says at the end, “anyway, it is really impossible to tell who a member of this or that, because there is a woman in my Methodist Church, or wherever, who was a Sunday school teacher when I was growing up, who is also a member of a cult. A so-called cult and that thing.

So, I think just backing off some of these assumptions about what it means for people to be affiliated in different ways, and think in more complex ways about that, and that kind of thing is happening. I am interested in the interdisciplinarity of the field. When I have to make a 5-minute statement on something about the field, news sites and sources is how I like to frame it, the only way I was able to do *New World A-Coming* and re-open the case, for me, on Arthur Fauset's *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, and not do it as a “where are they now?” ethnography was to think more creatively about sources, and where might we find evidence of (I say this advisedly) Black religious agency, given that these were people who did not necessarily leave a lot of records, or when there is only so much reading through racist sources one could do, to get at what compelled people to risk so much to be in these groups. So, different creative approaches to sources.

In diversity again, I think to not just add on Muslims and Catholics, but to think about simultaneity of developments and interactions. It is hard because of the dominance of Protestantism, but that kind of diversity. The last thing is that I would like more, less heroic stories, right? Religion does not make people good, necessarily. And religious worlds are responsible for lots of terrible things, and that is true in Black life. Not for the sake of doing it, although some of these people are just interesting, and I wrote a piece about someone who was a bad actor from whom we might learn some things about African American religious history. But it does not always have to be uplifting or heroic. There is a lot of stuff to learn from all kinds of stuff, and I think we have lots of good examples of these kinds of things happening.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Well, thank you so much Judith, for your time and for sharing.

Judith Weisenfeld

Thank you for doing this and for calling up all of these memories while I have them!