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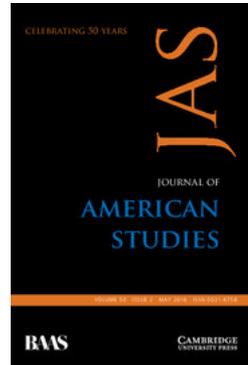
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Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith, *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, £19.49). Pp. 216.isbn 978 0 1999 8632 3.

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Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith, *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, £19.49). Pp. 216. ISBN 978 0 1999 8632 3.

With the publication of the Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape survey data, showing a significant rise (from 16.1 percent in 2007 to 22.8 percent in 2014) in the number of Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated, Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith's *Atheist Awakening* is a timely contribution to the rapidly expanding field of secular studies, providing original data and cogent analysis. American secularism, in Cimino and Smith's account, offers a range of distinctive features, internal factions, and points of contact with the dynamic US political-religious landscape.

The title indicates one of several motifs of Cimino and Smith's analysis: that what they call "secularists" (a catchall term including atheists, agnostics, and humanists) are not so much massively more numerous now than they were in decades past as they are better organized, more confident, and more articulate, and planting a much wider cultural footprint. Cimino and Smith are in a unique position to make this case: this book draws on a range of sociological studies that they have personally carried out over the past eleven years, including online surveys, in-person interviews, fieldwork, and analyses of printed and online materials.

This wide chronological scope allows Cimino and Smith to examine a pivotal phase in the history of secularism in the United States: the first decade of the twenty-first century, bookended by the 2002 "Godless March on Washington," which drew 2,500 attendees, and the 2012 Rally for Reason, which drew between ten thousand and twenty thousand. This decade saw the extremist attacks of September 11, 2001, the presidency of the born-again evangelical George W. Bush, the advent of the New Atheism, and the election of President Barack Obama (marking the end of the ascendancy of the Christian Right). The term "atheist awakening" also reflects the way that secularists in the US absorb and reconfigure templates from their Christian milieu – another motif of the book.

Cimino and Smith's data sets, although too eclectic to provide clear evidence of trend lines, nonetheless offer a number of fascinating snapshots of a rapidly evolving secularist movement. Or, more accurately, movements, since one of Cimino and Smith's exhibits is the ongoing diversity of secularism in the US. Secularism (or, better, what Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini call "secularisms") is divided on how aggressively to confront religious belief (if at all), whether to pursue ritual and other mechanisms of community formation (chapter 4), how much to make science central to secularist identity (143), and even whether to accept the category "atheism" itself (44). Cimino and Smith also take care to highlight how internecine disputes within contemporary secularism recapitulate conversations that have been taking place on the (much quieter) secularist scene in the US for half a century already – between religious humanists and secular humanists, for instance (chapter 1).

In spite of this fractiousness, Cimino and Smith's analysis shows that there are a number of commonalities that provide some coherence to secularism as a movement beyond rejection of religion. There is a distinct political center of gravity, for instance:

“the Democratic Party is increasingly the home of the nonaffiliated ... while the Republicans have become the party of conservative religionists.” Whereas in the United States of forty years ago or the United Kingdom of today secularism landed askance on the political spectrum, “today that guessing game is largely over” (3). Moreover, as Cimino and Smith ably show in their third chapter, the Internet has given the secularist community in the US a powerful organizational platform – the largest atheist community, they point out, is the /r/atheism subforum of the website Reddit, with 2 million subscribers (85). The Internet provides a sense of community, opportunities to produce counterpublics (93), and even a source of grassroots energy capable of rewriting the agendas of established secularist organizations (112).

Finally, there remains a strong tendency among secularists to express admiration for the New Atheist movement of the mid-2000s. I found Cimino and Smith’s analysis here particularly striking and persuasive: they capably show that to engage New Atheist books on the aptitude of their arguments is to miss the way that the books themselves turned into a sort of virtual nexus that has provided a new platform for community for secularists. One of Cimino and Smith’s respondents wrote that through reading New Atheist literature, “[I] have become more comfortable and open about [my] atheism.” Another: “It has made me prouder to be an atheist!” (79).

At the same time, Cimino and Smith acknowledge that these responses were solicited through the mailing list of a secularist organization – and yet only a slim minority of nones – even atheist nones – are active members of these groups. This is where Cimino and Smith’s fourth chapter, on “New New Atheism” or “positive atheism” becomes key to situating their individual data sets against a wider backdrop: this chapter tracks a range of efforts to articulate a vision of secularism that is not limited to the negativity of the New Atheism, such as the chaplaincy program of the American Humanist Association, whose most notable exponents are Greg Epstein and Chris Stedman, or various attempts to develop atheist rituals. Clearly, although the New Atheism may have had a major role in shaping secularist identities in the US, the next generation of secularists is exploring a range of departures from the New Atheist profile.

As with so much writing on secularism in America, the book is somewhat diminished by paying insufficient attention to race (and, to a lesser extent, gender, though see the section in chapter 3 on sexual harassment online, and region, a problem only partially mitigated by Cimino and Smith being personally located in Virginia and Oklahoma respectively). This is not a knock-down criticism, only to point out that, as scholars such as Josef Sorett and Monica Miller have argued, the picture of secularism – and especially the relationship between secularism and US politics – presented by self-selected survey data or site visits to elite white secularist organizations is best understood as an image of white secularism, not necessarily the full national spectrum.