

*Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*. Edited by Eboo Patel, Jennifer Howe Peace, and Noah J. Silverman. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018. 262 pp. ISBN: 9780807019979. \$28.00 paperback.

In November 2017 I attended the launch of the Association of Interreligious and Interfaith Studies (AIIS) in Boston. This workshop, which was organized as a pre-meeting session of the American Academy of Religion's Annual Meeting, aimed to give participants a picture of the emergent field of interreligious/interfaith studies and provide a venue for discussing related questions and pedagogy. From the moment that Diana Eck, founder of the Pluralism Project at Harvard and the day's keynote speaker, began her remarks until the conclusion of the session, the enthusiasm and energy in our conference room were palpable. The dozens of scholars and interfaith leaders who joined together in conversation that day were invested in approaching the study of religion through new theoretical frameworks—frameworks that, while carrying their own set of challenges and tensions, had the potential to generate fresh and transformative modes of scholarship and learning. Many of the themes that came to the forefront of the workshop have been captured beautifully in *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*.

The book's three co-editors are individuals who have been leading the conversation about interreligious studies for the past fifteen years: Eboo Patel, founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC); Jennifer Howe Peace, co-director of the Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education; and Noah J. Silverman, the senior director of Learning and Partnerships at IFYC. Their edited collection does not argue for a singular definition of, or model for, approaching interreligious studies; rather, this book strives to document the dynamics, questions, and outcomes that motivate various persons who are helping to bring this field to life. As the editors write in their introduction, their central goal is to “draw a circle around [the] various ‘facts on the ground’—the courses, journal articles, degree programs, faculty positions, and common questions—and see what pictures emerge” (xvi). Thus, the eighteen essays in this text come from scholars across various areas of specialization and institutional settings.

The collection is divided into four subsections. Part one, comprised of five essays, maps the field of interreligious studies as an academic discipline. The first essay by Kate McCarthy, who teaches at a large public secular university, emphasizes the need for educators to carefully distinguish between interfaith work—as a sociopolitical program that strives to promote intergroup understanding and peace—and interreligious studies—as an academic discipline that is both religiously neutral and dedicated to critical inquiry. Subsequent chapters in this section imagine the field in their own ways: contributions by Deanna Ferree Womack and Elizabeth Kubek situate interreligious/interfaith studies in relation to other existing disciplines or area studies. The former emphasizes how interreligious studies draws effectively from the history of religion and theology and the latter considers how interfaith studies might foster an interdisciplinary approach that operates outside of the “traditional knowledge structures” of the academy (29). The next two essays turn to examine more grounded examples of how this discipline is currently taking form. Amy L. Allocco, Geoffrey D. Claussen, and Brian K. Pennington discuss the minor in interreligious studies that they established at Elon University, while Kristi Del Vecchio and Noah J. Silverman highlight six key themes that have emerged through their work at IFYC to help colleges and universities across the country advance interfaith initiatives. These two essays provide a helpful bridge to the next section of the book, which is centered around pedagogy and classroom practices.

As someone who is committed to experimenting with new teaching practices in my religious studies courses with undergraduate students at the University of San Diego, I was eager to see what sorts of strategies the authors in the next section of the book might offer. Two essays in particular were thought-provoking to me. First, Kevin Minister discusses how he transformed his world religions class into a course that uses an interfaith studies approach. What I appreciated most about this essay was the author's analysis of the broader effects that this sort of change might have upon a religious studies department, as re-envisioning introductory courses may require fundamentally rethinking upper-division offerings and broader program goals. The other piece that forcefully grabbed my attention was Ellie Pierce's essay about using the case method in interfaith studies classes. Case studies, which present stories from real life and ask participants to inhabit the particular questions and possible outcomes that emerge from them, offer opportunities for engaged forms of learning and critical thinking in the classroom. Though less immediately relevant to my own teaching context, the other essays in this chapter proved equally insightful: Matthew Maruggi and Martha E. Stortz emphasize the power and importance of narrative storytelling while teaching interreligious studies; Michael Birkel argues for listening as a fundamental practice and commitment in the emerging discipline of interreligious studies; and Wakoh Shannon Hickey and Margarita M. W. Suárez demonstrate how interfaith and interreligious studies classrooms might accomplish affective goals by helping to nurture reflexivity, empathy, and humility.

For educators and scholars who are interested in themes of religion, race, privilege, and power, the third and fourth sections of this book provide meaningful avenues for exploration. Part three includes essays that probe the complications of interreligious engagement (including the dangers of essentialization and questions about accountability), the limits of inclusivity and diversity in the interfaith movement itself, and the need to cultivate more holistic ways of contextualizing interreligious engagement that include attention to both the environment and interspecies solidarity. A powerful essay by Jeaninne Hill Fletcher also contends that if interreligious/interfaith studies want to transcend the history of white Christian privilege in the United States and transform existing structures of oppression, the field must acknowledge this historical baggage and work to facilitate more inclusive forms of cooperation. The final section of the book steps outside of the classroom to consider a wide range of other contexts in which interreligious and interfaith approaches are having an impact: amongst religious and civic leaders, in teaching religious literacy to prison officials, in preparing citizens for religiously diverse workplaces, and in the work being done by educational nonprofits to prioritize the shared interests of a city's inhabitants.

Reading *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies*, I was struck by the accessibility of the writing in each chapter, especially in light of some of the deep theoretical work being done therein. For example, two essays address intersectionality in the context of interreligious/interfaith studies, with authors emphasizing the importance of recognizing the various and ever-evolving aspects of a person's identity that combine in unique social contexts. At the same time, other essays exhibit careful consideration of the ethics inherent in designing interreligious/interfaith courses and curricula, especially those that utilize experiential learning or ethnographic site visits. As someone trained as an anthropologist of religion, I was impressed by the manner in which Allocco, Claussen, and Pennington lay out their steps for responsibly preparing students for experiences in the "field."

Ultimately, this book provides a useful introduction to imagining how interreligious/interfaith studies might be adapted in a variety of contexts, including my own. Last semester, I assigned Pierce's essay to one of my students who wanted to craft a case study in lieu of

a research paper for an independent study she was conducting with me. She later demoed her case with a group of local high school students, putting her research and critical thinking skills into action in a way that also served to further others' learning. Thus, this collection has already proven beneficial to my own ways of approaching teaching and has inspired further questions in me about how this field might continue to evolve. I look forward to future workshops, publications, and scholarly conversations that might offer additional insights into interreligious/interfaith pedagogy as well as the possible relationships between other academic subdisciplines—such as material religion—with interreligious/interfaith studies.

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