

***Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions.* By Megan Goodwin. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019. 220. \$120.00 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper)**

On the first page, Megan Goodwin clarifies her intentions with *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions*: “to narrate stories that foster religious and sexual intolerance by perpetuating the assumption that religious difference causes sexual abuse” (p. 1). Drawing on the genre of books written about sexual abuse and minority religions (and the social movements these books both represent and catalyze), Goodwin demonstrates the outsized response against Satanists, Muslims, and Mormons in the realm of sexuality and sex abuse.

The movement(s) against religious minorities as sexual deviants make up what Goodwin calls “contraceptive nationalism” (p. 3). According to Goodwin, this contraceptive nationalism sees white, Christian women and children as allegories for America itself, and sexually predatory behavior as the default of religious—and often racial—minorities. In particular, she follows the trajectory of books such as *Michelle Remembers* by Smith and Pazder, *Not Without my Daughter* by Mahmoody, and *Under the Banner of Heaven* by Krakauer—as well as the social movements that inspire and were inspired by these narratives.

Goodwin also interweaves a critique of these narratives of the sexual abuse of women by minority religious groups in the sense that they usually reinforce the assumption that women are helpless in their own liberation. In one sense, these stories uplift white women’s voices, but in another sense they double-down on traditional gender hierarchies, assumptions of weakness on the part of women, and that white Christian women in particular are worth protecting through conservative and traditionalist values. Goodwin does a tremendous job of demonstrating that “not all stories about women are feminist stories” (p. 4).

Each topical section is a sound primer on the topic at hand and its intersection with religious minoritization and sexual violence: the Satanic Panic and the “Believe the Children” movement; the racialization of Islam and sexual violence; and the Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints and polygamy.

While Goodwin’s critiques of commonplace hysterical discourse around sexual violence and religious minorities are quite clear, the book filters through a clearer vision of the inequities of representation and concern of women of color and privileges that white Christian men are allotted. She is not arguing that the problems associated with some of these examples do not exist—but rather, that they are not unique to minoritized religious groups. To some extent, this is the crux of the argument of the book: that contraceptive nationalism has been used as a tool of power to marginalize those who are religiously, sexually, and often racially different, and rarely as a tool of liberating women (or women liberating themselves) from sexual abuse—which is what is usually the claim by its proponents

Goodwin’s *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* provides a much-needed critical approach to interreligious and interfaith studies. As advocates and scholars examine the ways that mainstream forms of Christianity have marginalized other

religions, this book provides critical context for reflecting on the structures that privilege and oppress minorities.

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