
Book Review

Amanda Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017) ix + 213 pp., \$29.95 (pbk), ISBN: 9780520291171.

Amanda Baugh's *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* is a rich and engaging ethnographic portrait of the Chicago-based interfaith, environmental non-profit Faith in Place. Founded in 1999 and still active and thriving as of this writing, Faith in Place identifies itself as an organization committed to empowering 'people of all faiths to be leaders in caring for the Earth' (faithinplace.org). While its reach has expanded significantly in the last decade, Faith in Place historically has focused its work at the neighborhood level, seeking staff and volunteers who are engaged in their local religious communities and who see themselves as 'people of faith first and environmentalists second' (p. 62). Nevertheless, as Baugh argued throughout her book, staff, interns, and volunteers all found their way to Faith and Place through diverse avenues and with wide-ranging motives, sometimes in ways that diverged from the organization's stated intention.

One of the many strengths of *God and the Green Divide* is the way Baugh probed the complex avenues by which identities of all kinds (race, gender, religiosity, willingness to call oneself an 'environmentalist') both converge and compete with one another within the lives of those who were active in the organization. Notable in this regard, is the way Veronica Kyle (now Outreach Director for the Chicago office) saw her call as an African-American leader in the organization. As Baugh described it, Kyle 'envisioned environmentalism as a movement that could bring respectability and opportunities to African-Americans', a stance that sometimes confounded white leaders whose theories about racism in the environmental movement led them to try to distance themselves (at times quite awkwardly) from the white, elitist dimensions of their environmental work. Baugh's book brings history and ethnography together in highly effective ways to tell a story that builds on what many of us already know about the race and environment divide, but she also complicates that story, challenging the common mistaken assumption that when race and environmentalism are brought into conversation, environmental justice is the only topic to address.

As a scholar, Baugh has an eye for nuance that warrants our appreciation. In her final chapter, 'From Grassroots to Mainstream', Baugh brings to light the ways Faith in Place has moved away from its early urban, community-based, 'people not polar bears' model and toward mainstream environmentalist initiatives such as land conservation, habitat restoration, and political advocacy. In tracking these developments, Baugh does not hesitate to note the ironic ways Faith in Place has come to resemble the very kinds of mainstream environmental organizations against which

it had originally defined itself. Her point is not so much to criticize as it is to call attention to the difficult negotiations that transpire when an organization seeks to be simultaneously successful, environmentally engaged, racially conscious, pluralistic, and religiously rooted.

Not surprisingly, *God and the Green Divide* truly shimmers intellectually when the matter of religious messaging emerges as the most compelling part of the author's analysis. Building on recent scholarship in secular studies, Baugh deftly made the case that while Faith and Place advertises its inter-religious mission as 'open to all', its messaging and implicit theological perspectives clearly perpetuate a liberal, Protestant ethos. People of faith who uphold an understanding of God and ethics that is outside of this liberal 'immanent frame' (evangelical Christians, Orthodox Jews, theologically conservative Muslims) are officially welcome to become involved in Faith in Place, but they are not apt to feel religiously at home there. If I have one overarching criticism of Baugh's book, it is that the title is somewhat misleading. While Baugh attended well to the complexities of race and racism throughout her book, her analysis of religious messaging is the strongest, most lasting intellectual contribution.

I have long been a fan of the creativity and achievements of Faith in Place as an organization, and Baugh's study does not dissuade me from this view, nor does Baugh intend such a result. Baugh's work as a scholar is to lead us to think more critically about the ways that religious environmental organizations, however successful, are necessarily messy when it comes to the lived realities of the people involved. In exploring these complexities, Baugh moved well past early scholarship in religion and ecology that risked essentializing religious traditions as inherently ecological. Carefully researched and refreshingly jargon-free, *God and the Green Divide* is a welcome addition to ethnographies of religious environmentalism in the United States.

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