

Deborah Justice. *(White)Washing Our Sins Away: American Mainline Churches, Music, Power, and Diversity*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2022. 266 pages. \$95 hardcover (available now); \$33.95 paperback (forthcoming February 2023).

Since the 1990s, the topic of “worship wars” within White mainline Protestantism has been a recurring conversation among pastors, church musicians, and churchgoers. Rather than taking these “wars” at face value, Deborah Justice probes how this traditional-contemporary dichotomy intersects with notions of identity, diversity, power, and authority. *(White)Washing Our Sins Away* is an ethnomusicological study that examines how people “came to hear values through music, and then used internal musical controversies about those values to negotiate the externally shifting sands of the American religious ecosystem” (18).

In the Introduction, Justice situates herself within the scope of the study: an ethnomusicologist, a White woman, a mainline Presbyterian (PC-USA), a hammered dulcimer aficionado, and a historical witness of these worship wars—both as a participant in the pews (or folding chairs) and as a participant-observer in academia. After outlining the trajectory of the book in Chapter One, Chapter Two locates this study within the academic field of ethnomusicology. Justice contends that her field has a checkered history of centering Whiteness as the norm against which all other musical cultures are measured. However, by focusing on White mainline Protestantism as a distinct culture—and Presbyterianism even more specifically—Justice argues that this book contributes to antiracist scholarship, because this culture must be treated as one of many cultures in a diverse American religious landscape. While this argument is necessary and helpful, it could have been shortened and included in the Introduction or Chapter One.

The remainder of the book centers her ethnographic fieldwork at Hillsboro Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee as a prism for how a White mainline Protestant church navigated the Traditional-Contemporary binary. Chapter Three tells the story of Hillsboro’s history as a relatively early adopter (1995) of contemporary worship as a strategy “for survival, diversity, and cultural vitality” (81). An “interlude” chapter follows this, featuring a thick, sensory description of both the traditional and contemporary services at Hillsboro in 2009. This interlude is especially helpful for those interested in the nuts and bolts of ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter Four discusses the instrumental dimensions of the Traditional-Contemporary binary and how this intersects with cultural context, class, and race. Justice’s qualitative research uncovers an important dynamic at play in perceptions of musical immanence versus musical transcendence. Some worshipers appreciate musical continuity between Sunday and the rest of the week (immanence), while others desire musical transcendence on Sunday mornings in contradistinction to their everyday musical lives. While fascinating, this framework needed further development and it likely could have been expanded and integrated with her chapter on spatial diversity.

Chapter Five examines Traditional-Contemporary bridge-making practices that often appear in White mainline Protestantism: the incorporation of evangelical hymnody, retuned hymns, and the implementation of blended services. Chapter Six focuses on the negotiation of identity and power as it relates to space and place in worship. Justice notes that the distinct spaces “gave congregants a true experience of being tolerant and diverse” rooted in “genuine support for internal differences” (180).

Chapter Seven is one of the strongest and most analytically rich chapters of the book, focusing on the topics of expressive behavior, formality, authority, and agency. Of note is

Hillsboro's interactions with the historically Black Spruce Street Baptist Church and how musical style and perceived Presbyterian identity ("frozen chosen") intersects with race. The brief conclusion points out a key phenomenon: while there are many similarities between the Traditional and Contemporary services, the differences inform how we assign value and create meaning. Thus, by framing "Traditional" and "Contemporary" as incompatible opposites, congregations that balanced both styles "experienced themselves as projecting diversity and tolerance in the face of potential conflict and schism" (221).

Overall, *(White)Washing Our Sins Away* was an enjoyable read and an insightful analysis of how one church waded its way through the "worship wars" by perceiving difference, valuing it, and developing institutional responses. While other churches were included in her study, the central case study of Hillsboro was used as a micro example embedded within macro trends of White mainline Protestant Christianity in the United States. The deep dive into Hillsboro was a strength of the book, and Justice was careful to not make generalizable claims based on her research.

This book will be especially helpful to students and scholars of ethnomusicology, religious studies, liturgical studies, and anthropology. It is accessibly written and well-organized. It would be a strong supplemental text for a "religion and race" seminar or any specialized course in ethnomusicology, anthropology of religion, or American religious studies.

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