

In a Communion of Shadows: Religion, Race, and Nation in Nineteenth-Century American Photographs

Rachel McBride Lindsey with response by Martha A. Sandweiss
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Leigh E. Schmidt

Welcome to this afternoon's public lecture, sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics. I am Leigh Schmidt, acting director of the center, filling in for Marie Griffith while she is on active leave. We are pleased this afternoon to be showcasing the work of one of our own accomplished scholars, Rachel McBride Lindsey, who became associate director of the Center in 2013 after receiving her PhD in 2012 from the Department of Religion at Princeton University. Having also taught at Florida State University for a year before joining us here in St. Louis, Dr. Lindsey has played a critical role in developing the Center's curriculum including its new undergraduate minor in Religion and Politics, which we trust will thrive under her stewardship. While such enterprises at the Center have demanded much administrative dedication and focus, Rachel has at the same time kept up a research program of considerable scope and significance. Her Princeton dissertation on the vernacular photography and material archives of 19th century American religion, is now under contract for publication with the University of North Carolina Press, well [unclear] for the excellence of its list on U.S. history, religion and politics. Part of the broader shift to studying visual, material, and sensory world of American religion, Rachel's book promises to be a critical extension of that scholarship in the history of 19th century photography, an epoch in which new visual technologies refigured vast cultural terrains, not least religious landscapes and objects. In addition to her book project, Rachel has also published articles, one on Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement in the *Journal of Africana Studies* and another on the role of Church Women in the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in the *Journal of Southern Religion*. She is a regular contributor to the Religion and American History blog and is published as well in the Center's online journal. This afternoon, Dr. Lindsey will be offering us a foretaste of her forthcoming book in her lecture, "In a Communion of Shadows: Religion, Race, and Nation in Nineteenth-Century American Photographs." We are delighted to have the chance to catch this advance glimpse of her important book and to put it on public view here at Washington University. We are likewise very pleased to be hosting this afternoon Martha A. Sandweiss, professor of history at Princeton University. Renowned historian of the American West and American photography, Professor Sandweiss received her PhD in history from Yale and taught at Amherst for two decades before moving to Princeton in 2009. We are very fortunate to have her on hand to offer her reflections on Professor Lindsey's lecture and its place within the scholarship on 19th century race and photography. The fit could not be better. On race Professor Sandweiss is the author the poignant, enigmatic, *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception Across the Color Line*, published by Penguin in 2009. It was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in History and [sound cuts out 3:39-3:43] biography. Janet Maslin of the New York Times named it a top ten book of 2009

[sound cuts out 3:49-3:53] New Englander who led a secret life as a black man, married to Ada Copeland, a black woman, even as he continued to bedazzle white elites in New York and Washington. On photography, Professor Sandweiss is the author of *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, published by Yale University Press in 2002. That book garnered the organization of the American Historian's Ray Allen Billington Award for the best book in American Frontier History as well as the William P. Clements Award for the best book on the American Southwest. Professor Sandweiss's other works include a study of American photographer, *Laura Gilpin: An Enduring Grace* in 1986, as well as the co-edited volume *The Oxford History of the American West* in 1994, another major prize winning volume in American Western History. The Danforth Center is honored to have her here as part of our proceedings this afternoon. We will first hear from Professor Lindsey and then immediately thereafter from Professor Sandweiss. We will then open up the floor to audience Q&A for both speakers. Please join me in welcoming Professors Lindsey and Sandweiss.

Rachel McBride Lindsey

Thank you Leigh. Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to present this silhouette of my current book project as a point of departure for our discussion this afternoon. I'd like to first thank the many wonderful conversation partners around campus I've had the great fortune of discussing this material and its orbiting analytics with: my colleagues at the Center, the AMCS vismat and race and performance initiatives, colleagues in Religious Studies, History, IPH, and Sam Fox. This is truly an intellectual community and I am so grateful to be a part of it. I would especially like to thank Professor Sandweiss for her feedback on a project that is trying to straddle multiple disciplines without losing its narrative and analytical integrity. Marty, your work is a model that I aspire to emulate and I am so very grateful for your being here today, thank you.

My remarks today are organized around three objects, an ambrotype likeness that has been lost to time, a civil war soldiers enlistment portrait, and a family Bible. Each of these objects pushes us to consider 19th century American history and religion in a new light. But before I get ahead of myself, allow me to begin with a vignette that helps us begin to map out a way of approaching photographs as objects as well as images, of in short, recognizing what photographs were and how they were beheld by Americans in the 19th century. In the autumn of 1862, Molly Stillwell waited anxiously for news, any news from her husband. Twenty-two year old William had enlisted in the 53rd Georgia infantry in May and as news rolled in of the carnage that had taken place near Antietam in mid-September, Molly's thoughts drifted to darker and darker prospects for herself and two year old John Thomas, whom his parents called, Tommy. Would she ever know her soldier's fate? No doubt she knew of women who had received the dreaded news second hand, who would never see their soldier's mortal remains, would never know for sure how he died. Was he brave, was he frightened, was his soul assured? After another soldier, Private James W. McCulloch of the Georgia Seventh died in November of that same year, a mere four months after enlisting

and two months after receiving his mortal wound, his daughter Maggie memorialized him by placing a clipping of undated verse dedicated to the sunny south in his encased likeness and positioned opposite a clipping of hair. Perhaps Molly had read the same verses and gazed upon her soldier's likeness as she awaited news of William's fate. To what we can imagine is Molly's relief, William's letter arrived. 'Great God what awful things I have to chronicle this morning,' he wrote. For two days while he stood guard at the field headquarters in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, his brigade fought and fought like men in one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War. 'Molly, I have not heard who was killed and wounded in my company, he wrote from the troubled uncertainty of the front. I have no doubt but some of my friends is lying cold on the ground now.' The bloodstained ground at Antietam would prompt soldiers, politicians, and citizens on both sides to consider the toll of the war as well as what such carnage ought to purchase. By October, the battle was the subject of a series of prints by Alexander Gardner on display at Mathew Brady's gallery in New York. An exhibit described by a Times correspondent as something very like laying a few dripping bodies, fresh from the battlefield, along the pavement. Gardner also produced a series of stereographs that extended the reach of these wartime photographs throughout the Union. But before the great battle would become politically sanguine, before it was transformed into national iconographies of suffering, it prompted enumerable confrontations with death, both for soldiers serving in the field of battle and for their beloved confined to the lonely corners of their imaginations. William's experiences of battle were certainly not representative of all soldiers engaged in the war. He secured a position as a guard that kept him out of much of the action during the summer and fall of 1862, even if it could not protect him from disease, fatigue and lonesomeness. Yet his letter that September nevertheless gestures to the theological work that soldiers' situations prompted. 'I know that you are uneasy about me,' he consoled Molly, 'but you know that it will do no good to grieve, it is best to be cheerful as you can, for we ought to be able to say the will of God be done. If it is His will that your best friend should die away from home, let us submit to it.' Mindful of his duty to remain steadfast in his faith and of the stifling presence of death surrounding him, he instructed Molly to save his letters in order to instruct his children in the way of the Lord. William repeatedly quoted scripture and meditated on the will of God in his letters to Molly, often commenting on God's sure favor of the Confederate army in this quote, 'unholy war.' But his was not a theology of text alone, he cherished his Bible as a material object, so much so until it was damaged 'right smart,' he wrote. And his wife's likeness was a recurring devotional compass, at once binding him to his family in Georgia and to the cosmological pageantry in which he, the war, and the nation for which he fought and so many died, were suspended. 'I always carry my Bible with me, everywhere I go,' he wrote on January 1st 1863 from the camp at Fredericksburg, 'and your picture through hard usage, is becoming smartly worn, and I have to look at it every day.' William associated his Bible and Molly's likeness in several letters, suggesting that they were companion objects in his battlefield devotions. And finally, despite discouraging Molly from grieving over his corpse and reminding her of the inscrutability of the will of God, William confessed to his wife what he hoped for, should he, like the ranks falling all around him, die in battle. 'I think of you while the cannon roar and the muskets flash' he scribbled in stolen moments of

solitude, 'and I have often thought that if I have to die on the battlefield, if some friend would just lay my Bible under my head and your likeness on my heart with the golden curls of hair in it that it would be enough. Molly I shall have to close, for my eyes is bathed in tears, till I can't write.' Molly and William exchanged letters between his enlistment in 1862 and November 1864. William lost his foot and suffered several illnesses but was otherwise spared in body from the toll of war. Later records indicate that he returned to farming and other occupations to support his family while he began a career as a Methodist preacher, climbing those ranks throughout the rest of his life. Now despite the accessibility of these records, Molly Stillwell's likeness with the curls of hair, is lost to history. Like much of the other material my book examines, this letter is a historical fragment, invoking a world that can never be fully pieced back together. And yet despite the limitations it presents, despite the material absence of the portrait, Molly's hair, and the Bible, these phantom objects, still remain a hinge from which to open new questions for the study of religion in 19th century American life. Why did William need his wife's picture with him when he died? Does it matter that his deathbed reverie associated photographs, Bibles, and hair? Can we use this incident to imagine a cultural landscape in which objects such as personal likenesses performed theological work, transforming mundane inventories into sacred cosmologies? In short, what did photographs mean to 19th century Americans, how were they beheld, and what equips us as travelers in a strange land to discern these meanings and practices of beholding? In addition to the assertion that photographs mattered to Americans and to American life from September 1839 forward, the correspondence between William and Molly suggests that the story of religion and photography in 19th century America goes beyond issues of iconicity, beyond defining photographs as compositional subjects that invoke meditation on otherwise imperceptible truths. For William, Molly's likeness was a material object, imbedded in an abundant framework much like the hair clipped from her body that mediated her presence. Still, what does this have to do with the broader conceptual and narrative implications of religion in 19th century America? Answering this question requires stepping back. My ambitions when starting this project were modest. Little work had been done on photography and American religion, especially prior to the 20th century, even though scholarship had made abundant use of photographs as illustrations. The project started in short as an exercise in approaching photographs as history but not quite as Susan Sontag writes, as conductors of quote 'a truth beyond appeal.' As a cultural historian of American religion, I wanted to know how these immensely popular, wide ranging, and consequential objects were used by religious Americans and what effect if any they had on how religion was practiced. Because most Americans in the 19th century encountered photographs in homes, studios, and streets, I focused on these common-place, familiar, and ordinary artifacts: studio portraits tucked into family Bibles, death and mourning photographs, spirit pictures, half-toned prints and souvenir portfolios and newspapers, and stereographs of the holy land, the life of Christ, and other subjects, including this one of the triumphant host of King Jesus at the Sunday school parade during the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. After 1860, any number of these could be prints by famous photographers and many were commercialized, but many were also intimate and familiar. While certainly not comprehensive, these case studies provide a well grounded baseline for

defending my original suspicion that photography influenced 19th century devotional practices and religious imaginations in many ways and to different ends. And yet in conducting this research it also became clear that I was not going to be able to limit my scope of my analysis to religion or even to assume that religion was a stable category that could be captured by the camera and catalogued by tradition place or figure. This was a story not only about objects and compositional subjects but also about systems of representation and visual campaigns of belonging and exclusion. Techniques of power were inextricable from technologies. What cameras and chemicals captured on plates were not always what beholders of these photographs saw. And as much as religion contributed to emerging and changing photographic habits of perception and recognition, religion was also produced through material practices and imaginative acts of beholding. In short, attending to photographs did not simply provide a new visual record to the story of American religion. The history of religion and photography was caught up in acts of production, yes, but also preservation, display, and beholding. Approximating this history led me to shift my focus of inquiry from religion as a photographic subject to photographs as cultural mechanisms that help us better understand entanglements of religion, race, and nation in nineteenth-century America. Now rather than rehearsing the scope of my book, my remarks today as I said, are structured around these three historical fragments that help us to understand photography and the religious, national, and racial imaginaries that the new technologies facilitated through individual and corporate acts of beholding. What I aim to do in my remaining time, is to argue that excavating the cultural history of nineteenth-century popular photography raises important questions about the interpretative tangle of material culture, quotidian practices, and religious experiences, and that attentiveness again to these questions in turn illuminates new ways of understanding how Americans throughout the nineteenth-century learned to encounter religion, race, and nation as reflections of each other in an ever expanding hall of mirrors. In concluding I will gesture towards the communion of shadows, as not only lyrical tank on the social life of nineteenth-century photographs, but as a critical approach to photographs as historical sources, beleaguered, inconsistent, and fraught, to be sure but sources in their own right nonetheless.

Walter Jones was also 22 when he joined the war in late August 1862. Like William Stillwell, Walter Jones was a farmer. The Muster Roll describes him as a farmer with blue eyes, light hair and light complexion. He was also a young father. Both soldiers were in the battle of Cedar Creek Virginia in October 1864, a battle that stayed with each of them for the rest of their lives. It was here that William Stillwell lost his foot and Walter Jones in his telling was spared from mortal demise by nothing short of divine providence. They would both survive the war and late in life turn to public ministry. But unlike William, who was meandering his way through the ranks of the Confederacy, Walter enlisted in Company C of the Eighth New York Cavalry. The two men, who had so much in common, were on opposite sides of the war. As Walter Jones put his affairs in order and packed the few belongings that he would take with him, his stepmother gave him a small New Testament to carry with him throughout his service. And like thousands of other recruits, young and old, Union and Confederate, he also sent for a photographer. In his enlistment portrait, Private Jones sits in

front of a painted background of the Union standard waving above his left shoulder, legs crossed, clasping his left fist around the hilt of his saber and resting his right hand on his right knee. The framed half-length portrait was likely, possibly, an ambrotype. We don't know for sure because the original does not survive. Although he could not have known it at the time, the testament and the likeness would together become defining elements in narrating his life story. In many respects, Jones's portrait was like thousands of others in the early years of the American Civil War. We can imagine that it sat on an intimate table during his years of absence, or perhaps on a proud mantle. The small portrait could have been tucked into his wife Lola's hand when pangs of fear or separation trembled in her breast and cradled by his toddling son during bedtime prayers. The portrait was ordinary, familiar, common. But unlike thousands of others just like it in almost every way, this likeness is remembered because of the ways it was both preserved and displayed after the war. In September 1899, 35 years after he was mustered after the Union army, Jones secured a copyright of his likeness, now a print of the original and titled "A Testament." What was the testimony of this commonplace likeness? The print is not simply a reproduction of the original portrait but rather an orchestrated composition in which Jones's uniformed likeness is surrounded by a tattered New Testament and two discharged bullets. In 1899 Jones was still living, so why did the print incorporate his enlistment portrait rather than a more recent likeness? In a word, the portrait was a relic that brokered an immaterial past with the perceptible present. If Molly Stillwell's likeness brought her to the tips of William's fingers as he contemplated his demise in the unfolding pageantry of a providential war, Walter Jones invested his own likeness with the capacity to disclose a previous moment of time into the present. As much as the likeness worked to document his participation in the war for later beholders who gazed upon the young soldier, the portrait was also a conduit of Jones's former self, a tactile proxy of now discarnate flesh. Not unlike spirit pictures, which would grow in popularity in the years after the war, or post-mortems which had by then been common for decades, Jones's enlistment portrait brought to the tips of one's finger a form that had long since expired. The accompanying captured printed below the assembled artifacts told how Jones carried this little Testament in my blouse pocket during the war and how in two battles it saved my life from bullets, once in Cedar Creek in 1864, the other at Appomattox in 1865. Jones loved to tell the story of the Testament and there is little doubt that the title of the composition referred in his mind to the tattered scriptures. But the Bible did not stand alone, in "A Testament," Jones's portrait, the disfigured scriptures and the mangled bullets all worked together to authenticate the soldier's narrative of divine intervention through the mechanism of print photography. In short, the photograph had become Jones's new Testament. The trope of Bibles and bullets was ubiquitous among veterans of the Civil War. So much so that it was repeatedly lampooned in Mark Twain's story of the lucky bullet that saved him from being struck by a Bible on an afternoon stroll. But Jones was confident enough in the testimony of his experience that he authored a book that recorded his story. The book was swallowed and purged by the Library of Congress in the early twentieth-century and the testament gifted from his stepmother was destroyed by fire in the 1960s. All that remains is the photograph. What is more, as both an orchestrated composition of several objects and as an object in its own right, a testament spirals out from

a personal narrative to frame an intersection of religion, material practice, and national identity. In 1899 as the U.S. had pivoted toward new foreign policies that folded militaristic objectives with missionary benevolence, Walter Jones curated his own exhibit of divine intervention in the affairs of an American soldier. Then he gave it to the world. There are a smattering of records of people receiving this gift, but for the most part, a testament is a paradigmatic archival fragment. Still, the curated assembly of artifacts provides an interpretive toehold into the imaginative landscapes and material practices in which photographs existed. For nineteenth-century Americans, nationhood was a material project. Since the early republic, Americans had collected and treasured a range of material fragments, from clippings of presidents's hair to chippings of Plymouth rock to scraps of fabric to splinters of coffins, desks, and tree branches that were all considered within the broad category of relics, a term which until the turn of the century was broadly defined as remains. Whether intimate or public, accepted in private moments or brazenly captured, relics were material fragments that linked the past, however proximate to the present. The battlefields of the American Civil War were littered with such relics. Soldiers and civilians alike picked through these remains, classifying them in different ways, souvenirs, trophies, curiosities, mementos. Other times relics found their beholder; locks of hair, uniform buttons, last letters, and fatal bullets were commonly sent to survivors of fallen soldiers. Bibles, bullets, and photographs were among the most commonly retrieved relics of the war. William Stillwell recovered. His verb was captured, two Bibles, sending one home to his children and keeping the other for himself. And the ambrotype of three children found on a deceased soldier at Gettysburg, later identified as Amos Humiston, was but the most publicized example of enumerable instances of these treasured likenesses falling in fields of battle. Like untold thousands of other relics from the American Civil War, Walter Jones invested the material remains of his experience with a power to disclose the past into the present, leaving personal history with the pageantry of the nation, which in turn was but a refraction of sacred history. For Jones, the Testament gifted from his stepmother was marshaled less for what the tattered pages said than for what they did. They visually rendered and materially disclosed a specific moment in time into an unfolding present and alongside the mangled bullets and enlistment portrait, bore witness to the projectile's intended purpose. Placed alongside troves of other battlefield remains, a testament presumed the reliquary capacity of the photograph to materialize his redemption. This is my body, this is my unspilled blood, alongside that of the nation's on the brink of yet another war. Now of course the specter of national unity between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War and then the Philippine-American War at the turn of the century was in large measure National mythology. America in the late nineteenth-century was deeply divided, racially, regionally, religiously, socially, economically, and photography contributed a great deal epistemic grist to this representational mill. By the 1890s for instance, visual campaigns of American empire that prevailed in souvenir tours of the Columbian expedition in Chicago and scientific journals such as National Geographic and that informed popular coverage of U.S. interventions in Cuba and later the Philippines, were reflected in illustrated studies of American cities, missionary periodicals, and by 1895, mass produced photographic Bibles. We will return to these in just a moment. The camera was

conscripted in each of these cases to capture an unmediated record of racial superiority – direct proof of a natural order, worked out through a providential design favoring the American experiment. Biblical imaginaries, in short, were part of a broader landscape of American empire worked out through photographic technologies.

When James Weidemann Leigh, a Methodist minister, who ping-ponged between Atlanta and St. Louis in the 1890s and early 1900s wrote the preface to a new edition of the Bible that was illustrated with half-tone prints from plates made by the American landscape photographer, Robert Edward Mather Bain, he gushed about the quote, “absolutely perfect record of the camera” and echoed the contemporaries with equally superlative adulations for the instrument that quote, “makes the Bible real.” Influenced both by the political valences in American landscape painting and the growing field of Biblical geography, photographically illustrated Bibles at the end of the century prioritized landscapes. In so doing, however, publishers and commentators deployed contemporary inhabitants of Palestine as historical relics that provided visual evidence of an unchanging holy land that could therefore be captured by the camera and used to illustrate the Bible. They in other words employed a visual vocabulary consistent with epistemics of empire, capturing, cataloging, evaluating, dismissing, to conscript the photographic contemporary in the service of, in their words, “making the Bible real.” James Leigh and other, mostly Protestant, ministers who led various photographic tours of the holy land at the turn of the century frequently marveled at the camera’s ability to make the Bible real. But they seldom acknowledge the people who frequently, seemingly deliberately, populated their landscapes. But as visual campaigns of racially and religiously charged superiority were smuggled into American Bibles through clandestine colonialist metrics at the end of the century, American Bibles had by then long already been sites where the knotted threads of race and nation were smuggled into sacred history, unwittingly perhaps, under the guise of family pictures. In 1862, again 1862, the Saturday evening post described a family Bible that has been published in which adjacent to the pages usually bound in the book for the registration of births, deaths, etc, are, arranged in sheets, any convenient number of card cases in which may be inserted the photographs of the different members of the family. By the American Civil War, this notice suggests, Bibles had become photograph albums. This trend was possible in part because of new developments in photographic technology that made paper prints commercially viable. This album page is from a canvassing Bible used by sales agents to procure subscriptions in the 1880s. But the practice of preserving family portraits in Bibles was more than a feat of technology. The practice also spoke to the cultural operations of photographic representation and often enough, these mechanisms of representation were wrapped up in negotiations of belonging and exclusion bartered through discourses of lineage. Bible galleries such as this one, to cut to the chase, can teach us something about the politics of race and national belonging in nineteenth-century America. Alongside registries and mementos tucked into the pages of Bibles, photographs were part of an archive of artifacts that contributed to a form of memory work by entangling sacred history with the rather inglorious human predicament of birth, procreation, and death. In addition to the role of Bibles as familial memory closets, Biblical

reading practices were also sources of racialization through narratives of dissent, as the influential 1854 study by Josiah Nott and George Gliddon "Types of Mankind" demonstrate. In this study, Gliddon glacially [unclear] Genesis 10 as a quote "ethnological chart" that maps onto a genealogical table, creating a religio-racial model of dissent in which among other conclusions, quote "negroes are excluded from the Old Testament." Gliddon's defense of Biblical ethnography can be handily dismissed as analytically suspect even within its own historical milieu of antebellum America. But the interpretive practice of authenticating racial politics by locating their origin and meaning in Biblical text was far more pervasive than the rather limited reach of academic monographs. The illuminating content of family Bibles frequently interwove racial and religious categories, as this chart from the extensive front matter to a family Bible demonstrates. And perhaps more subtly, [unclear] genealogy also freighted religiously charged racial and cultural classifications under the aegis of ancestry. While speaking to different constituencies and often enough arriving at different conclusions, each of these cultural practices, Biblical ethnography, album curation, and amateur genealogy was bolstered by claims to empirical technique. For his part, Gliddon minced no words, quote, "such is our conclusion, science and reason confirm it, tenth Genesis proves it." Unlike other modes of visual representation, photographic technology enabled ethnologists, law enforcement agencies, and studio photographers to manufacture visual records of belonging, that were woven into narratives of destiny and progress under this authorizing discourse of technological empiricism.

Now let's turn to a specific family Bible to pull on these threads. Enoch Look Hemenway and Clara Davis were married in Framingham, Massachusetts in on April 22nd, 1863. Less than four years later Clara had given birth to two sons, Seth Carlton and Harry Windsor. In September 1876, more than 11 years after Harry was born, Clara gave birth to her only surviving daughter, Bertha. The Hemenway's family history was recorded in an 1877 edition of the latest illustrated family Bible. In addition to hundreds of pages of historical and scientific illumination and nearly 2,000 illustrative engraving on steel, wood, and in colors, the title page boasted, the Bible contained a gallery for sixteen family portraits just inside the back cover. Nearly 150 years later, a total of six photographs of Seth, Clara, Harry, and Bertha remain. In addition to the portraits, other artifacts in this Bible suggest how it was used as an archive of familial descent, that is, a narrative device that shapes the ways in which the family's lineage would be remembered. What this Bible demonstrates most clearly however, are the racialized implications at work in these materialized memories. Tucked inside the front cover of the Bible are a landscape photograph of Chester, Massachusetts with ballpoint markings identifying two ancestral residences. A photograph of a grown Bertha with her pupils from the turn of the century, a two page ancestral chart for six generations, and a certificate recognizing Bertha's membership in the Detroit colony of the National Society of New England Women. Alongside other so called heritage organizations that represent strictly New England heritage, strictly New England lineage membership to the Detroit colony was conferred by quote, "virtue of her New England ancestry" upon demonstrating either one's own New England nativity or that of her husband or parents. Bertha's membership in the National Society of New England Women

was not conferred until 1928, but the society itself was established in 1895 when as society journalist, E. Marguerite Lindley, explained, “citizens from foreign countries are becoming nationalized in such large numbers that we of the old New England stock need to band together in a common fraternity in order to preserve those grand old days of which we are so justly proud.” With a stated purpose to perpetuate the memory of our glorious ancestry, the Society of New England Women shared with other hereditary societies formed in the late 19th century, an interest in genealogical pursuits aimed at securing America’s racial stock, a thinly euphemism for white, through a careful inventory of ancestral characteristics. As collective archives of family records, photographs, and ephemera, family Bibles, such as that one inherited and curated by Bertha Hemenway, wove the racially charged practice of constructing family lineage into the Biblical pageantry of redemption. The archival context of the family Bible lends some interpretive insight to the photographs that came to be common within its pages, but so to does the broader cultural obsession with photograph albums and here too, the connections to metrics of descent were quickly promoted. The earliest clues to a deliberate association between Bibles and photograph albums come from D. Appleton & Company of New York in December of 1861: Advertising the complete and extensive assortment of albums, Appleton noted that the newly popularized albums in their stores presented at once a mild form of hero worship and an illustrated book of genealogy and speculated that “it does duty for a living hagiology and it will supersede the first leaf of the family Bible.” Photo albums never replaced Bibles and yet Appleton’s predictions nevertheless poignantly conveyed sensibilities gaining currency in the second half of the nineteenth-century. The camera was the new pen that provided a living hagiology wherein likenesses were animated surrogates rather than chemical traces in place of lifeless scribbles. But how did albums condition visual strategies of race? Let me provide one brief example: Here are three fundraising photographs of children from an album of card portraits compiled in the 1860’s and 1870’s. Recently freed from enslavement by Union forces in New Orleans, the children in these card photographs, Charles Taylor, Rebecca Huger, and Rosina Downs were on a tour of Northern photographic studios, coordinated by the American Missionary Association and the National Freedman’s Relief Organization during the winter of 1863-1864 to raise money for Freedmen schools through abolitionist support. In an 1864 letter published in Harper’s Weekly, C.C. Lee of the Freedman’s Bureau described Rebecca as an 11 year old who “to all appearances is perfectly white, her complexion, hair, and features show not the slightest trace of negro blood” and concluded of 8 year old Charlie that “three out of five boys in any school in New York are darker than he.” That the creators of this album, which included images of Henry Ward Beecher among others as well, that the creators of this album chose to include the photographs of Charlie and Rebecca, children who are marked as visibly white and contextually black, speaks to the albums toying with racialized sensibilities and systems of racial classification. On the one hand, in other words, despite appearances, racial classifications were defined by lineage. But on the other hand, photograph albums could upset that logic by replacing written transcriptions with visual signifiers, a cultural practice that upset anyone with a stake in maintaining racial purity. Within the archival context of photograph albums, family pictures were inevitably wrapped up in narratives of race and nation. National and racial identities

were ciphered not in isolated portraits but through economies of exchange and the compilation of visual narratives. Publications on the order of Frances Galton's life history album, first published in 1883, and anthropometric catalogues at Universities and other institutions for instances, encouraged individuals and institutions to maintain photographic records of development not only for one's own amusement or benefit but also because such a document, in Galton's words, will be of great value to your family and descendants. Such directives tellingly resemble practices that had been at work in Bible galleries for nearly two decades. Although not systematically executed in the way that Galton advised, family Bible portrait albums frequently included multiple photographs of its members at various stages in life, effectively collapsing Galton's record of biological experience into a Biblical frame. Bible portrait galleries were, in short, spaces where individual likenesses became touchstones for ancestral legacies, which were in turn woven into narratives of Biblical lineage and national heritage.

By way of conclusion, it is fair enough to ask directly how these three fragments, Molly Stillwell's likeness, Walter Jones's enlistment photograph, and the Hemenway's family Bible, contribute to the study of religion, race, and nation in American history. Now attention to these triangulated categories of analysis is nothing new. So what does this project contribute to an already existing body of work? In brief, *A Communion of Shadows*, the larger book project from which this talk derives, asserts that over the course of the nineteenth century, photography became indispensable to American life and that histories of American religion can no longer overlook the influences that photography had on material landscapes, quotidian practices and religious sensibilities. It then goes further to assert that analysis of these influences cannot be limited to a predefined arena of religion, but rather must take into account overlapping and intersecting habits of perception and recognition that unmoored photographs and practices of photographic beholding from any specific cultural arena. It argues that isolating religion apart from entertainment, science, fine art, law, territorial expeditions, or other contexts, from the outset distorts the prismatic role that photography played in nineteenth century American life. And so doing this project brings new insights to establish new modes of historical inquiry and pushes the field to consider visual technologies as primary rather than subordinate historical sources. The *Communion of Shadows* is an apt metaphor that cuts across complementary analytics that my book contributes to the study of religion and American history. On the most obvious surface level, it refers to the materials that constitute my archive. An advertising jingle for daguerreotypes in the 1840's and 1850's counseled Americans to "secure the shadow ere the substance fade." And in his 1864 *History of Photography in the United States*, the highly repeated Philadelphia photographer, Marcus Aurelius Root, reflected on the technological innovations of the previous decades, the telegraph, steam power, and photography in particular, and concluded that what bound these developments in common purpose was that they "served to bring the individuals of our race, however widely dissevered by material distances, into more or less proximity and community with each other. Thus on the first level on analysis, photographs are material artifacts that help us to think differently about nineteenth century social and cultural networks, networks in which religious

sensibilities were both animated and articulated. But this leads us to a second level of analysis. Photographs were systems of representation in which cultural categories and power structures were materialized, rendered accessible to the senses if only for fleeting moments of encounter. They were approached as documentary evidence of the very realities that the visual exchange created. Racial classifications, national aspirations, and religious imaginations may not have been coterminous with the perceptual habits conditioned by photography, but they each gained currency through that exchange. The Communion of Shadows then in this sense refers to the haunting presences and ghostly matters of social, political, and epistemic constellations of power, coded within the commonplace and the visual.

William Stillwell's letters to his wife, Molly, Walter Jones's choreographed prints, a Testament, and Enoch and Clara Hemenway's family Bible each demonstrates the photographs were intimate objects suspended in knotted webs of practice, meaning, and aspiration that dismissed convenient cultural compartmentalization. As seamlessly as William transitioned from regimental movement to scriptural interpretation to farming duties to fatherly affection in his letters to Molly, so too could the visual field of a studio portrait traverse seemingly distinct but truly entangled interpretive directives. Informed attention to the material life of photography is, in sum, a necessary first step to approaching this Communion of Shadows. Thank you.

Martha A. Sandweiss

Great, thank you so much Rachel. I have to say that Leigh's kind introduction to me failed to note that my education actually began right here at Washington University in nursery school and it continued, and I am going to date myself here, with weekly Saturday night trips during high school to flirt about the periphery of the riots at the long gone ROTC building on Big Bend. So I really learned everything you need to know in life right here: how to take a nap and how not to get caught with a rock in your hand. So it's a pleasure to be back and I want to thank Leigh Schmidt and Sheri Pena for helping to organize my visit and I especially want to thank Rachel for that wonderful and provocative talk. I'm so happy to get a glimpse of your big book project. Now it's always a challenge to comment on a talk that is part of a larger piece of writing because the commentator always runs the risk of pushing the author to think about something she's already thought about or to engage with ideas that she's already considered. But I'm going to plunge in anyway. So, Rachel seeks to show that nineteenth-century photographs should be of interest to historians of religion not simply as illustrations but as primary sources that can help us get at topics of central importance to the discipline of religious history and American history in general. And I'm certainly very sympathetic with that idea; I have long urged my American History colleagues to consider photographs as primary sources for the study of the American past. So I am happy to welcome Rachel to the tiny team of people who actually care about these things and I think that by expanding the discussion of photographic history to embrace the history of religion, she's really bringing a new perspective to the topic – and a much needed

perspective. So, imagining that this talk is a précis of your larger project, I want to talk about a few ideas you might consider as you think about expanding it for a book. Three ideas: One, how you can foreground religion in your discussion, two, how some of the questions you engage might be put into a broader historical context, and three, how you might address what seems to be the very Protestant-centric focus of your argument, and think about either owning up to it or being more explicitly comparative in your thinking.

So, first point, the point about foregrounding religion. Rachel argues, at the end of her paper, that we shouldn't isolate religion from entertainment, science, fine arts, legal, territorial expeditions, or other context, that help us understand the role photography played in nineteenth century America. Fair enough, good point. But it sounds like the point of someone who wants to demonstrate the importance of religious history by linking it to other disciplines, and I have to say, that as an American historian, and as a historian of American photography more generally, what's actually so new and exciting about Rachel's work *is* that it comes from a specific discipline, the discipline of religious history. So I actually push you, Rachel, to be bold about making claims for your discipline. What are the big, religion driven ideas that you bring to the study of photographs that generalists like me would never think to frame and couldn't begin to answer? I would say don't shy away from those questions because you are uniquely qualified to tackle them and sort them out and explain them to the rest of us. Now to a certain degree, everyone who uses photographs to study the past confronts the same set of questions, and I'll put it really simply: photographs fix time, but history is dynamic. I'm always dealing with the theoretical problems that grow out of that one. But I think Rachel has to think about something that complicates that messy relationship even further. She has to think about religious faith. Faith is dynamic. It mutates over time and it takes particular form in the lived experience of an individual life. So Rachel has to address questions that other cultural historians do not. For example, how can we think about the relationship between a still photograph and a dynamic kind of faith? And to the extent that faith *may* be made visible through actions or words, but also may be interior and invisible, are there certain kinds of questions that photographs help us address but other kinds of questions that photographs can't possibly help us understand? So I'd push Rachel on this point to be bold, to tell us explicitly how approaching images from the perspective of a historian of religion adds something to the readings a different sort of scholar might have. For example, the practice of carrying a photograph of a loved one into battle does not seem to me necessarily or explicitly religious, so when Rachel brings the perspective of a religious scholar to that first image she spoke about, or that missing image she spoke about, what are the new kinds of questions and insights she can bring to our understanding of what might, I think to many of us, really seem a secular practice. So that's the first point; I would encourage her to foreground religion and the specific disciplinary concerns of religious history, because I think to the extent that this is a book about religion and photography and not just another general cultural history book, it's really all the stronger, and more exciting to all of us.

Second big point – While I’d hope to see the religious history discipline foregrounded throughout, I think Rachel is absolutely right to argue that the issues she’s exploring fit into broader cultural and historical contexts. Now I’m going to sound self-contradictory here; I’m first encouraging her to think narrowly in foregrounding her religious history discipline and now I’m going to encourage her to think more broadly. I think what I really want to do is to push you to articulate the complementary tensions between the disciplinarily specific and the broader cultural approach to your photographic subjects. Brief example, if you can remember that collaged image of Walter Jones with the bullets and the Bible. I actually don’t know what that is, it looks like a page from a book – is it a page from the book? It’s hard to tell what it is from the caption. I have to say that what intrigues me for all your wonderful explication of the Testament and the bullets, is actually the caption. And I’m struck by the way that caption opens, where Jones says, “I am not a Hobson or a Dewey.” So he’s making very specific references there to heroes of the Spanish-American war, and in that regard, I think he’s trying to insert himself into a larger conversation about the meanings of military heroism, you know, he doth protest too much – ‘he is not,’ but of course, he wants us to associate himself with these people, and inserting himself also into a larger historical argument about the ties that bind soldiers across generations and across wars in American history, and what really intrigues me about the picture is that those associations usually work the other direction, that is, during the Mexican-American war, many soldiers evoke the imagery of the revolutionary war heroes – they are looking backwards, but here’s Jones, peculiarly and interestingly, looking forward and associating himself with people who prove themselves four decades, three decades afterwards. So yes, I do think there is a religious context for that photograph, but I also think that there’s another one, drawn from ideas about military heroism, and his heroism is simply proved by the fact of his survival of course, larger arguments about American nationalism and so forth. So I think what’s really interesting here is the way the set of religious questions you pose intersects with the quite secular questions that someone like me might pose coming in and being intrigued by the caption. Now I think the Bible galleries or albums provide an even richer example for this point about how valuable it can be to push out into these broader historical contexts. These albums are fascinating and I have to confess I’ve never heard of them or never seen them before, so thank you, and I think they invite our consideration in three broader historical contexts: larger arguments about scientific racism, the ongoing debates about the meaning of evolution, and the shifting racial landscape of the United States in the immediate aftermath of emancipation. Rachel hints at all of these, and I agree, these are three stories that bear much further investigation. So first the connection to scientific racism – it certainly makes sense that the Bible, with all of those ‘begats, begats, begats’ should be a place where people should use photographs to document their own family heritage. Now I was wondering, were these Bibles usually Old Testaments, New Testaments, or book that combine them both, because as you suggested Rachel, in your reference to the work by Josiah Nott and George Gliddon, the Bible became a flashpoint for scientific racists in the nineteenth century. The debates really went well beyond their argument about Genesis 10 and whether the descendants of Noah included ‘negroes.’ So Nott and Gliddon were believers in polygenesis, the idea that God created not one man, from which we all descend,

but multiple men of distinctly different races. And they followed on the heels of people like the nineteenth century Philadelphia, well, 'anthropologist,' Samuel George Morton, who argued that the measurements of the skulls of people of different races, conclusively proved that the races were not related, and surprise, surprise, he conclusively 'proved' that white people had bigger skulls and were smarter. Now, how could that story of multiple creations square with the story of Adam and Eve? The polygenesists found their way to talk around it of course, and obviously that's one of the great things about the Bible – it's an enormously elastic text. But the centrality of the Genesis story to their conversation about the origin of the races, does make me wonder about those Bible photo galleries that were intended to fix one's racial heritage, and I really wanted to know whether they end up in books that include the story of the Garden of Eden, or not; we can talk about that. Second is the context of evolution because the emergence of these Bible galleries as a genre in the early 1860s is following immediately upon the heels of Darwin's 1859 publication on the *Origin of Species*. And Darwin's theory of evolution of course directly challenges the story of the Garden of Eden but it also challenges the story of polygenesis because Darwin's argument is of course pointing toward the idea that there is a common origin for man. Now, you took out of this talk, a fantastic image of a lithographed family tree, that I guess went with the family Bible, and Rachel has done some interesting work on how family lineage can be visualized; you can visualize the family trees here. But I think these family trees take on such an interesting meaning and context against the backdrop of Darwinism, because think about it for a moment, I think all of you can probably conjure up images that came out of Darwin's ideas, you can probably all see that image of the ape walking across the page and slowing standing more upright until he becomes a man, and you can perhaps visualize some of the family trees that illustrated Darwin with apes branching into different kinds of peoples. I love thinking about the family trees that are in other parts of your work in conversation with these explicitly Darwinian images, it's fascinating. The third context for those family Bibles is of course, emancipation and the emergence of the Jim Crow laws, because if the emergence of these family Bibles in the 1860s suggests possible connections to the debates about Darwin and the evolution, we might think about what it means for them to emerge on the eve of emancipation and to thrive in its wake. How can we think about these albums in the context of Reconstruction and the emergence of Jim Crow segregation laws in the Deep South? Well until 1865 when slavery ends, a host of laws in the slave holding states dictated exactly how one could treat, or mistreat, a person who was legally the property of another. But once the slaves were freed, and the 13th amendment ended slavery in a legal and constitutional way, how could whites continue to reinforce the racial hierarchy that characterized American society? If they could not define people by their legal status, they would seek to do it another way, and they did it by defining race. The laws that spring up in the South after the collapse of Reconstruction sought to make one's status as a Black person very, very hard to escape. And the laws effectively said that if just one of your eight great-grandparents was Black, you were Black, and you could be compelled to ride in the segregated train cars. It didn't matter what you looked like; family heritage was all. And that that of course was what the Supreme Court upheld in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* as it declared that separate was equal. Now these racial laws, which reached their absurd apogee

in the 1890 census that designated People of Color as Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, or Octoroon, these racial laws existed in uneasy tension with the kinds of photographs that Rachel shows us from the family Bible albums. The photographs in concert with the other kinds of genealogical documentations such as she showed us, were meant to prove family racial identity. But as those remarkable photographs of the three white-looking enslaved children, or formerly enslaved children showed us, skin color did not always track one's family lineage. If the Southern races could have counted on the color of one's skin to prove one's racial identity, they wouldn't have needed all those laws. So yes, photographs prove your racial identity, but then, as you suggest in the picture of the enslaved children, they might not. Americans were really anxious about that. And I think these Bible albums engage a very complicated set of ideas coming from both religious culture as well as secular culture and I'm so glad you are exploring that. So, scientific racism, evolution, post-emancipation racial laws, these are all really rich contexts for exploring these family albums, and Rachel's there.

So let me just switch gears and briefly throw out my third and finally topic here. How to acknowledge and address the implicit idea here that this is largely a story devolving around American Protestantism. I think Rachel has two possible strategies here, and surely she's picked one already. She can just gesture towards other religious stories and explain why she is focusing on this one, or she can get really brave and ambitious and be comparative. Now for the sake of conversation, let's just ask, what other kinds of photographic evidence exist that might help us think more comparatively if that were the direction we were going to go. In Northern New Mexico, where I spend a lot of time, there's a very rich tradition of religious imagery, Catholic of course. Inexpensive lithographs, and later chromolithographs, of Saints were common by the early nineteenth century. They came into New Mexico up from Mexico City, and these prints became part of domestic shrines in people's homes. Now later in the nineteenth century, once photography is invented, family photographs find their way into those shrines alongside these older chromolithographic prints. And in more public sites, like churches, or pilgrimage sites, family photographs likewise get left behind by pilgrims next to the painted retablos, the paintings on tin that people would leave behind. And this just makes me wonder, whether someone interested in Hispanic Catholicism might ask a different set of questions about the almost talismanic power of family photographs, a different set of questions than Rachel does as she explores their use in the Civil war in a context that is implicitly Protestant. Now once I started thinking about this paper I started going off in all sorts of directions, thinking about other kinds of photographs that might play into a study like this, if not by Rachel, by someone else. And I began thinking about Mormonism, that most American of nineteenth century faiths. And there actually I am not sure, but there are some people in this room who could contribute more to this conversation. Certainly the Mormon faith puts an enormous emphasis on the connection to one's ancestors, but until 1890, polygamy was practiced by a significant minority within the Mormon culture area despite anti-polygamy rulings by Congress in 1862 and the Supreme Court in 1879, it was not officially renounced as a practice until 1890 as a condition of Utah joining the Union. Now, pictorial family trees, I don't think, would have been exactly what

polygamous families would have wanted to circulate. And it strikes me then, that the family trees of non-polygamous families would have had a particular valence, political valence, that they wouldn't have had in a Protestant culture area or a Catholic culture area. And, Rachel, I don't know if you've ever seen these photographs, but the weirdest photographs from nineteenth century Utah that I've seen are, I don't know the word for them, I'm going to call them "baby bumper crop pictures" and they are photographs, they are collaged photographs with maybe a hundred, little, smiley [unclear] white babies pasted into a sky, or a field of flowers, or something like that. And you gave me a new way to think about those photographs. There, it seems to me, that people are celebrating the importance of family, and they found a way to do it without discussing lineage, which in an area like that, might have seemed problematic, or at least visually problematic, so thank you for that. Now photography becomes a ubiquitous part of late nineteenth century American culture and there's any number of other places one could go to think comparatively about different nineteenth century American religious practices and photography. We could look at the family photo albums of families fleeing religious persecution in Europe. We could look at the albums of German-Jewish families, for example, fleeing here in the 1850s. We might look at the different religious practices involving photographs that are imbedded in gravestones. I have seen those in Eastern European cemeteries and the Rocky Mountains. We could look to somewhere like Alaska, where some anthropologists noted the ways in which nineteenth century photographs, many produced for the tourist trade, were incorporated into Northwest coast Indian ceremonials. So there's any number of places one could go if one wanted to construct a more comparative look. And I'm not necessarily encouraging you to do that, that would be an enormous task, but I think it might be worth contextualizing your argument and suggesting that you were tracing one practices, in a nation where there were many.

So I think I am going to stop there, with three big points: foregrounding religion, thinking more broadly about context, or expanding those contexts, and dealing with the challenge of comparative practices. It's really a rich and wonderful project and you've given me so much to think about and I'm going to shut up and hope that all of you have interesting things to say as well.

Rachel McBride Lindsey

Thank you so much, Marty, this is incredibly helpful, insightful. Just a quick attempt to respond very briefly, and we can talk later, and I would love to hear you expand more on some of these points. But the question about foregrounding religion, so I think I am going to gesture to the first and third points that you made, because they are on my mind right now. I don't intend to make religion a barnacle on American history, that's not the way I imagined this, but I am absolutely hearing you when you say that's how that could be read, so I will certainly work toward making those arguments more explicit about what is going on here from the vantage of religion, both the discipline and the religious practice. As far as the third point you make, is a point that has plagued this project since it was a dissertation. Do I call it

religion when I'm really thinking about Protestants? And I think that I do have some sort of footing for that in that the discipline of religion gives me some footholds there, but absolutely. SO thinking about, I am not going to make this a comparative project, but there are certainly any number of examples that I could bring in to demonstrate why this is not comparative. And I think that the point I want to make in thinking about this material from the Protestant perspective is that oftentimes, studies of visual culture and religion, sort of use Catholicism, Mormonism, as sort of *the* visual stories of American religion, and part of what I am saying that Protestants have a very deep, modern history with visuality and materiality as well, so what does that mean when we think about these questions directly. That's a very weak attempt to address these very insightful questions, but I look forward, and thank you very much.