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Linda Dowling. Charles Eliot Norton: The Art of Reform in Nineteenth-Century America.

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book is a beautifully written and meticulously researched work that traces three stages of the historiography of the “Tribe of Ishmael” from the 1870s to the present. But this brief description does not capture the range of Deutsch’s ambitious project, which is not only a history of the eugenics movement but also a history of Orientalism in the United States and a history of upland southerners in the Midwest.

The first stage in America’s fascination with the Ishmaels began when Oscar McCulloch, a Congregationalist minister, armchair Orientalist, and proponent of the Social Gospel in Indiana, discovered a number of (supposedly) related families in the slums of Indianapolis whose high rates of unemployment, crime, and degeneracy were, he believed, congenital. “The Tribe of Ishmael: A Study in Social Degradation,” McCulloch’s article in the 1888 *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction*, alerted the American public that this group of itinerant, atavistic savages was living in the heart of darkest Indianapolis, and the Ishmaels, like the Jukes and the Kallikaks, entered the lexicon as a catchphrase for the undeserving poor in Gilded-Age America.

We learn from Deutsch that the Ishmaels were indeed one of many pauper families in Indianapolis in the nineteenth century; he shows that McCulloch chose to refer to the entire underclass of that city as “the Tribe of Ishmael” in order to appeal “to the contemporary craze for things Oriental while still exploiting overtly negative stereotypes of Islam” (p. 54). Indeed, throughout the book Deutsch successfully demonstrates that “each stage of the Tribe of Ishmael’s story corresponds to a different phase in [the] fascinating but largely unwritten history of American Orientalism” (p. 14).

The public perception of poor people in the United States entered a second phase in the 1920s when eugenicists like Harry H. Laughlin and Arthur Estabrook of the Eugenics Records Office manipulated the Muslim-sounding surname of the Ishmaels in order to transform the cacogenic family into a symbol of the need for immigration restriction, anti-miscegenation legislation, and widespread sterilization. The eugenicists continually argued that the Ishmael family’s pauperism, criminality, and licentiousness were due to their inferior germ plasm, which caused inherited feeble-mindedness. It is one of Deutsch’s great coups that he is able to prove that the Ishmaels were, in fact, descended from hard-working, patriotic, upland southerners who were simply doing their best to survive during an era of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Deutsch persuasively concludes that it was their poverty and lack of education, “rather than any genetic predisposition toward criminality, wandering, or feeble-mindedness, [that explain] the . . . behaviors that became associated with the so-called Tribe of Ishmael” (p. 199).

The Ishmaels entered a third—and thoroughly unexpected—stage in the wake of the Black Power movement, when a white minister named Hugo Leaming (who later joined an African American Islamic temple) published a chapter entitled “The Ben Ishmael Tribe:

A Fugitive ‘Nation’ of the Old Northwest” in *The Ethnic Frontier: Group Survival in Chicago and the Midwest* (1977), in which he claimed that the Ishmaels were actually descended from escaped slaves who had established the first Muslim community in the United States. Leaming argued, for example, that the sexual promiscuity of some of the Ishmaels was not a mark of wantonness but rather a sign of polygamy, a practice descended from Islamic tradition. Again, Deutsch’s historical detective work reveals that Leaming’s widely repeated and influential version was based on little more than fantasy and wishful thinking. And that, of course, is the point of Deutsch’s book: every generation of American scholars has projected its own ideological and psychological needs and fantasies onto the Ishmaels, a group of “families” who never even existed as a family and were never “degenerate,” “cacogenic,” or Islamic.

The trope that social scientists see what they want to see has appeared in many recent books on the eugenics movement, including my biography of the leader of the eugenics movement: *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (2009). Like Deutsch, I also argue that the eugenicists were scientific-minded reformers who, like wildlife managers, believed that the good of the individual was subservient to the good of society and thus sought to use the power of the state to bring about the ultimate progressive reform: regulating human evolution. It is fitting, therefore, that Deutsch concludes his wide-ranging book with a scathing indictment of the eugenicists. While recognizing that they “possessed good intentions—at least in their own eyes—when they wrote about the Tribe of Ishmael,” he notes the damning irony that from our modern perspective “it is the eugenicists themselves, not the Ishmaels . . . or any of the other supposedly cacogenic groups, who appear to us like an antisocial tribe that once threatened the fabric of the United States” (pp. 203–204).

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LINDA DOWLING. *Charles Eliot Norton: The Art of Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies.) Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, for the University of New Hampshire Press. 2007. Pp. xxi, 221. \$39.95.

In this book Linda Dowling provides a revisionist portrait of Charles Eliot Norton, best known as the first professor of fine arts at Harvard University, as an impassioned reformer. What is fascinating about Dowling’s account is not so much that she refutes the caricature of Norton that first emerged during the Progressive era, summarized as a “carping, hypocritical, neurasthenic elitist” (p. 143), as that she challenges present-day readers to assess his actions and writings in light of his entire life’s work rather than his later public reputation. For this reason, Dowling focuses her attention on the period before Norton’s Harvard appoint-

ment in 1874. Her book is not a biography—she acknowledges the groundbreaking work of James Turner's *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* (1999) in this respect—so much as an intellectual history of Norton and the strain of nineteenth-century liberal thought that he represents.

In order to establish Norton's lifelong commitment to reform, Dowling prefaces this book with a discussion of his sustained public criticism of the Spanish-American War and of U.S. imperialism. She argues that Norton saw contemporary American foreign policy as a betrayal of the moral and civic ideals underpinning the Union cause during the Civil War. She emphasizes that this position made him reviled by many. The subsequent five chapters go back in time to explore the formative impact of the Civil War on Norton, his religious beliefs, and his participation in Anglo-American debates about the role of culture in civic life.

Dowling analyzes relationships and events that radicalized Norton as well as sources of his disillusionment. Through his direct interactions with John Ruskin and the English Pre-Raphaelite artists during the mid-1850s, Norton discovered a model for an alliance between visual culture and social reform. During the subsequent decade, his roles as a propagandist for the Union and a supporter of the Sanitary Commission provided an outlet for his abolitionist beliefs, to which he was a late convert. Dowling juxtaposes Norton's conviction that Union victory would usher in a higher stage of American civilization with his misgivings about the country's rampant materialism. She also links Norton's crisis of faith, which became pronounced after the premature death of his wife, Susan, to his devotion to artistic beauty as the only source of immortality. The author presents Norton as increasingly out of step by the end of the century, bewildered by American society, wary of the aesthetic movement (with which his ideas about art are often equated), and hardening in his habits and judgments. As Dowling puts it succinctly, Norton, like many of his generation, was "mourning a larger belief about the world that had animated his young manhood and middle age: the idea of progress" (p. 153).

Throughout her nuanced analysis of Norton's thought, Dowling challenges the reductive vision of him as simply a prisoner of his class and the ivory tower, whether in his characterization by Van Wyck Brooks during the 1950s or in the more recent assessment of Louis Menand in *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001). There are a few areas in which Dowling herself seems to perpetuate the myth of Norton, describing without irony his escape from physical discomfort during New England winters to more forgiving climates or recording the simple grace with which Susan Norton entertained at their country home, but her insights into Norton's place in cultural history far outweigh these lapses.

The compactness of Dowling's book makes for a focused profile of Norton; it also leaves the reader eager for more information, for example, about his early work

as a housing reformer in Boston or his advocacy of women's rights. Given that Norton believed in art as a means of social reform, Dowling presents a limited examination of his involvement with art and architecture in the United States, whether as a collector, curator, critic, or educator. The catalogue from a recent exhibition, *The Last Ruskinians: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore, and Their Circle* (2007), and Michael W. Brooks's essay "New England Gothic: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles H. Moore, and Henry Adams" (*Studies in the History of Art* 35 [1990]: 113–125) develop Norton's links with John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites by tracing their American legacies. Future studies could also build on Dowling's portrait of Norton when investigating the institutionalization of culture in Boston during the late nineteenth century.

In summary, Linda Dowling offers a generous reexamination of Charles Eliot Norton, one that both highlights his singular activities as well as the ways in which he was representative of his time, place, and class.

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MORRIS L. DAVIS. *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era*. (Religion, Race, and Ethnicity.) New York: New York University Press. 2008. Pp. viii, 197. \$45.00.

Slavery split the Methodist Church into separate northern and southern organizations even before the Civil War split the nation. From 1869 to 1935, race and racism bedeviled the many attempts of Methodists to reunite their denomination. In this well-crafted monograph, Morris L. Davis provides a racial exegesis of an important part of the process that eventually resulted in the formation of the United Methodist Church. Davis focuses this study on the six meetings of the Joint Commission on Unification that took place between 1916 and 1920.

The "primary question" addressed in this work is, "how did so many of these Methodists understand race and Christianity together?" Davis moves beyond standard narratives that merely describe and lament racism. He attempts "to examine race itself as a historical phenomenon." He explores how, during the Commission's deliberations, the language of racism, power, and white privilege was translated into Christian discourse. Davis believes that previous scholars have put too much emphasis on doctrine and theology. He approaches Methodism primarily as a "cultural category," and for that reason he suggests that his work "has an anthropological or ethnographic feel to it."

In order to craft an acceptable plan for reunion, the Commission had to reconcile divergent regional understandings of the significance of race, but some views were held in common. Neither northern nor southern commissioners ever proposed the integration of local churches. Even the two black commissioners felt obliged to join their forty-eight white colleagues in rejecting "social equality" and denouncing miscegenation.