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BOOK FORUM

Stubborn Entanglements

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Kathryn Gin Lum's *Heathen* is so rich and so vast, I struggled to know where to begin! As I read, I kept being prompted to think back to sources I had encountered in my own research over the years and to think about them in new ways. And so, rather than trying to summarize the book's arguments, I'll aim to preview some of Gin Lum's central interventions by running various bits of sources from my research through the filter of *Heathen*. My hope is that this process conveys what I see as the broad reach and significance of *Heathen*, while also raising a few points for further consideration. I have tried to align my research tidbits with particular threads and claims Gin Lum presents.

Thread #1 – Dismantling the Replacement Narrative

The examples in this thread engage with Gin Lum's nuanced replacement of the replacement narrative – the notion that racial categories superseded religious categories of difference – and her push-back against historians' prioritizing change over continuity. Instead of a linear change over time, a morphing from religious to racial markers of difference, she insists on the simultaneity and interdependence of racial and religious categories as seen through the morphing and enduring nature of heathendom as a means of ordering the world.

My first research tidbit is from 1749 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a decade after the incorporation of the Mohican mission as a traditional New England town, with lands re-granted to Mohican residents in a six mile square township, and a board of selectmen a majority of whom were Native. Oliver Partridge, a member of the Committee on the Affairs of the Indian Lands at Stockbridge, filed his report of meetings with Stockbridge Mohicans in which Native landowners presented their complaints. The Committee heard nine distinct complaints and time and again the committee granted the substance of the complaints, but then decided in favor of the white settlers, usually with some version of the logic that it would be inconvenient for the white settlers to take up land elsewhere.

The second tidbit in this thread relates to the Munsee and Mohicans affiliated with the Moravian Church. In 1763 they were targets of the Paxton vigilantes who were sure the Native Christians were facilitating attacks on white settlers. In 1782, an American militia massacred ninety-six Christian Natives at Gnadenhütten, Ohio, a third of them children. In both instances, Christian Natives were deemed untrustworthy, as much or possibly even more so than the "heathen" non-Christian Natives. Moravian missionary John Heckewelder commented that among many backwoods settlers, destroying Native peoples, "both root and branch" would not only be an act of devotion to God, but would "be the means of averting his [God's] wrath, which they otherwise might incur by suffering them to live" because they saw them as "the same as the

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Canaanites of old, an accursed race, who by God's command were to be destroyed." In these cases of violence against Native Americans, racial identify trumped religious identity. If Heckewelder's observation was accurate, it is particularly interesting that biblical stories of ancient "heathens" were used to create a racial category that enabled settlers to overlook the fact that their victims were in fact Christian co-religionists.

In my prior thinking about these instances, I had somewhat uneasily embraced the replacement theory – it must be that race had become the more important category because of the violence perpetrated by white Christians against their brothers in faith. These instances however, are prime examples of what Gin Lum terms the simultaneity of religious and racial othering. In the Stockbridge example, the Commissioners demonstrated their belief that the Stockbridge Mohicans, despite their Christian status, were not entitled to equal application of the law – one suspects their proximity to "heathen-ness" as well as their racial "otherness" led the Massachusetts officials to some questionable moral calculations that deemed the gift of Christianity to more than compensate for the loss of a bit of land, and that the settler investment of labor, capital, as well as their service as models of Christian civilization more than compensated for the crime of encroaching on Stockbridge Mohican lands. The US Government has done little to improve in equal application of the law, as conveyed in the damning words of US District Judge Royce Lamberth who oversaw the Corbell case against the Department of Interior for mismanagement of funds held by the government in trust for tribes: "After all these years, our government still treats Native American Indians as if they were somehow less than deserving of the respect that should be afforded to everyone in a society where all people are supposed to be equal."

Heathen helps to us see the differences and similarities of the Stockbridge and Moravian cases – one key difference is that the Stockbridge case took place in peace time, while both Moravian incidents were during times of war. During times of security, Native Christians' proximity to heathen-ness rationalized a different system of justice that factored in the gift of Christianity and imagined that recently "heathen" peoples had lesser needs of secured property. During war time, proximity to "heathen-'ness'" and ties to "heathen" relations and tribespeople fueled suspicion – Native Christians were not to be trusted. These wartime incidents helped to solidify the equation of Christian = white, an equation with remarkable staying power, as Gin Lum's own childhood experience, recounted in the *Prologue*, attests.

A final tidbit returns to the neighborhood of Gnadenhütten, Ohio, but in the 1930s. A postcard shows a quaint, neat settlement of log cabins and picket fence and has a sign posted to the side "Schoenbrunn: The First Town in Ohio, begun May 3, 1772 by David Zeisberger." The postcard seems to be a typical 1930s celebration of America's pioneer heritage, but a few things are off: Schoenbrunn was not a white settler town. Its inhabitants were Native Christians. It was not the first town – the town was built on land assigned to the Native Moravian community by Delaware Chief, Netawatwees. His nearby town, now known as Newcomerstown, had more than 700 residents, many living in two story log houses. Schoenbrunn was the first Christian town in Ohio, but the sign doesn't mention Christian or Native, but relies, I believe, on the viewer knowing to connect the dots and infer that "first towns" are by definition white and Christian.

This string of incidents constitutes another set of data points that can be interpreted through the lens of *Heathen*. The intertwining of racial and religious categories of otherness in these cases ultimately helped to usher in the conditions by which, as Gin Lum

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writes in the epilogue: "The figure of the heathen and the vast realm of the heathen world are part of the very sinews that have conflated and upheld Whiteness, Protestantism, and Americanness as superior to the world at large" (275). It is that conflation that fully erased non-white Christians from the Schoenbrunn postcard.

Thread #2: Heathen as Barometer

My second thread of tidbits engages the theme of critique, from chapter 5 "Barometer," in which Gin Lum argues that "heathenness became a barometer of the deficient, against which to both deify and denigrate a genteel Anglo-Protestant norm, and to mark those who belonged and those whose actions made them seem to be a 'foreign element' within the body politic" (130). Gin Lum's evidence falls largely into two categories: examples by which Anglo-Protestants saw heathen-ness even among Christian African-Americans, for instance, and examples of non-Anglo, non-white Christians such as David Walker and Uchiura Kanzo, who used the heathen barometer to find the Anglo-Protestants wanting. Gin Lum might have considered a third category – Anglo-Protestants who used the heathen barometer to critique their own society. From my own research files, I would nominate Thomas Morton and Roger Williams as prime examples of this third category.

Thomas Morton, in his 1637 *New English Canaan*, and Roger Williams, in his 1643 *Key into the Language of America* both parodied New English Christians for their equation of themselves with the New Israel calling attention to how this equation justified the displacement and destruction of Native "Canaanites." Morton agreed that the new world "is nothing inferior to Canaan of Israel, but a kind of parallel to it, in all points." There, however, he found "two sortes of people, the one Christians, the other Infidels, these I found most full of humanity, and more friendly then the other." He continued his critique, assessing Puritan settlers and their peculiar religious tenet that "no person hath any right to Gods creatures, but Gods children onely, who are themselves: and that all others are but usurpers of the Creatures." When Williams was facing banishment for challenging English claims to Native lands in 1635, he preemptively removed to live among the Narragansett. His experiences became the basis for *The Key*, in which he inverted Christian and Heathen, by ventriloquizing a Native man, "We weare no Cloathes, have many Gods,/And yet our Sinnes are less:/ You are Barbarians, Pagans wild,/Your Land's the Wildernesse." Morton and Williams deployed the "heathen" as barometer to show Anglo-Protestant society wanting, but differ from Gin Lum's examples in their positionality. Morton and Williams might be seen as precursors of what Gin Lum deems the "preservers" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, explored in chapter 8, "Preservation and Pushback," though it is not an easy fit.

The final tidbit comes from family papers that came to me as the historian in the family. It is from a letter from the 73 year old mathematician, historian, and fomenter of good trouble, Alice Bache Gould, sent to a group of her girlhood upper-crust Bostonian friends, including my great aunt, Cornelia "Cora" Bowditch. She wrote from Spain in December 1940,

> My dears, I will now permit myself a little sermon. It is this piece of heart-felt advice: Don't try to work until you understand what you are doing; in short, when in doubt, mind your own business. I see so much of the awful harm, the colossal harm done by those Professional-Doers-of-Good who loom so

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> dangerously large in Boston. They accomplish as much evil as those who deliberately want to hurt. Their motto is: Never shall the trumpet sound without my answering! They don't in the least realize that it is the extra dose of ego in their cosmos that speaks. . . .Good intentions are not enough. I doubt if St. Peter will admit them as final. . .So the Boston doer of good seems to be satisfied if she makes a sacrifice. . . See the frogs and the boys in Aesop. It is nice for you to do your bit; it makes you feel noble, but it is death to those you try to help.

I don't know the details of what led Gould to give this "sermon" and there is no explicit mention of Christians and Heathens, yet Gin Lum's *Heathen* helps us to see that the Boston "doers of good" are a new variant on the old theme of Christian/American abundance and heathen (in this case war-time Spain) impoverishment. Gould echoes Morton and Williams in her critique of the presumed superiority of white/Christian/American from her position of an insider who in some way chose to position herself as an outsider. *Heathen* is such a monumental undertaking and so this question is more of an invitation to other scholars to continue through the door that Gin Lum's work opens in order to examine the ways that members of the dominant society deployed the heathen-barometer as critique.

My final note is one of deep appreciation of Gin Lum's call in the epilogue for both humility AND action. Critique alone will not undo the legacy of the heathen designation, which we see every day in the equation of white = Christian = American, both by those who laud the equation and those who decry it.

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