

Additional Praise for James W. Perkinson's *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity*

“In this fascinating and inspiring book, Perkinson accomplishes two things that seem virtually impossible. First, he makes visible the invisible. While black reality in the United States has been subject to countless analyses, white reality appears to be impossible to grasp. The book reads the latter in light of the former and covers new ground. Second, Perkinson rethinks the basis of transformation. Key are not intention and moral appeal, as is commonly assumed, but the alternative energies and powers that arise in the midst of repression. Rather than painting a bleak picture of life under pressure, the book finds passion and vitality in unexpected places. The result is a profound reshaping of white reality and theology that has the potential to set the stage for things to come.”

—Joerg Rieger, Professor of Systematic Theology, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

# BLACK RELIGION / WOMANIST THOUGHT / SOCIAL JUSTICE

Series Editors: Dwight N. Hopkins and Linda E. Thomas

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White Theology  
Outing Supremacy in Modernity

*By*

*James W. Perkinson*

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WHITE THEOLOGY  
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## Acknowledgments

In one sense, this book has its beginnings on the basketball court of my youth. The outbreak of a sudden love affair with the game at the age of eight plunged me into the world of urban sport in the neighborhood I grew up in (which became majority black before my freshman year) and the inner city magnet school I attended from junior high through high school. There a passion to perform with abandon exploded into consciousness and whatever loves I have developed since (and there have been a number) owe their intensity to what I began to discover about both fear and desire in that world. The ancestry of this project goes back far behind its first conception in my mind.

The obvious place to start the praise song, of course, is my family: my parents, Ralph and Mildred Perkinson, who taught me to respect all and pay particular attention to the underdog; my brother Jerry, with whom I shared all of my earliest triumphs and traumas; my grandparents on one side who modeled staunch German industry and understatement (that somewhere along the way got lost in my own development); and my grandmother on the other whose cantankerous liveliness taught us all how not to die before we die.

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## Series Editors' Preface

Jim Perkinson's book stakes out a novel space in today's study of religion and theology. It takes on directly the challenge from African American intellectuals, and black theologians especially, to white male scholars regarding the notion of race. In these pages, you will find perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of "whiteness" by a white male theologian. Perkinson wields the poetic pen as he brings to bear an interdisciplinary analytical scalpel in the dissection of what is a "white race." Part autobiography (i.e., a white man living in a northern ghetto), part an aesthetic performance (i.e., Perkinson is a poet), and partly the result of a sharp and careful mind (i.e., the author earned his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago Divinity School), this book will keep you engaged throughout.

What is race? What is white supremacy from a theological perspective? For the author, power in America is disproportionately distributed among white citizens and thereby enables the latter the luxury to avoid defining and thinking about a "white" identity. Yet, for Perkinson, the American white racial contract establishes the norm for how all Americans perceive themselves and those around them.

Amidst contemporary conversations over policy, morality, business, the family, and culture, it is refreshing to hear a new and well-documented claim about the proverbial "elephant in the room." For Perkinson, the white elephant constantly avoided and not talked about is the white "race" in America. What does it mean rationally to be white? How does it feel to occupy the privileged position in a racial hierarchy? And what implications can one draw from the white community's access to and control over much power, property, and privilege? Perkinson gifts us with a theology of responsibility and wholeness, not just for the white community, but for all citizens on this space called earth.

Jim Perkinson's groundbreaking work continues the quality and breadth of publications in the black religion/womanist theology/social justice series. The series publishes both authored and edited manuscripts that have depth, breadth, and theoretical edge and addresses both academic and nonspecialist audiences. It will produce works engaging any dimension of black religion or womanist thought as they pertain to social justice. Womanist thought is a new approach in the study of African American women's perspectives. The series will include a variety of African American religious expressions. By this we mean traditions such as Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Humanism, African diasporic practices, religion and gender, religion and black gays/lesbians, ecological justice issues, African American religiosity and its relation to African religions, new black religious movements (e.g., Daddy Grace, Father Divine, or the Nation of Islam), or religious dimensions in African American "secular" experiences (such as the spiritual aspects of aesthetic efforts like the Harlem Renaissance and literary giants such as James Baldwin, or the religious fervor of the Black Consciousness movement, or the religion of compassion in the black women's club movement).

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