

# Reaction to: “Reframing Radical Religion”

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The discourse of race, religion, and policing is dictated by how the speaker frames the conversation. This is especially true in today’s world where media – both fake and real, foreign and domestic, and conservative and liberal – dominates the livelihood of American citizens. In her article *Reclaiming Radical Religion*, Professor Vanita Saleema Snow emphasizes the biased nature of political rhetoric that frames its targets as dark, dangerous, and criminal. The article emphasizes how language has been weaponized to describe the enemies of whiteness (i.e., the war on drugs against blacks and the war on terror against Muslims), thereby paving the way for the over-policing and over-arming of law enforcement.

Professor Snow briefly discusses the opioid epidemic. A more thorough exploration of the language used to describe the recent uproar over the control of opioids demonstrates the power of framing. Consider the change in language-use when addressing drugs in the context of whites suffering compared to the “criminal and thuggish” language used to describe drug usage by African Americans during the heroin epidemic. For example, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie described the opioid epidemic as “the medical crisis of our time” and as “the AIDS epidemic of our generation, but even worse.”<sup>1</sup> Even Donald Trump, a bastion of conservative toughness on crime, warned about the destruction of the American dream by opioids, declaring the epidemic a national crisis: “The opioid epidemic is truly the crisis next door. But too often, we forget that. Stigma, silence, and a lack of information prevent us from confronting this crisis as we should.”<sup>2</sup> Compare this rhetoric with the vilification of black homelessness and addiction, as well as the government’s response through minimum sentencing laws<sup>3</sup> and three strikes provisions.<sup>4</sup>

The data makes clear that opioid deaths have drastically affected white people more than black people. In 2016, there were over 30,000 opioid-related deaths among the white population in America compared to less than 5,000 for the

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1. David Wright, *Christie on Opioids: ‘This is the AIDS Epidemic of Our Generation, But Even Worse’*, CNN (Oct. 27, 2017), <https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/27/politics/chris-christie-opioid-commission-aids-cnntv/index.html> [<https://perma.cc/4D3M-XBEK>].

2. Donald Trump, *The Crisis Next Door*, YOUTUBE (Mar. 13, 2018), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0Y3ytZrN\\_s&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0Y3ytZrN_s&feature=youtu.be) [<https://perma.cc/SPY9-M5YY>].

3. Brian Mann, *The Drug Laws That Changed How We Punish*, NPR (Feb. 14, 2013), <https://www.npr.org/2013/02/14/171822608/the-drug-laws-that-changed-how-we-punish> [<https://perma.cc/6VAX-FMTF>] (discussing the Rockefeller drug laws that set harsh minimum prison sentences for low-level drug users).

4. HILLS TREATMENT CTR., *The Three Strikes Law and Drugs*, <https://www.thehillcenter.com/addiction-treatment-programs/treatment-programs-in-california/the-three-strikes-law/> [<https://perma.cc/P3AS-CP84>] (describing Three Strikes laws, which subject individuals with prior felonies to severe punishments, including doubled sentences and requirement to serve eighty percent of their sentences).

black population.<sup>5</sup> The changing demographic in those using drugs has transformed the narrative surrounding the battle against addiction. Thus, narrative framing regarding drugs is much more sympathetic to victims of drug abuse when those victims are middle-class white teenagers.

Especially with the White House declaring opioids a national crisis and public health emergency,<sup>6</sup> a plethora of framed speeches by the government has shifted its framing of drug addiction. By addressing the blatantly different frames of conversation of the same issue, Professor Snow can bolster her argument asserting that the power of framing is a tool used against minorities.

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5. Henry J. Kaiser Family Found., *Opioid Overdose Deaths by Race/Ethnicity*, <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/opioid-overdose-deaths-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D> [<https://perma.cc/RNP6-PDN9>].

6. See Trump, *supra* note 2.