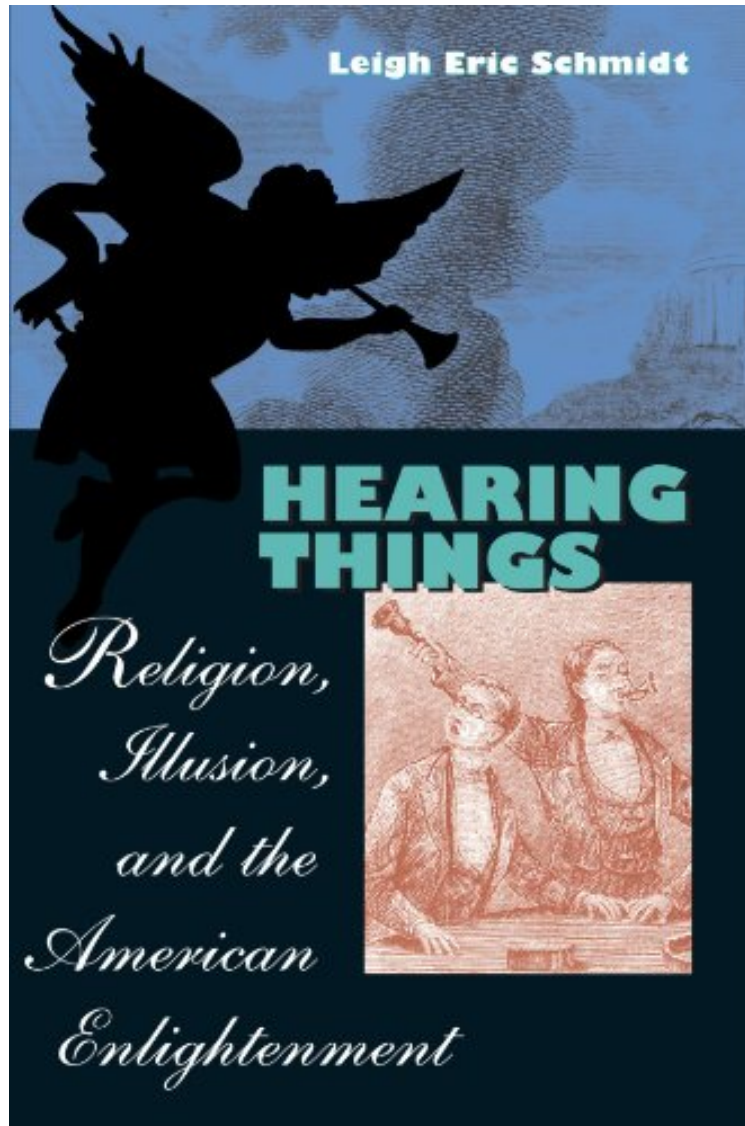


[Get free] Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment

# Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment

*Leigh Eric Schmidt*

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**Leigh Eric Schmidt : Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. How Americans went from hearing divine voices to silence and disenchantment.By Shamgar with an Ox GoadIn this book Leigh Eric Schmidt, one of the leading experts in the study

of American religion, tries to come to grips with how the enlightenment has caused Americans views on religion to change. He's interested in how people went from a world to seemly inhabited by supernatural voices and other presences to one that is silent. Schmidt focuses on hearing, chronicling both a period in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where people felt they heard God or angels speaking as well as the efforts of skeptics and rationalists to disenchant the modern world. The book touches on an astounding array of ideas; with chapters about Swedenborgianism, ventriloquism and skeptics efforts to debunk ancient oracles. Despite the diverse array of sources the book never seems to veer too far off topic. This is a book that is targeted mostly at academic specialists in the field of religious studies or intellectual history, though it could conceivably be of interest to an advanced undergraduate. It would be highly useful to anyone studying atheism, secularism, religious experience, mysticism or the effects of the enlightenment in America. Highly recommended.

Faith cometh by hearing so said Saint Paul, and devoted Christians from Augustine to Luther down to the present have placed particular emphasis on spiritual arts of listening. In quiet retreats for prayer, in the noisy exercises of Protestant revivalism, in the mystical pursuit of the voices of angels, Christians have listened for a divine call. But what happened when the ear tuned to God's voice found itself under the inspection of Enlightenment critics? This book takes us into the ensuing debate about hearing things an intense, entertaining, even spectacular exchange over the auditory immediacy of popular Christian piety. The struggle was one of encyclopedic range, and Leigh Eric Schmidt conducts us through natural histories of the oracles, anatomies of the diseased ear, psychologies of the unsound mind, acoustic technologies (from speaking trumpets to talking machines), philosophical regimens for educating the senses, and rational recreations elaborated from natural magic, notably ventriloquism and speaking statues. *Hearing Things* enters this labyrinth all the new disciplines and pleasures of the modern ear to explore the fate of Christian listening during the Enlightenment and its aftermath. In Schmidt's analysis the reimagining of hearing was instrumental in constituting religion itself as an object of study and suspicion. The mystic's ear was hardly lost, but it was now marked deeply with imposture and illusion.

This engaging book is remarkable for the breadth and depth of its research, its freshness and analytical power, and its fluid and witty style. Leigh Schmidt makes a persuasive and essential argument for the recovery of religion as a matter of senses, while exploring the ironies of 'secularization' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (David Hall, Divinity School, Harvard University) *Hearing Things* is a profound meditation on the surprisingly enduring dialectic among pre-modern, Enlightenment, and post-modern attitudes toward human experience, merged with a thoughtful account of supernatural and charismatic forms of Christianity. This is an important and an unusually insightful book. (Mark Noll, Wheaton College) Insightful, witty, succinct--would that more academic books possessed the qualities which *Hearing Things* displays in abundance. This is a major contribution to the analysis of a key historical problem. (Roy Porter, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine) In this intriguing, heavily researched study, Schmidt considers the interaction between American Christianity and the Enlightenment with regard to hearing in an era when ventriloquism became a popular entertainment and Thomas Edison invented his phonograph. The very tools that had been developed to debunk spiritism were now being used to advance it. The author studies hearing as a cultural phenomenon, both scientific and religious, in this fine interdisciplinary study that sheds much light on a particular period of American history. (Augustine J. Curley Library Journal) Who silenced the angels? For an answer, Schmidt turns back to the 18th and 19th centuries to look at Enlightenment philosophers and traveling ventriloquists, at acoustic engineers, anatomists and alienists, each of whom demonstrated in his own way the structures that undergirded claims of the miraculous... This densely argued, fascinating story features a panorama of colorful characters, from the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg to the traveling showman William Frederick Pinchbeck and his Pig of Knowledge. Schmidt's study offers an important chapter in the genealogy of the modern religious imagination. (Publishers Weekly) About the Author Leigh Eric Schmidt is Professor of Religion at Princeton University.