

American religion its historic addressing history essay

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American Religion and its Historic Addressing

American religion is no single majority religion, only a wide variety of minorities mingling with different faiths, sharing a common culture and movements. Religion in the United States is vital and diverse, as it has been very important part of the contemporary American culture. In one term it is impossible to canvass the depth and variety of the five centuries of American religion in a complete way. In another term religion plays a very important role in the lives of the majority of Americans, a proportion unique among developed nations. Religious cultures and their languages are used in history to describe past events or an encompassing term for the whole collection of events. Important figures with their stories and biographies are not that hard to locate in American Religion. However, how historians describe events dealing with religion cannot be easily ignored, with sacred past and overviews of their history from the creation to the end of times are constantly being stressed by religious historians. History, through their views of writing and construction of religion are usually involved with social practices, being detached from chronicling bygone events of the past. Historians need to avoid being tied up with politics and the social construction of bias to portray the historical movements of the vast numbers of religions that are influenced by outside sources and opinions, as we will see from some historians. Historians not only examine the Puritan lifestyle, but other religions from around the world. This gives them the availability to map a historical outlook for scholars. Letting them pinpoint the exact roots and movements of such from this outlook. Making use of the other religious

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institutions to create an equal understanding of American Religion to seek the beliefs and illuminate patterns. Doing so, does away with the social bringing point of views that spread across America, which unfavorably changes the overall outlook. Carroll favors a point of view from several key speakers or historical figures in helping create the ideals which help build on the denominations past. One cannot look in one direction, but in a vast spectrum to gather all credible information. Giving focus to the movements and missionary transformations on religious beliefs in able to generate an accurate map of the religious upbringings. Carroll believes that this map or atlas was predicted on the belief that there is a story, or in broader terms many stories with small patterns rather than large ones. (Carroll Pg10). This gives the reader the aspect and focus of the diverse movements across America. In understanding this map that Carroll divulges to us, it's hard not to wonder about how much information one is missing when breaking up the religions into this road map in order to avoid certain overall aspects and opinions. America is challenging this mainstream on how to focus on writing history, but still misses the main points at times. We would have to look at the basic understandings and the nation's cultural influences to gather such themes. Trying to avoid the white Protestant theories and move to a more of a broad theological view. Focusing on the movements and what those movements caused in their historical path from past to present. Using primary and secondary sources to the understanding and interpretation as the historians never witnessed the actual event they are writing about. This builds their argument and support, rather than the opinions and non-factual events from the past. This would help Carroll not only writing it in a historical

context, but in a practical understanding and evaluation of the information from that time period. This does away with the political and social aspect. We can see how hard it is to focus on the main points from an atlas view with the writings of Maffly-Kipp from *Eastward Ho!* Being that geography is very important to the writings of history, Maffly-Kipp writes "cultural geography also suggests that it pays to be attentive to the significance of topography, climate, and other physical features of the earth that have dictated human behavior and movement" (Maffly-Kipp pg132). Many religions tend to incorporate different aspects of the surrounding land into their religions, and tend to view the status of those lands as cues from their assorted deities. Writing history based on a directional approach can skew the reader's perspective in regards to the significance of events, as well as a culture's historical impact. Maffly-Kipp describes a unidirectional writing of American religious history as giving more credence to the Puritans and other European immigrants. This approach tends to minimize the significance of the natives of the U. S. by implying that the Puritans were the first religious people to set foot in America. However, a directional approach to U. S. history is both beneficial and detrimental to different religious cultures in different ways. For example, approaching U. S. religious history by moving north would focus on the Spaniards having more religious influence. Perhaps it is not the direction that matters when writing history, as much as the chronology. However, in order to write a chronologically accurate text on U. S. religious history, the author would have to be in many places at one time. We can see this with Gaustad's approach as he writes about the movement of the Puritans to the new world. Addressing that in fact this was not a new world and was in

habited by the indigenous peoples. (Gaustad pg5). He looks to the primary sources of the belief system of the early settlers. Avoiding the political approach and giving a more understanding to the events that occurred in the way they were perceived. He tries to maintain a more ethical and neutral standing on the history he writes about. From Gaustad's approach he needs to have a more balanced and comprehensive treatment towards how he writes about the religions. One can get too focused on a religion and start tempting the reader to focus primarily on it rather than the others that were involved in that time or event. He needs to limit this single attention and not lead scholars to think about adherents on the faiths of the other religions. Keeping it balanced and comprehensive towards the historical and social value of the religion, while avoiding the opinionated matter of the author. In proving how different authors are in writing about religious history Kim Knott suggested that " theories, approaches and methods that engage with the issues that have affected the history within the last two hundred years is affected mainly by our own standpoint and background" (Knott pg 33). Addressing that not only trying to avoid splitting up the numerous religions and being too opinionated on the religious matters, social standpoints affected by the writer can have a negative stand point on the focus of the reader from the writer. These authors all have their own unique way of writing about history, but some approaches seem to have too many key issues at hand. From Carroll's stand point on the atlas approach, he gives a limited view for instructional purposes only with his own opinionated matter from his own research. How the author address the changes will depend on how the reader will see it from their point of view rather than the author.

Maffy-Kipp provides the geographical view with only focusing on the primary areas where religions had a greater influence. A factual explanation of the migration of religion with a geographical approach does give certain valuable information that adds to information gained from an American westward approach. By seeing how events affect each different region and culture separately, a more encompassing and informed history can be understood. Gaustad provides the scholars a better more overall approach of the facts. Rather than stating it like Carroll and Maffy-Kipp, he provides historical views from those that were there. This lets the reader see the history from the historical figures and the neutral stance of the author. By using a mixture from the two authors Knott and Gaustad, historians can get a better overall scholarly approach to American religion. Avoiding the theories and the social aspects of history and remaining neutral is how these authors need to approach addressing the religious history of America. It's understandable that these authors only have so much information they can provide to scholars, but one must give an overall view. They need to provide geographical movements to other religions on their adventures to America and the abnormalities that came from it. An example is how one's self can become wrapped up from the historical understanding and provide the scholar irrelevant information. We saw this with Maffy-Kipp's geographical review of the complexity and variety of cultural contacts catalyzed by desires (Maffy pg 134). Specific features of these movements afford a more nuanced glimpse of their religious contours, allowing us to shape the sprawling story. Although these people shared experiences or encounters, they are predominated by particular points in time. As we have seen from Gaustad,

his past writings are still present. Even though he has a revised edition explaining the reason as to why he left out important religious groups, he signifies new inclusions to this, re-approaching what he missed to provide the scholar a less opinionated matter. With Carroll however, he skips the makeup of religious history by providing the foundation of the landscape first. We did not see the white Protestant Christianity till chapter 3 in his historical understanding. He does not provide a rich narrative like Gaustad, but shows the equal struggle between the two on their writing about religious history. As both do give the different approaches that I am stating authors should follow, keeping it on track and eliminating the irrelevant facts will be hard. They're not only providing facts, but opinions to fill in the gaps they could not be pieced together. We can see this type of problem with Gaustad on his traditionalist approach, beginning with the Puritans and then moving westward. By keeping it traditional he leaves out other groups until they were more or less bumped into the Protestant movement; ignoring the minorities like women. Acknowledging the truth of his fragmented and non-chronological aspect, he adds encounters and cultural religious practices. Even though he still keeps with his wide array of the diverse religions, he focuses more on the historical markers rather than the other existing approach, from the age of exploration to the age of limits. He does this by giving us a pluralistic dialogue introducing the rougher edges that were missed in the original edition with a deeper approach. When writing about history authors will have a different approach on how to write it, but the principles on what to include will stay the same. These problems are always appearing, but giving the fact the authors themselves are limited in statue of

information and one cannot re-address their opinions. Considering that much of history is written about events that have long passed and people who have long passed away, writing with complete objectivity is difficult. Historical texts are subject to the interpretation of the reader, not the original author. Research acquired by word of mouth is, in itself, one-sided. Finally, as human beings, complete objectivity does not seem to be something that is in our nature. Whichever approach one chooses, it seems that there is no ideal historiography. Writing history seems to depend on not only the subject chosen, but the ability of the author.