

recounting this complex history. Instead, one might fault the author's shifts in storytelling style. At times it seemed as if the author were giving a lecture, then at other times relating anecdotes from an interview, and at still other times writing book reviews or encyclopedia entries. Even so, this book is fun, and even a bit nostalgic, for those of us who came of age academically during the 1980s and 1990s (yes, we all have our Gordon Melton stories). Ashcraft's book will also give solid historical grounding to the generations of scholars studying new religions in the future.

The last chapter offers a postscript of sorts. By the early 2000s, new religions studies had begun to break free from the cult wars. The older *cults*, having become established *religions*, are not all that interesting to the newer generation of scholars. In fact, in the current digital age of hyper-reality, scholarship is being propelled by concerns over the fragility of culture and community—a world of constructed, contingent, commodified meaning. Religion, such as it is, has become largely self-referential. If new religions studies is able to navigate along these new currents, concludes Ashcraft, “then the field is enriched by creative, outside-the-box concepts that push the older boundaries of what makes something an NRM” (241).

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Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal. By Tisa Wenger. University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 312 pages. \$34.95 cloth; ebook available.

This is an ambitious but worthwhile volume that traces the role the social construction of religious liberty has played in the history of relationships with various minority populations in America, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Jews, and Catholics. The historical role the multi-faceted and malleable concept has played in international affairs of the United States is also examined in detail in a chapter delineating machinations involving American efforts to claim and control the Philippines more than a century ago. The volume focuses on the time between what Wenger refers to as “the Spanish-Cuban-Filipino-American War” and World War II, which she refers to as a “pivotal period in our histories of race and empire” (1).

Wenger's basic theme is that a specific type of religious freedom derived from white Protestantism has been the driving force behind efforts to integrate, control, and assimilate various minority ethnic groups into American society. She notes, “The dominant voices in the culture linked racial whiteness, Protestant Christianity, and American national identity” (1). Somehow minority ethnic and racial groups had to accommodate themselves to this pervasive and powerful cultural force.

However, Wenger also documents how some minority groups—Catholics and Jews particularly, but also Native American groups—have been able to turn the tables somewhat. They have defended themselves and at least some of their cultural practices with claims that if they are to become part of American society they deserve to be granted a degree of religious freedom themselves. She does add that African Americans have been unable to secure the same level of acceptance, even as they have tried to promote various types and degrees of religiosity. For the most part African Americans remain defined racially, not by religious proclivities.

The socially-constructed view of religious freedom has also been used as a justification for building American empire through war and other methods of expanding American power in the world. Disseminating a certain definition of religious freedom has justified various actions in the international arena that now appear self-serving and not necessarily in the best interest of nations involved in interactions with the United States. But, again, Wenger points out how certain ethnic groups in some other nations were able to make religion-based claims to protect a modicum of their cultural heritage.

The volume is admirable in the detail presented with each of the case studies presented, even if the discussion is sometimes a bit difficult to follow *because of* the immense amount of detail included. Nevertheless, the effort to absorb Wenger's well-documented argument is worth the effort. I recommend the volume to all students of American history, not just those focused on religious history. And I eagerly await Wenger's effort to apply her analysis to more contemporary issues such as the much-criticized (at least abroad) International Religious Freedom Act passed in 1998, as well as current efforts of Muslim Americans to gain acceptance within American society. Do these more recent actions and efforts offer further support for her analysis, or do they demand some modifications of her thesis?

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Buddhism in America: Global Religion, Local Contexts. By Scott A. Mitchell. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 320 pages. \$114.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper; ebook available.

Buddhism in America provides an ambitious historical overview of Buddhism in the United States (not the Americas). Most readers will find this book to be a well-written and engaging source of new information and insights.

The content is what one would expect in a good undergraduate text. Section One, "Histories," starts with a highly compressed, clear presentation of the Buddha's life, his teaching, and the early Buddhist