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A Companion to American Religious History

Edited by Benjamin E. Park

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A Companion to American Religious History

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A COMPANION TO AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Edited by

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This edition first published 2021
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Registered Office
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Editorial Office
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Park, Benjamin E., editor.
Title: A companion to American religious history / edited by Benjamin E. Park, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, USA.
Description: Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2021. | Series: Wiley Blackwell companions to American history | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020025382 (print) | LCCN 202002538 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119583660 (hardback) | ISBN 9781119583677 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781119583684 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: United States–Religion–History.
Classification: LCC BL2525 .C647 2021 (print) | LCC BL2525 (ebook) | DDC 200.973–dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020025382
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020025383

Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Image: © Devesh Tripathi/Getty Images

Set in 10/12pt Galliard by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Chapter One

The Centrality, Diversity, and Malleability of American Religion

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Every year in early spring, millions of Hindus across the globe gather to celebrate the end of winter and the blossoming of life. The day-and-a-half event, filled with distinct ceremonies, includes a series of rituals and prayers, yet it is best known for the festival of colors, the Rangwali Holi, in which participants smear themselves and each other with bright powder while accompanied by vibrant music. Large crowds dance, sing, and march as they spread their joyful colors and voices throughout the festival grounds and surrounding streets. And while the Holi Festival originated in India, it has spread outside of Asia and into many nations in the western hemisphere, including places where Hinduism makes up a small percentage of the population.

One of the largest Holi festivals takes place in Washington DC, where thousands of young Americans — most of whom are white, Christian, and know very little about Hinduism — gather at the Hare Krishna Temple to participate in this global Hindu celebration. While ignorant of the theological origins of the event, and not too interested in the rites that accompany the festival, they are mostly concerned with the joyous celebration. Social media accounts, newspaper editorials, and magazine features are then filled with these high school- and college-aged kids doused in vibrant colors and hailing the beauty of life.

That thousands of young, white, and Christian Americans could participate in an annual Hindu festival near the nation's capital would have seemed bizarre only a century earlier. In 1893, for instance, many prominent religious and political leaders worried that the Asian religions that were being featured at that year's Parliament of World Religions might corrupt the country's youth, and therefore did their best to ban "heretical" practices like yoga and belly dancing — let alone ornate ceremonies with thousands of attendees. For a nation still controlled by a Protestant majority that acted as a quasi-religious establishment, such measures could still be practiced.

But in the twenty-first century, the Holi Festival in DC captures many of the central elements of American religion: its embedded nature within the national culture, its diversity of sacred expression, as well as the porous nature of its spiritual boundaries. Previously marginalized practices that were seen as threatening are now embraced as a joyous embodiment of diverse cooperation. But to understand how this came to be, we must examine the many trajectories that culminated in the modern American religious marketplace.

A Companion to American Religious History, First Edition. Edited by Benjamin E. Park.
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* * *

Wherever one looks in modern America, they are confronted with the pervasive influence of religion. Most politicians are sworn in on the Bible, Qur'an, or Tanakh; "In God We Trust" is found on national currency; the Pledge of Allegiance beseeches the name of deity; and athletes frequently offer thanks to a higher power after their athletic achievements. This influence is even found in popular culture. In 2017, for instance, one of the most popular new songs was Kesha's "Praying" (drawing on the ritual of invocation), and one of the new hit television series was NBC's "The Good Place" (exploring competing ideas of the afterlife). Whether on the campaign trail, stage, athletic fields, or in shopping centers, then, religious ideas and language have become ubiquitous within American culture. Yet beyond this veneer of a shared culture is a complicated and evolving web of diverse expressions and conflicting values.

It has always been such. The earliest peoples who inhabited the land that eventually became America, thousands of Indigenous tribes with as many belief systems as languages, viewed society in a way that blended the material and spiritual; for many of them, there was little difference. Later, European settlers were as interested in spreading their religion as they were in colonizing land and building capital; to these newcomers, their particular form of Christianity was synonymous with civilized progress. And among those that were then expected to build these new societies were enslaved African laborers transported against their will; yet even these communities, many of whom were forced to leave their religious cultures behind, succeeded in developing spiritual practices that provided meaning to their lives and resistance to their oppressors. The North American colonies were founded upon these varied experiences.

By the time the United States was formed as an official polity, the landscape was littered with different — and often competing — religious cultures, so much so that it was impossible to identify and install a national, established religion. What resulted was therefore a spiritual marketplace that allowed all denominations — or at least those not deemed as a threat — to contend for converts under a broad, if not always consistent, umbrella of religious freedom. The vibrancy of this democratic experiment invited new innovations and radical interventions, as traditional churches now battled with upstart sects for the young nation's attention. Then, as the country evolved into an empire, religions were both martialed as part of that imperial pursuit as well as deployed to oppose those very aims; simultaneously, marginalized groups drew on religion in their efforts to oppose racial, economic, and gender oppression, and claim what they believed were constitutional, God-given, rights. In the twenty-first century, though religious affiliation has slightly decreased, the United States still polls much more religious than her European peers, in large part because of the traditions that built the country in the first place.

The story of America, then, can only be understood when taking into account the deep and divergent influences of religion. *A Companion to American Religious History*, designed as a primer for students of American history in general, exposes readers to the significance, variety, and malleability of the nation's religious past. The most recent generation of scholarship has produced a plethora of exciting and revisionist interpretations in the field, and this volume condenses and explains them for a new generation of students.

This *Companion* is unique, then, in its attempt to prove religion's centrality to broader historical narratives and themes. It is not just a story of religion *in* America, but a story of how religion *shaped* American history. It prioritizes chronological periods and larger contextual issues in order to introduce students of America's past to religion's role in the stories and events that already populate textbooks. The volume is a bridge between the robust field of American religion and the wider community — and especially the numerous classrooms — of American history writ large.

In a nation still struggling to define the parameters of pluralism, *A Companion to American Religious History* provides both a historical genealogy for the country's various religious traditions as well as meaning for its many cultural expressions.

* * *

This volume does not offer a comprehensive story, nor does it cover every single significant episode. Instead, it offers poignant case studies of distinct moments, movements, or themes that demonstrate the potency of America's religious past. Each chapter takes a theoretically small story and gleans much broader lessons, often framed through the lived experiences of those involved. These microhistories and thematic overviews are meant to give students of American history an entry point for understanding the legacies of the nation's religious traditions, as well as prompt further reflection and discussion related to the inchoate roles that belief and action have played in American culture.

Though a number of lessons could be prioritized, and while many chapters move in different directions and draw from divergent discourses, three themes hold this volume together. First, that religion has been *central* to American history, and that one cannot understand broader historical moments without investigating the religious actors and ideas that played a significant role. Whether it be European colonization, the American Revolution, slavery, territorial politics, imperialism, Gilded Age capitalism, the Civil Rights movement, or modern-day television, religion shaped how many citizens understood and challenged the world around them. Therefore, much of this volume is structured to augment courses focused on American history more broadly, proving religion's significance to the larger story.

A primary reason that religion is often downplayed in synthetic historical works is the cultural chasm between America's predominantly religious culture and the increasingly secular nature of the academy. Historians are hesitant to provide ammunition to cultural warriors hell-bent on proving the United States as a "Christian nation," and are instead mostly interested in deciphering the *real* motivations — social, cultural, economic, or political — beyond the religious rhetoric. Yet granting the depth of religious influence in America's past does not validate arguments for religious significance in the present; indeed, a better understanding of the variety, not just the gravity, of religious history often undercuts the type of cultural arguments that typically make academics blanche.

Second, chapters in this volume highlight the *diversity* of the nation's religious past. Though universalistic symbols and the common language of a "Christian Nation" seem to imply religious homogeneity, and while many Christians have envisioned a nation held together by shared beliefs, the reality is that America's story is filled with a vast array of different voices and distinct practices. At no point was there a shared creed, and all attempts for a joint identity were the result of an anxiety derived from entrenched pluralism. Individual case studies in this collection therefore highlight these diverse expressions, whether the variety is found in race, class, denomination, geography, or gender. Indeed, this volume eschews the typical discourse of an American religion in favor of American religion*s*.

Among the many forms of religious diversity this collection highlights are a sustained focus on Black and Indigenous religions. When it comes to African American religiosity, an explosion of recent scholarship has demonstrated its depth and variety, yet broader synthetic studies have still marginalized non-white experiences to the peripheries of the story, or, at the most, separated them into distinct frameworks. This volume, by contrast, attempts to integrate Black religious movements and ideas into mainstream trajectories of American life, ranging from the non-Christian religious practices of the enslaved, the Black prophetic tradition found among abolitionists, or the use of religion during the post-emancipation period to secure constitutional liberties. In every section of this volume, readers will be exposed to how Black religion was central to understanding its particular era.

These historiographic issues are even more complicated with Indigenous religions. Since traditional stories of America's religious past have been framed by white Protestant interests, the spirituality of Native Americans have typically been ignored or dismissed altogether. A theology of invisibility concerning Indigenous religiosity, not too dissimilar from the manifest destiny doctrine that dispossessed Native tribes, has erased a crucial part of the nation's story. Yet the variety and centrality of Indigenous religious practices and ideas can no longer be avoided. Whether it be the Wampanoag who challenged the Puritan's Godly settlement, the Lenape who tested the boundaries of Pennsylvania's inclusive vision, the Delaware who opposed Western expansion, the Haudenosaunees who appropriated their own form of spirituality, the Pueblo who pushed back against evolving federal policies, or the Mohawk who carved out a portion of Pentecostalism, every section in this volume contains at least one substantive example of Native American religiosity. This collection therefore aims to add to the reparation project of reintegrating these voices into America's past.

The third and final theme of this volume is the *malleability* that came with religious interaction. No religious tradition ever existed in a vacuum, but rather acted within a context of competing views and beliefs. This is especially true of the denominations and communities that have squeezed into America's boundaries as cultural contact and exchange became a consistent feature of American culture. Very few chapters in this volume examine one religion in isolation. Rather, most focus on how different communities reacted to their surrounding society, including other denominations and racial groups. Students will recognize that American religion was an evolving tradition with porous boundaries and interdependent trajectories. Only by highlighting the broader forest can the significance of each tree become clear.

* * *

A Companion to American Religious History is separated into five parts, each framed around a chronological period. Every section is based on the diversity of expressions within its own era. The first part, "Colonialism," briefly examines three different colonial projects that preceded the American Revolution. First, Richard Boles unpacks a typical New England town to show that religious diversity and contestation were always present, even in what was supposed to be a Puritan hamlet. Moving south, Rachel Wheeler exhibits how multiple communities — Moravian and Native — intersected within confined spaces. Both of these chapters give particular attention to the Indigenous tribes who were dispossessed by these religious colonization attempts. And finally, the section concludes with Jason Young's examination of enslaved religiosity throughout the colonial period.

The imperial crisis that rocked the North American continent during the late-eighteenth century and the creation of a new American nation each spurred novel and contested directions in religious life. Part Two, "Establishment," focuses on how new traditions were both established and disestablished during the American Revolution, as well as appropriated during the few decades that immediately followed. While nearly everyone in the formerly British colonies were forced to choose a side in the conflict, few faced such daunting choices as the clergy. Peter Walker's chapter zeroes in on the loyalist ministers who tried to stay faithful to the English crown, drawing upon a rich martyrdom legacy to do so; conversely, Christopher Jones's chapter follows a radical clergyman and his Methodist flock, including a number of free black believers, as they navigated numerous boundaries — both denominational and geographic — during an age of Atlantic rebellions. But what about the newly United States' creation of religious liberty that followed the political conflict? Sarah Barringer Gordon's study of the origins of disestablishment in Virginia reveals that one of the nation's most cherished ideals — religious freedom — was surprisingly tethered to one of its most controversial: a resurgence of pro-slavery arguments. But more than just political frameworks, Jon Sensbach's microhistory of one African-born man named Abraham unpacks the lived realities

of enslavement and conversion. And finally, Lori Daggar's examination of the Delaware Tribe's witch hunt, and Jennifer Dorsey's chapter on the Shakers, demonstrate that the tensions of disestablishment and innovation crossed racial and denominational boundaries.

Once America was established as a new nation, with broadly accepted, if still challenged, religious traditions, a series of geographic and political transformations shifted the country and all the people who lived in it. The third part of this volume, "Expansion," provides examples of the many implications from this march of manifest destiny, as both the geographic and denominational boundaries remained undetermined. Christopher Cameron uses David Walker to display the foundations of a Black prophetic tradition destined to challenge both the legal practice of slavery as well as the theological institution of white supremacy. Yet African Americans were not the only individuals refused assimilation, as Cassandra Yacovazzi's chapter displays the potent risk that Catholicism, including the seemingly pacifist nuns, posed to the Protestant establishment. And among the new religious experiments introduced during the era, few challenged traditional theological parameters as much as those who attempted to appropriate new religious philosophies, like the Romantics as overviewed by Brent Sirota or the Haudenosaunees as traced by Christian Gonzales. But the major disruption of this era, of course, was the Civil War, which not only destroyed the South's bid for a slaveholding empire but also raised important questions regarding territorial politics and racial equality; Brent Rogers's chapter uses Mormonism to understand the former, while Nicole Turner's uses black denominations to understand the latter.

The decades that followed America's sectional crises witnessed America becoming an imposing power, with both domestic and global fissures reflected in various religious drives. This volume's fourth section, "Imperialism," details the battles that shaped the emerging nation's new world. A central conflict regarded the emerging capitalistic divide between poor and rich, and chapters by Janine Drake and Nicole Kirk depict the competing religious visions of a social gospel that improved the lives of the oppressed on the one hand, and a consumer culture that sanctified wealth and material goods on the other. Another deep division concerned the availability and consumption of alcohol, as Joseph Locke's examination of the prohibition movement exemplifies the potential — and pitfalls — of religious reform efforts. But once again, some of the most complicated questions regarded racial assimilation and acceptance, as Arlene Sanchez-Walsh's chapter on Hispanic believers among the Pentecostal movement, and Sarah Dees's chapter on federal policies over Indigenous tribes, show how the politics of religious recognition became even murkier as the "Christian nation" came into shape. Nor were these questions solely relegated to the continental United States: Carleigh Beriont's look at the Bikinian Islands in the Pacific during the World War II-era highlight the global dimensions of America's imperial and religious ambitions.

The final section, "Modernity," touches on the culmination of these disparate and interdependent trajectories and posits that they resulted in a number of competing, if related, modernities. Some of these divisions were found within groups that are typically lumped together, as Vaughn Booker's chapter digests two distinct brands of Black theology, each designed to gain civil liberties, in the post-war era. Joseph Laycock's contribution then details a more quixotic — yet still revealing — episode from the same period: an attempted exorcism of the Pentagon, which he uses as a lens through which to see what the "occult revival" of the 1960s tells us about popular religion. In another case of unexpected bedfellows, Angela Tarango examines how Native Americans, yearning for cultural assimilation, appropriated modern Pentecostalism to their own ends. Of course, the most famous coalition formed in the second half of the twentieth century, and one that remains a cultural touchstone, is the union of the Republican Party and Evangelicals; but while this political marriage is well-known, Emily Johnson's chapter unveils gender dimensions that are often overlooked. And as the volume began with an emphasis on diversity, so too will it end: Melissa Borja's overview of Asian-American immigration establishes the new demographic realities that shape the

nation's present and future, and Jennifer Caplan's analysis of Judaism in modern television extends that reality to the streaming age.

Taken together, these chapters capture the vibrancy and variety of America's religious past. They serve as touchstones for understanding and engaging the broader themes and moments of United States history and give context to tensions that still exist in the present day. Americans have yet to fully comprehend the implications and potential of these diverse traditions — and indeed, some still tragically see it not as a "potential," but as a problem — but historians of American religion have provided a foundation for that important discussion. This volume hopes to only add to that vivacious chorus.

So when young Americans gather in springtime to participate in a sacred Hindu celebration, they are reenacting, either consciously or not, the fulfillment the nation's diverse religious heritage, a culture rooted in diversity as much as anything else.

Part I

Colonialisms

Chapter Two

Nemasket/Middleborough and Religious Diversity in Colonial New England

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In popular memory and in many American history textbooks, colonial New England is depicted as remarkably homogenous in its religious culture. The traditional narrative stresses the Pilgrim and Puritan migration away from persecution in England and the attempted creation of an idealized "city upon a hill." From grade school forward, therefore, most Americans have been taught a basic story of these beleaguered groups. But much of this narrative focuses on homogeneity. Differences of opinion in early New England are sometimes acknowledged in the stories of Anne Hutchison and Roger Williams, who were outspoken critics of Boston's religious leaders, for example. But their 1630s exiles from Massachusetts imply the creation of a rigidly uniform Puritan colony that persisted rather statically until the Great Awakening or American Revolution.

The more complete history of religious beliefs and practices in New England is very dynamic. Colonial New England always featured a wide range of religious practices. This diversity included competing types of Christianity as well as the presence of non-Christian religions. Throughout the colonial era, the religious practices of the Wampanoag (Pokanoket), Narragansett, Pequot, Massachusett, Mohegan, Nipmuck, and other Indian communities were vibrant and varied. English colonists instituted congregation-based church governance that allowed for community control of religion as opposed to centrally controlled or top-down ways of governing churches. Differences in beliefs and practices among the clergy and laity were also occasionally significant. Furthermore, numerous colonists did not join a church at all and mixed Christian beliefs with other spiritual practices. Later, in the eighteenth century, religious revivals caused church schisms and produced competing churches in many towns. Europeans imported enslaved Africans to New England during the earliest decades of colonization, and some Africans and black Americans retained West African religious practices, including Islam, Catholicism, and polytheistic or nontheistic religious traditions. They preserved essential parts of these religious practices despite the oppression of slavery and legal prohibitions against publicly practicing these religions. Black and Indian peoples also participated in predominantly white churches, while Wampanoag, Narragansett, and other Indians maintained their own churches. Common depictions of colonial New England critically obscure and neglect much of this religious diversity.

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Communities located in eastern Massachusetts, known consecutively as Nemasket, Middleberry, and Middleborough, provide a useful case study for examining the variety of religions in colonial New England. This chapter focuses on this one location because it is a good representation of the religious diversity that existed across the whole region. In many ways, Middleborough was quite typical and rarely was it exceptional. But while the focus remains mostly on Nemasket and Middleborough, this chapter occasionally broadens its coverage to understand how developments in nearby places influenced religious trends over time. Through examining this location and nearby communities, we can trace much of the religious history of the diverse peoples of southern New England before the nineteenth century.

* * *

In order to understand how religious diversity developed and changes, it is helpful first to outline how Europeans and Africans came to reside in this region, including the role that violence played in colonization. For thousands of years, Indigenous people inhabited this resource-abundant area in present-day eastern Massachusetts. Gradually, in the more recent past, English colonists, other Europeans, and enslaved Africans invaded the area and brought their religions. Europeans visited New England shores and Wampanoag communities sporadically after 1524 and regularly after 1602. Europeans not only traded with but also frequently attacked and kidnapped people from New England's Indigenous communities. In 1619, a small group of English migrants, including Pilgrims, arrived on the coast of Massachusetts and settled about twelve miles away from Nemasket. The Pilgrims' theft of food and desecration of Wampanoag graves almost led to the Pilgrims' demise, as some Wampanoag wanted to kill or drive them away. But Wampanoag paramount sachem Ousamequin (often known by his title "Massasoit") allowed the English colonists to stay, likely because he envisioned the English as a tributary community. Ousamequin resided west of Nemasket, so colonists and Wampanoags crossed this community when going to meet with each other and to trade.[1]

Beginning in 1630, English Puritans began arriving by the thousands, first settling north of Wampanoag territory and then later in present-day Rhode Island and Connecticut. The English population proliferated thereafter, and they occupied more and more Indian lands through means of purchase, theft, and war. Believing Christianity to be the only true form of worship and believing themselves "a chosen people," English colonists used their religion along with their understandings of "just war" and "property rights" and longstanding English legal traditions to justify dispossessing and fighting Indians.[2]

In the 1660s, descendants of Pilgrim immigrants made the first purchase of land in the area that would become Middleborough. English colonists routinely pressured sachems (community leaders) and other Indians to cede territory, often under the threat of violence. Colonists pushed some Wampanoags out of Nemasket and established the English town of Middleberry, which was incorporated in 1669. During King Philip's War of 1675–1676, a federation of Indians led by Wampanoag paramount sachem Pumetacom (called Metacom or Philip by the English), tried to regain their homeland and prevent colonists from extending jurisdictional control over sovereign Indian nations. Most of the English homes in Middleborough were destroyed by the Indian forces, who successfully eluded colonial troops until colonists convinced other Indians to fight with them against Pumetacom. Colonists eventually killed or enslaved thousands of Wampanoags and other Indians, and then took more land.[3] After the war, English residents returned to Middleborough and rebuilt. Wampanoags continued to live in the vicinity of Nemasket/Middleborough, especially the districts or communities of Titicut and Assawompset (Betty's Neck), into the late eighteenth century.[4]

Middleborough grew throughout the eighteenth century, and this site functioned as a crossroads for travelers moving between Plymouth (twelve miles east), Boston (forty miles north), Providence (thirty miles west), and Cape Cod. As was the case all over New England,

enslaved Africans were crucial supplements to the labor provided by family members, and they helped make some Middleborough residents, including its ministers, relatively prosperous in the eighteenth century. Some of these enslaved black colonists participated in the town's churches, but others rejected Christianity.[5] The 1740s religious revivals, later known as the Great Awakening, led to the establishment of new churches in the region. Thereafter, residents could choose among multiple English ministers and houses of worship. As was the case for most of colonial New England, Nemasket/Middleborough was inhabited by a mix of Indian, African, and European peoples whose religious practices, beliefs, and institutions were multifaceted and diverse. Remarkably, the multiplicity of religions persisted and even expanded despite occasional institutional attempts, including violent warfare against Indians and slavery, to suppress religious differences.

Wampanoags of Nemasket

It is challenging to describe the religious lives of Wampanoags in Nemasket and surrounding areas before 1600 because Wampanoag communities and culture, of which religion was inseparable, were never static, and also because the Wampanoag did not yet produce the types of written records upon which historians heavily rely. Moreover, Native American religions were not homogeneous; religious beliefs varied at least as much as languages and the physical environment varied across New England. The stories and rituals diverged even between the Wampanoag who lived on the mainland and the Wampanoag on the island of Noepe (Martha's Vineyard). Nevertheless, we can speak in general terms about Wampanoag religious practices during this period because of archeological evidence and seventeenth-century written sources. Wampanoag also continued to hold many of these beliefs through recent centuries.[6]

In the Wampanoag's world, alive and inanimate objects pulsed with varying degrees of divine or spiritual power, known as manitou (or manit). Animals, plants, bodies of water, sacred objects, and environmental, meteorological, and celestial features contained manitou. Historian David Silverman writes that these things possessed "spirits capable of bestowing and withholding favor, of doing good and ill, depending on their whim." As a result, the place where they lived was inseparable from their religion. The Wampanoag at Nemasket depended upon Lake Assawompset and the Nemasket and Taunton rivers to provide freshwater, fish, and waterfowl. In nearby fields, they cultivated maize, beans, and squash, whose seeds and farming techniques originally developed in Mexico. Wampanoags also gathered berries and other plants and hunted animals. In summer months, inhabitants of Nemasket resided on the Atlantic coast, where clams and seafood abounded. For success in feeding themselves and their families, they depended upon the interventions and guidance of spiritual beings and power.[7]

The vital force of manitou was necessary to prosper and for health, but some objects and beings contained dangerous power that could be detrimental to human flourishing. Knowledge about and respectful engagement with objects that were richly infused with manitou determined communal and individual wellbeing. Pawwaws (religious specialists) were individuals, almost always men, whose understanding of and connections to manitou allowed them to assist people facing illness, important decisions, or the seasons of life.[8] Pawwaws made connections to manitou and spiritual beings through dreams, visions, induced trances, and rituals. They could "influence, tap, or control unseen powers of the world for the benefit or ill of mankind," writes scholar Kathleen Bragdon, by praying for aid or by placating dissatisfied spiritual beings.[9] Pawwaws provided "answers to questions about the cause of illness, the outcome of future actions, and choices in forthcoming decisions," noted ethnohistorian William Simmons, and they were trusted in identifying "thieves and murderers."[10] Because of the power that they wielded in these communities, when things went wrong, pawwaws were sometimes accused of doing harm.

Persons unseen by the naked eye and manitou filled the whole world, but some particular beings loomed larger in Wampanoag thinking and daily lives. In the seventeenth century, Wampanoags described a humanlike god named Kiehtan as the creator of their world and as the source of maize and beans (known as Cautantowwit among neighboring Narragansetts). The southwest was the direction of Kiehtan's house.[11] Often more important in the daily lives of Wampanoag was Cheepi, a powerful being associated with death, "the moon, night, cold, the horned winged serpent, and panthers." Water locations and the animals who dwelt therein were associated with Cheepi, especially swamps, springs, marshes, and whirlpools.[12] Pawwaws gained their standing in the community first by having a powerful, visionary encounter with Cheepi. They also turned to Cheepi when people were sick. Cheepi was sometimes the source of illnesses, which meant that it could also provide cures. However, if Cheepi was angry at an individual or a community and sought to punish them, no remedy would be possible.[13]

Dreams and visions, for anyone in these communities, served as a means of seeking aid from spiritual beings. Animals who appeared in their dreams carried different messages or warnings. Spiritual guardians, when respectfully sought in reciprocal relationships, might provide help in directing manitou toward people. When Wampanoag persons slept, one of their two souls departed the body to travel among spiritual beings in the upper world (sky) and underwater world, thereby communicating spiritual information through dreams.[14]

Pawwaws led the community in seasonal rituals, such as green corn festivals, and advised individuals and whole sachemships (distinct communities organized under a sachem, or leader) in preparing for war and in combatting sicknesses, drought, and other threats. They were knowledgeable about the rituals that accompanied births, deaths, and burials. Feasting, fasting, smoking tobacco, and giving away or destroying material objects were sacred activities associated with important moments in life.[15] English colonist Roger Williams, writing about the nearby Narragansetts, said that *Nickómmo* means "a feast or dance." He went on to explain that "of this feast they have publike and private and that of two sorts. First in sickness, or Drouth, or Warre or Famine. Secondly, After Harvest, after hunting, when they enjoy a calme of Peace, Health, Plenty, Property." For the Narragansett and the Wampanoag, these festivals, songs, and dances were of vital importance in times of distress and periods of plenty. They happened intermittently based on specific needs and seasonally, such as during spring plantings. Williams also noted that when a person was sick, the pawwaw "comes close to the sick person" and performs rituals to "threaten and conjures out the sickness."[16]

These beliefs and practices did not disappear, but neither were they static. When European-produced brass, glass beads, and other objects began trickling into Wampanoag communities, some of these objects were "incorporated into ritual and contributed to a continuation of Native ideas about health and well-being."[17] One or more epidemics, introduced by contacts with Europeans, killed between 70 percent and 90 percent of the Wampanoag on the mainland between 1616 and 1619. This catastrophe left people bereft of close relatives and led to the loss of community knowledge as the elderly were more susceptible to illness. Pawwaws and other individuals could do little to stem the staggering death rate, the cause of which was unknown, and catastrophes of this magnitude necessarily alter religious beliefs. To some Wampanoags, their confidence in the prevailing religious practices was deeply shaken. Others sought to reinvigorate and adapt their beliefs to the new reality. Over time, some communities slowly recovered, but others were left abandoned.

One of the sachems who joined Pumetacom in fighting the English in 1675 was known as Tispaquin or the "Black Sachem." He was sachem of Assawompset, and Plymouth officials forced him to cede land to the English, part of which became Middleborough. He was also respected as a powerful pawwaw. It was rare for a sachem also to be a pawwaw, but Tispaquin leveraged all his community's physical as well as spiritual resources in fighting for independence and survival.[18] Epidemics, English colonization, and wars altered but did not destroy

the Wampanoag religion. It persisted throughout the colonial era, and even some English colonists turned to Wampanoag men and women for spiritual aid in their times of need throughout the eighteenth century.[19]

The Congregational Way

All English colonists in seventeenth-century New England did not practice identical rituals or ascribe to the same religious beliefs. Nemasket was proximate to three different manifestations of English Puritanism. English colonists were a heterogeneous group of Protestant Christians, most of whom sought to reform churches and create purer Christian communities in England and American colonies. Although the Wampanoags in Nemasket realized that English colonists were united during times of war, they also likely understood that there were differences and religious divisions among the English colonists located to the east, north, and west. While most of these English Christians fell within the broad Puritan reform movement and Reformed tradition, Puritans in Massachusetts Bay Colony, Pilgrims (Puritan Separatists) in Plymouth Colony, and the Baptists, Quakers, and other religious groups in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations disagreed with one another on some religious and political subjects. Their system of locally controlled churches, a method of governing that they called "the Congregational way," protected local control of religion and enabled some variation of theological perspectives to co-exist in colonial New England. Quakers and Baptists made up small portions of the seventeenth-century population (around 1 percent of Christians). There were only twelve Baptist congregations in New England by 1700, but these groups were concentrated in Plymouth and Rhode Island colonies, and they expanded dramatically in the eighteenth century. By 1776, more than 15 percent of New England congregations were Baptist, and nearly 4 percent were Quaker.[20]

Puritan, Pilgrim, and Baptist colonists agreed on the vast majority of theological topics, but they separated from each other over a small number of doctrinal issues and ritual practices. New England Christians generally agreed with the foundational doctrines of Reformed-Protestant Christianity: the holiness and omnipotence of God, the three persons of this triune God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), the literal death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the absolute authority of the Bible, the deep sinfulness of humanity, salvation through faith alone, and the predetermined election of the saints. They all deeply opposed Roman Catholicism. Many New England Christians criticized the Church of England, the official form of Protestant Christianity in England. They criticized the Anglican Church's structure, especially its bishops, its interconnectedness with political power, and its relatively open access to the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper (also known as communion) for parish communities.[21]

Colonists, however, tended to disagree about how much English Protestantism required additional reforming. Most Puritans agreed that the Church of England was a legitimate and important part of Christ's visible church on earth, even though it needed further reformation. A large majority of Puritans remained in England and within Anglican parishes, and they hoped to purify their national church further. Only a minority of English Puritans migrated to American colonies. Pilgrims (Puritan Separatists), conversely, believed that the Church of England was too errant, and therefore, true Christians needed to fully separate from the state church and form new congregations made up of people who were faithful (as they defined it) to biblical requirements. Both Puritans and Pilgrims baptized infants and children of church members upon the basis of their parent's faith. Baptists, as their name implies, disagreed with Puritans and Pilgrims (and almost all other Christians) concerning how and when the ritual of baptism should be administered. Baptists believed that only people who made a personal public profession of faith should be baptized, thereby excluding

infants and small children from the ritual. The Baptists were also Separatists because they formed independent congregations of professing believers who were distinct from the all-encompassing parishes of the Church of England.[22]

Plymouth Colony was founded by Pilgrims (Separatists) and other English colonists in 1619. Many of the Pilgrims had moved to the Netherlands between 1607 and 1609 before deciding to move to America because they faced legal penalties in England for establishing illegal churches.[23] They settled on Wampanoag territory nearby Nemasket. Not everyone in early Plymouth adhered to the same beliefs; in fact, people who were not dedicated Separatists outnumbered the religiously-committed Pilgrims, and economic, not religious reasons, motivated a good share of them.[24] The Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded in 1630, and Boston became the principal city in the region. Wealthier migrants brought indentured servants whose religious views varied. Moreover, the founding of churches in Boston did not keep up with the population growth; by 1650, the two meetinghouses used for worship in Boston could only accommodate at most one-third of the town's people. Non-puritan colonists included skilled wage workers, indentured servants, slaves, fishermen, and sailors who were important to the colony's prosperity but who did not frequently participate in Puritan churches. Some of these colonists were Anglicans. Even Puritans in Boston were divided amongst themselves over a variety of theological and political topics. Some Puritans left Massachusetts Bay to establish Connecticut colony; along with economic reasons for creating a new colony, leaders in Connecticut felt that the church admission requirements in Massachusetts churches were too strict, and they disagreed about parts of that colony's governing structures.[25]

Roger Williams and a few other families started the town of Providence and the colony that eventually became Rhode Island in 1636, and it became a refuge for people with dissenting opinions. Williams was a Puritan Separatist minister who disagreed with a number of religious and civil practices in the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies. His vocal criticism led to a court-ordered banishment from Massachusetts. Williams adopted Baptist beliefs and, in 1639, started the first Baptist church in North America. Similarly, after a protracted series of private meetings, debates, and trials, from 1636 to 1638, Anne Hutchinson and some followers were banished from Massachusetts for their publicly expressed dissent. Hutchinson claimed to receive direct revelation from God, criticized ministers' sermons publicly, and shared her religious views with dozens of people in her home. According to dominant Puritan (and Anglican) interpretations of the Bible, women were prohibited from teaching or preaching religious truths. Puritan religious and civil authorities were explicitly patriarchal. Anne, her husband William Hutchinson, and eighteen other families started the town of Portsmouth in Rhode Island.

From their beginnings, Providence and other Rhode Island towns instituted freedom of conscience, which fostered religious diversity. No one was compelled to pay taxes to support a church or minister (as was required in all other New England colonies), and there were no religious requirements for full political participation in Rhode Island. For years, Massachusetts and New Haven only allowed church members to vote in colony-level elections. Because of this unique religious liberty, a wide variety of religious dissenters settled in Rhode Island. It contained a much higher proportion of Baptists, Quakers (Religious Society of Friends), and the religiously unaffiliated than other colonies. In some ways, the religious views of many Rhode Island colonists were more individualistic and radical than the Puritans in Massachusetts or the Separatists in Plymouth. For instance, Quakers asserted that believers had direct access to God's revelations through the indwelling "inner light." They also practiced, for the time, radical equality by encouraging women to speak and share their testimonies in public meetings.[26] Because of these radical beliefs, Puritans in Massachusetts banished Quakers who preached in public and occasionally executed Quakers who returned after being banished more than once. A small number of Jewish families settled in Newport, Rhode Island, by the 1670s. In the early 1760s, they built a synagogue. In 1698 an Anglican Church was

established in Newport, and Moravians came to Newport in 1758 (see Rachel Wheeler's chapter for more about Moravians).

The most significant public rituals for New England Christians (excepting Quakers) were baptism, the Lord's Supper, thanksgiving days, and fast days. For the Puritan communities, "fasting and confession were means of healing sickness in the body social."[27] In the early decades of colonization, baptism and the Lord's Supper were reserved only for members of Puritan churches, but after the 1660s, many churches in Massachusetts allowed people to "own the covenant" to be baptized or to have their children baptized. These "half-way" members (those who owned the covenant) could not partake in the Lord's Supper, which was reserved for full members.[28] Most Christians in colonial New England sought to have their infant children baptized very soon after birth, which suggests that they viewed this ritual as providing a measure of spiritual protection. In the case of the Lord's Supper, however, many English Christians avoided taking communion until facing a dangerous part of life, such as childbirth, or until they reached a more advanced age. Ministers warned congregants about the dangers of taking communion in an unworthy manner, and many introspective Puritans were cautious about approaching this ritual. "Half or more of all lay people never found the confidence to testify about the work of grace," which was a necessary part of joining and becoming a communicant in Puritan churches.[29] Baptism and communion were associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine represented the body and blood of the savior, and the water of baptism represented cleansing through burial in death and rebirth.

The central activities of public religious services were listening to sermons, praying, reading scripture, and singing psalms, but for some congregants, socializing and talking about business matters between the two Sunday services also motivated church attendance. In most of colonial New England, attending church services was nearly compulsory for town residents, but membership in a church was always voluntary. In Rhode Island, conversely, even attendance at worship services was voluntary. The residents of each town exercised complete control over their selection of a minister. No outside body — ecclesiastical or civil — could assign a minister to a town's church. Groups of ministers published guidelines for how "the congregational way" of organizing churches should function, but their recommendations were not binding on any independent congregation. Since towns and church members selected their ministers, the theological perspective of ministers varied slightly from town to town.[30]

Baptism and communion were infrequent rituals, so for many New England Christians, other weekly and daily devotional practices were central to their religious lives. The most frequent religious rituals for Christians in Middleborough and surrounded communities were individual and family prayers, fasting, confessions, and reading the Bible and other texts. Samuel Sewall, a Puritan merchant and judge, participated in nearly one hundred fast days during the years he kept a diary, and these "fasts were linked to a variety of troubles — drought and military defeat, sickness and death, politics at home and abroad, family troubles." New England Christians had high rates of literacy, and reading was a fundamental component of their religious experiences and identity. Most colonial households owned at least one Bible, printed in their native language; some households had psalms and other types of books written for devout laypeople. According to historian David Hall, "the uniqueness of the Bible was its status as the Word … It was the living speech of God, the 'voice' of Christ, a text that people 'heard.'"[31] The Bible was so crucial to Puritans' religious practices that they translated the entire scriptures into the Wampanoag language and published it in 1663 as part of their missionary activities.

Both clergy and laypeople emphasized the importance of the Bible, but the theology and religious practices of college-educated clergy varied significantly from some of their congregants and community members. Nearly everybody in New England believed that they

inhabited a "world of wonder," where nothing was an accident, and everything had a spiritual cause. According to Hall, for the Puritans, "God was immediately and actively present in the world, the ultimate force behind everything," so signs and wonders were indications of God's approval or displeasure. If manitou and spiritual beings lay behind everything good and ill that happened, according to the Wampanoags, then the Puritans likewise did not believe in accidents. Ultimately God, but in some cases Satan, caused everything that befell human beings. Puritans were continually watching for signs, such as comets, earthquakes, remarkable deliverances, and illness that suggested God's merciful generosity or angry wrath.[32] The clergy argued that prayer, repentance, fasting, and thanksgiving were the only proper ways to seek God's blessings, protection, or relief from troubles.

New Englanders generally engaged in these spiritual practices, but some of them also sought to influence the spiritual world by methods that were not rooted in Protestant Christianity. Some Puritans consulted fortune-tellers and "practiced magic to defend themselves from witchcraft." Puritans and later Christians in New England sought out Wampanoag and other Indigenous healing practices throughout the colonial era. Europeans, Indians, and West Africans all believed that witches could be threats to their families and communities because they all believed that some people could harness spiritual powers for ill purposes.[33] David Hall also describes how "lay people sometimes distanced themselves from the message of the clergy" in their beliefs and the religious books that they read. Books that diverged significantly from the dominant Puritan perspective in Massachusetts could be purchased in Boston bookshops in the seventeenth century, along with Bibles, psalm books, and Puritan devotionals. Baptist and Quaker books were available by the 1650s. According to Hall, what many New England farmers "guarded for themselves was the right of judgment. More exactly, they turned their familiarity with Scripture — their own capacities as readers — into criticism of the minister."[34]

From the last decades of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, the number of church options and private religious practices increased in New England cities. An Anglican Church, King's Chapel, was organized in Boston in 1686. Baptists and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) began worshipping in Boston despite Puritan opposition. Puritan ministers and magistrates welcomed French Protestants (Huguenots), who they embraced as fellow Reformed Protestants. As the enslaved African population in New England grew rapidly in the eighteenth century, exceeding ten thousand enslaved black people by 1750, the variety of privately practiced religions increased as well. The religious backgrounds of slaves in New England rarely appears in the historical records, but some enslaved Africans held onto their religious beliefs, including Islam and Catholicism.[35] Occasionally, even people of different religious perspectives joined Boston churches. A free black man named John Vingus joined the Hollis Street Congregational Church of Boston in 1735 by "owning the covenant," professing to believe the church's teaching. He did so to have his seven-year-old daughter baptized. John Vingus was not baptized in 1735 because he had been "baptized in his own country by a Romish priest." Vingus had practiced Roman Catholicism either in West Africa, perhaps in the independent Kingdom of Kongo, or in the Portuguese or Spanish empires before arriving in Boston.[36] There was no Catholic Church in Boston at the time, so Vingus affiliated with a Protestant one in order to have his daughter baptized. The religious beliefs in the largest New England towns were varied, but diverse religions were also practiced in small communities too.

Christianities of Nemasket and Middleborough

Even within the area of Nemasket and Middleborough, people practiced multiple types of Christianity since the late seventeenth century. Some Wampanoags maintained their own

churches there before English colonists officially established the Middleborough Congregational Church. By 1675, Wampanoag churches existed at Nemasket, Titicut, and Assawompset. In total, these churches included about 90 members. The number of members grew to about 110 by 1685.[37] These Wampanoag churches were the result of evangelical work by both English and Indian preachers. Several Puritans, especially John Eliot, John Cotton Jr., Thomas Mayhew Jr., and Richard Bourne, worked part-time to evangelize Indians. Some sachemships were amenable to Christian evangelists, while others resolutely refused missionaries. Massachusetts Bay Colony began organizing "praying towns" for Indians who were exploring Christianity; by 1674, about 2,300 Indians lived in these towns. These communities established their own churches, and colonists tried to equip Indian men to serve as ministers. Historian Edward Andrews has shown that Christianity among Native New Englanders mostly spread not by white missionaries but rather through the work of Indian evangelists.[38] Colonists stated that praying towns would protect and guarantee Indians' land possessions and independence. In reality, colonists bought or stole most of the land in these praying towns between King Philips' War and the 1750s.[39]

From the 1670s to the 1750s, a succession of Indian ministers served the churches at Nemasket, Titicut, and Assawompset. John Sassamon, who was a Massachusett Indian, attended Harvard and preached at Nemasket and Assawompset between 1673 and 1675. The complicated events surrounding his murder helped ignite King Philip's War. Other Indian ministers included Stephen, who preached at Nemasket in the late seventeenth century; Jocelin, who ministered at Assawompset from 1698 to 1711; Charles Aham, who preached at Titicut around 1698; John Hiacooomes, who preached at Assawompset from 1698 to 1718; Joseph Joshnin, who ministered at Titicut from 1710 to 1718; and John Symons (or Simons), who ministered there from 1747 to 1757.[40] John Symons, as was common for Indian men, served with English forces in colonial wars against France. Symons was wounded and disabled during military service, and the Massachusetts government granted him forty shillings a year as a pension. In Titicut, Symons served as the minister of the Indian church even as an English Baptist church developed in the same area. In 1753, Symons wrote a letter decrying the loss of more Indian land to English colonists, suggesting that Indian ministers also led the fight for community autonomy and protection.[41]

The Christianity practiced by Native Americans in colonial New England was not a simplified or partial copy of Puritan Christianity, and Indian Christians believed that maintaining a church could serve broader communities' goals of independence, self-governance, and retention of Indigenous cultures. In many ways, a new form of Christianity developed among Wampanoags in the seventeenth century. "Native people turned the missionaries' religion into a new way to express indigenous truths by melding Wampanoag religious concepts and spirits with their rough Christian equivalents," according to David Silverman. "To no small degree, this process was a natural result of using Wampanoag-language terms to communicate analogous Christian principles," a process not all that different from how Christianity changed as it spread from ancient Israel to Roman Europe. Some Native preachers and schoolteachers were paid salaries by the New England Company, a Puritan missionary organization.[42] Because of his education and bilingual abilities, John Sassamon was a cultural broker between Indians and colonists.

From the late seventeenth century until the 1740s, many of the English Christians in Middleborough sought to live out their faith as "godly walkers." They viewed their spiritual development as a life-long journey toward, hopefully by God's grace, final redemption and purification in heaven. They baptized their children when young, attended church services regularly, and engaged in family devotions. Many people, especially women, joined their church and took communion when the long-term pattern of their behavior reflected their Christian commitments. Church life was often orderly, predictable, and comfort-providing to many New Englanders. Basic knowledge of Christian theology, public

behavior that conformed to society's expectations, and a desire to become a full communicant were usually the only requirements for church membership.[43] In other words, having and publicly sharing a dramatic experience of conversion was not necessarily a requirement for joining the church. The first English Congregational Church of Middleborough was constituted, and Samuel Fuller became the pastor in 1694, although Fuller had already resided in Middleborough for years and had probably led religious services in homes before that date. After Fuller's death in 1695, several ministers preached at the church for limited periods. Peter Thatcher served as pastor of this church from 1709 until his death in 1744.[44] Following the Great Awakening and Thatcher's death, however, the religious status quo was dramatically altered. The Congregational church divided as some people wanted to make churches purer by instituting more stringent requirements for membership. After the 1740s, Middleborough's residents could choose among several competing English congregations.

Great Awakening and Church Schisms

The 1740s was a period of tremendous religious change and divisions for New England communities, and Middleborough "experienced one of New England's most powerful revivals."[45] Religious revivals, periods of intense devotional practices and higher rates of church admissions, occurred periodically in earlier decades. Reverends Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards led the Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts, through several revivals, and Edwards' revival of 1732–1733 became widely known because his account of it was published in London, England, in 1737. The revivals of the early 1740s, however, were different from previous revivals because of their broad impact and long-lasting consequences.

George Whitefield was an Anglican priest from England who pioneered new preaching and publication techniques that, along with many imitators, created a "Great Awakening" in New England. Whitefield traveled from town to town, drawing enormous crowds to hear him preach. He also used newspapers masterfully to share his message and prime his audiences. The effects were not identical or consistent from town to town, but a remarkably high number of people decided to join a church or be baptized in New England in 1741 and 1742. According to historian Douglas Winiarski, "perhaps as many as 60 percent of all New England churches admitted more than twice the yearly number of communicants" during these years. Middleborough was significantly affected by the preaching of Whitefield and other visiting colonial ministers such as Daniel Rogers, Gilbert Tennent, and Eleazar Wheelock.[46]

Not only did more people join the church, but the demographics of the church members changed during this revival. From 1741 to 1744, the average age of the people who joined the church dropped significantly. In the Congregational Church of Middleborough, "men admitted during the revival season were, on average, more than twelve years younger than their pre-awakening fathers, brothers, and neighbor; the mean age for women dropped by more than five years. More than one in five men and one in four women admitted to Middleborough church during the revival were under the age of twenty, compared to 3 and 9 percent, respectively before 1740." The youngest new members were ages seven and nine.[47] In earlier times, most people waited longer to join their church and take communion, but the revival preachers sternly warned listeners not to wait in committing their lives to the Lord. Those who waited too long might miss their chance and be called to God's judgment seat unprepared.