

## BOOK REVIEWS

*J*on Butler. *New World Faiths: Religion in Colonial America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xi, 183, illustrations, index. Paper, \$12.95.)

Religion has an awkward place in early American history. To many, early American history is best characterized by the earliest settlers—those that sought to establish religion as a cornerstone of their communities and did not welcome outside religious interference. Yet, if our national ancestors were so religiously motivated, how can we understand our own spiritual heritage best exemplified by the First Amendment—that is, that “the federal government should not legislate on religious matters and should leave individuals alone in their pursuit of religion and religious truth” (148)? In his book *New World Faiths*, Jon Butler traces the variety and intensity of religious persuasions in early America from the Catholic missions in New Spain to the African American Episcopal churches in Federalist America to argue

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that “religious practices and beliefs in America were modified in response to changing circumstances. In turn, changing religious traditions altered the ways Europeans, Africans and Native Americans experienced life. These powerful interactions made religion a major force everywhere in colonial American life” (20).

Religion is, in fact, often overlooked in explaining early American experiences. It is often superseded by economic, material or political motivations. Religious early Americans are viewed with suspicion, and religiously apathetic accounts are touted as standard attitudes. Yet religion encouraged Europeans to immigrate, exposed them to new ideas, fueled tensions, sanctioned slavery, and drove missionaries. Even when individual Americans remained apathetic or hostile to religion, Butler argues that religion was central to American development; in fact, “religion, in short, molded the New World everywhere” (xi).

The seven main chapters cover the variety of experiences and beliefs, both similarities and differences, between Africans, Native Americans and Europeans that illustrate the uniquely evolving American religious character. The first three chapters set the stage of the American experience in its infancy. Butler begins with the Old World (Africa, Europe and America before European arrival) where religions were not static, but had yet to confront the upheavals and transformations of the New World (20). Quickly, he moves on to the violent encounters of the French and Spanish with Native Americans and the struggle for traditional religious establishment that foreshadowed English experiences more than a century later. Lastly, Butler discusses the settling of New England and the Chesapeake by the English who experienced a familiar desire to establish strong religious bases. However, despite initial religiosity, church adherence faltered by the 1640s and waned dramatically by the 1680s to the tune of jeremiads, beliefs in witchcraft and anxiety over religious fates.

The next three chapters discuss the late seventeenth and eighteenth-century explosion of religious denominational and spiritual diversity that shocked and perturbed Americans, and created religious competition. Spurred by European immigration and revivalism, “religious diversity [became] one of the region’s most distinctive features and . . . major component of colonial life everywhere” (73). Simultaneously, Native American religions adapted in the face of death and missionaries, and African religions persisted in the face of slavery and masters’ desire to resist all slaves’ religious pursuits—both created new religious identities quite separate from European religious experiences.

Two main periods of revival, from 1680 to 1710 and from 1740 to 1770, allowed existing churches to expand and strengthen their holds, created new churches, changed preaching styles and increased women's religious participation to hitherto unseen levels, all of which "typified American religion in the next three centuries" (128). The last chapter confirms this plurality of American religious experience culminating in the First Amendment. Butler argues that the First Amendment "embodied the essence of colonial American religious development—the evolution of a lively, multifaceted, multiracial, multiethnic religious world brought forth mainly by independent groups and individuals rather than by the state" (133).

All together, Butler's *New World Faiths* is an excellent synthesis of the most current and classic works on early American religious practices. Butler pulls divergent people, places, and themes into a coherent narrative and argument of American religious experience without losing the details and examples that illuminate history. The end result is a thoroughly enjoyable, well-written, concise textbook that argues for a uniquely American religious experience that can easily be used as the basis for an early American religious history class or as an accompaniment to a broader American history class. Those interested in expanding their general early American religious knowledge will find entertaining examples, connections with modern religious sensibilities and thorough explanations.

Teachers at high school or college level will find the chronology, further reading, and index at the back of the book as useful as the main text. All the events in the seven-page chronology are discussed in the main text, and are included in the fifteen page exhaustive index that runs from the Acoma to the Zuni Indians. The chronology is especially useful, as are eight pages of nearly ninety books for further reading, all of which are accessible for undergraduates.

However, *New World Faiths* is not without shortcomings. A single primary source is included at the end of four of the seven chapters, and two primary sources at the end of another. Although they are excellent sources, including Jonathan Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, it is not clear why they were included and not other sources that were mentioned in the main text. Without comparative sources or exploratory questions their usefulness in this context is limited. Why include some sources and not others? Why on some chapters but not all chapters? Similarly the images chosen for the center of the book lack connection with the main text—they are not placed chronologically, nor do they accurately reflect the variety of religious experiences.

The primary source texts and images could have supported and enhanced the main text, instead they awkwardly hang on. Despite these minor limitations, Butler's *New World Faiths* should be imminently useful in the classroom, as well as an easily digestible read. Butler accomplishes both an accessible general synthesis and an argumentative narrative—a difficult feat.

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Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller. *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America*. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. Pp. ix, 229, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$60.00; Paper, \$27.95.)

Landlocked though it may be, Pennsylvania encompasses a remarkable forty-five thousand miles of streams and rivers. Any historian of the mid-Atlantic knows well the significant influence these waterways have had on every period of this region's past. From Washington crossing the Delaware to Fulton's earliest hopes for the steamboat, the Commonwealth boasts its share of famous river stories. But beyond the icons, there are also important stories to tell about how Pennsylvania rivers have shaped settlement, mediated cultural conflict, forged economies, and nurtured ties to the Atlantic World. These stories figure in important state and regional histories, but outside coffee-table glossies, rarely do the rivers themselves play leading roles.

*Pennsylvania History* readers who wish to fill this gap will find an instructive template for a new river history in Christof Mauch and Thomas Zeller's edited collection, *Rivers in History: Perspectives on Waterways in Europe and North America*. The editors' goal is to reposition rivers as dynamic entities, not just backdrops, within historical studies. Rivers, they argue, are significant indices of the cultural forces—such as fur trading in the American west or mountain forestry throughout the world—that alter waterways over time. Purposeful efforts to control rivers receive special attention throughout the volume, especially where the work of hydrologists demonstrates the determination of emerging nation states to link the social meaning of rivers and water quality to political agendas. It will come as no surprise that echoes of James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* ring throughout.