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# The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America

Edited by

Philip Goff



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## Preface

The only thing that rivals the transformation of religion in North America over the past 50 years is the way American religion is studied. It is not just that the Civil Rights movement, feminism, increased immigration, and the rise of the Religious Right have changed the face of the United States; rather, these events have caused scholars to reassess how they study the many components of religion in North America. Several encyclopedias and collections have documented the religious revolution away from a liberal Protestant cultural hegemony to a decentered religious pluralism in which consumerism, entertainment, and a therapeutic mindset often govern religions' growth here. What we've lacked is a comprehensive volume by leading scholars to assess the story behind the story — how it is that the analysis of religion has changed alongside the religious landscape. *The Companion to Religion in America* offers an opportunity for scholars to step back and consider not just the various major topics that constitute American religion, but also the ways those subjects have been analyzed by scholars over the years. Each author tells the story of scholarship about a particular topic in American religious history alongside a description of that topic.

The Companion to Religion in America stands apart from anything else currently in print. Existing encyclopedias focus on descriptions and analyses of particular topics, usually from the perspective only of the one author. Ignored are the multiple interpretations and the long and storied "careers" of topics – such as when they arose in significance within the field, to which traditions they are tied, how different schools of thought developed in relation to those topics, as well as how they were challenged and changed not only in response to changes in society but also in relation to transformations within the scholarly discipline.

This collection, by contrast, includes essays from a rich variety of scholars capable of stepping back to analyze the bibliographic history in a narrative fashion. Authored by both longstanding "stars" and more recent young scholars beginning to make their marks in the field, the volume offers a unique collection of essays on the most important topics in American religious studies. These are not just descriptions of topics, but bibliographic essays on the life of our most important subjects in the field. They are not so much snapshots of subjects as they are portraits in motion.