Introduction

Comparisons of Migrants and Their Religions, Past and Present

Richard Alba, Albert J. Raboteau, and Josh DeWind

The importance of religion for the incorporation of immigrants and their children into American society was a truism for those who attempted to understand the aftermath of the mass immigration of Europeans and East Asians of a century ago. The scholars and laypersons who studied and reflected on immigrant groups in the America of the first half of the 20th century took for granted that the institutions and meaning systems that religion provided shaped the immigrants’ experiences in profound ways and could help or hinder the adjustment to the new setting. They understood also that the “religious factor,” to borrow the title from one famous sociological study of the early 1960s, was not a given but evolved for each group in response to the challenges of living in a new environment. These points were all the more consequential because the immigrants formed not only ethnic minorities in the U.S. society of the time but also religious ones. Heavily Catholic and Jewish, they had entered a society that defined itself not simply as Christian but as Protestant and which regarded the immigrants of the time with suspicion and even xenophobia. Largely forgotten today is that Catholics and Jews were targets of Ku Klux Klan venom and that, during the 1920s, the Klan was a powerful organization in many of the northern cities where immigrants concentrated (Jackson, 1967).

The most famous reflection on these issues was Will Herberg’s Protestant-Catholic-Jew (1960 [1955]), but their traces are evident almost everywhere one looks in the literature of 1900–65: for instance, in W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki’s classic work The Polish Peasant in Europe
and America (1918–20). Remarkably, religion was initially a minor theme in the scholarship on the “new,” post-1965 immigration. Among sociologists and economists, the predominant emphasis was for a time on the socioeconomic insertion of immigrants and their children. From this perspective, the omission of the religious aspects of immigrant incorporation is perhaps understandable: scholars no longer credited religion with as much economic significance as they did when they were still under the spell of Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1958 [1904–5]).

But it was a major omission, nevertheless. As in the early 20th century, immigration today is fueling the development of minority religious groups, such as Korean and Chinese Buddhists, Indian Sikhs, and Arab and South Asian Muslims, thereby expanding the range of religious diversity. More than in the mass immigration of a century ago, however, many new immigrants belong to religions that are well established on the American landscape, such as Mexican Catholics and Korean Presbyterians, though often immigrants set up their own congregations rather than join existing ones. In any case, religion has not lost any of its power to shape the incorporation of immigrants as an institution where immigrants can seek some shelter from the stresses they face in the U.S. environment, share knowledge about jobs and business opportunities, and introduce their children to the ethnic community; indeed, religion has become a cultural scheme that they can use to interpret their experiences and guide their actions.

Religion of necessity is gradually being restored to its rightful place of importance in inquiry into the immigrant and second-generation experience. While scholars of religion did little for a number of years to tackle descriptively or theoretically the complex nexus of religion and immigration (with the exception, most notably, of Jay Dolan, Robert Orsi, and Karen McCarthy Brown), the signs of change are increasingly evident. Diana Eck’s Religious Pluralism Project at Harvard University recognized and began to describe the stunning variety of religious groups brought to the United States largely as a result of the new immigration. Her book, A New Religious America (2001), synthesized the results and brought them to the attention of a wide audience. Meanwhile, the New Ethnic and Immigrant Congregations Project, under the leadership of sociologist Stephen Warner, supported investigations into a variety of new immigrant groups and religions, resulting in a volume of essays, Warner and Judith Wittner’s Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities

To impart additional momentum in this rediscovered direction, the Pew Charitable Trusts provided funding to the Social Science Research Council’s International Migration Program to organize a project that would support research and convene scholars to examine relations between Religion, Migration, and Civic Life. Led by Josh DeWind, this program convened a series of meetings involving both social scientists and scholars of religion interested in immigration, with the purpose of creating a working group that would lay out the terrain of inquiry for the field and point in some fruitful directions. After a number of preliminary meetings, a group emerged with Richard Alba and Albert Raboteau as its co-chairs and defined an agenda for a first round of intellectual surveying. Sixteen scholars would be invited to prepare papers on the religion(s) of a particular immigrant group from a doubly comparative perspective. One comparison would be historical, pairing a new immigrant group with an older one to ascertain what is distinctive about the new immigration and what remains continuous with the patterns of the old. The other comparison would pair scholars from different disciplinary areas, social-scientific and religious studies, to see what new insights such collaborative exchanges might spark. In short, the basic motivation for the working group was to help shape the burgeoning field of immigration studies by bringing together perspectives from religious studies and those of immigration studies to enrich our understanding of the institutions by which immigrant communities organize themselves and the systems of meaning by which they “map” their lives. The current volume results from this group’s efforts.

Religion as Institution—Religion as System of Meaning

Two approaches—religion as institution, religion as system of meaning—strike us as essential to any investigation of the ramifications of religion for the incorporation of immigrants and subsequent generations. No single
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A scholar needs to give equal weight to both, and most of the authors in this volume devote more attention to one than to the other. But the scholarship on the immigration-religion nexus must deploy these approaches in a balanced way. For as institutions, religious organizations have acted as social service agencies, materially aiding immigrants through such “secular” concerns as economic opportunity, political activity, and the promotion of educational achievement. Descriptions of the institutional forms and activities of religion tend to deploy sociological categories and to emphasize the socioeconomic and political effects of religious activity (e.g., Hirschman, 2004; Foley and Hoge, 2007; Foner and Alba, 2008). As a meaning system, religion has furnished immigrant communities with symbolic interpretation of the experience of immigration, ritual reinforcement of identity, and the moral support of self-esteem. Descriptions of the meaning-making function of religion use the categories of religious studies and focus on beliefs, values, worship practices, and devotional piety (e.g., Orsi, 1985).

These two aspects of religion, while analytically separable, are not separate but cohere, even if imperfectly. When, for example, a particular religion fails to fulfill desired socioeconomic functions, practitioners may adopt another religion that does, thus demonstrating the greater efficacy and plausibility of the new religion’s meaning system, as do, for example, Latino and Haitian Catholics who convert to evangelical forms of Protestantism. They may even adopt another religion while continuing to embrace the system of meaning of the previous one for certain occasions or particular purposes.

Four themes weave throughout the chapters and engage both aspects of immigrant religion, those of institutional structures and systems of meaning. All the themes can be viewed in terms of the most basic dilemma that confronts any immigrant group: How do its members cope with their status as outsiders? The question itself is Janus-faced. One face looks outward from the group to its place in the receiving society; this aspect is concerned with the barriers to inclusion. The other face looks inward and is concerned with the vulnerability of the group and its members in the new environment.

One theme, then, that emerges prominently from the substantive chapters is religion as a site for the articulation of the relationship to the host society. From the perspective of civic life, religious institutions of immigrant populations and their leaders have frequently played an important role in representing the group’s interests to nonethnic audiences and
making claims on its behalf (Foley and Hoge, 2007). The interests involved may be religious—for instance, the right of Muslim female students to dress in distinctive ways and to participate in required school activities, such as physical education, without having to compromise religious and moral injunctions. But, even more frequently, they involve overtly secular concerns, such as the legal and political rights of immigrants. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church, nominally the religious home of millions of Hispanic immigrants, the largest portion of the contemporary immigration stream, has taken strong positions on numerous questions touching on the rights of these immigrants. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference, for instance, condemned Proposition 187 in California, which would have deprived illegal immigrants and their children of many public services, and the Catholic Church worked against its passage and subsequently joined lawsuits to block its implementation.

For many of the groups studied in this volume, systems of meaning also seem to shift in the American environment to address the concerns about outsider status. One manifestation, our first theme, is the rise of theological discourses to assert the compatibility of the group’s values with those of U.S. society. Sometimes these take quite remarkable forms, assertions that, despite the superficial appearance of difference, the group is, at bottom, ultra-American, more American in some respects than native-born Americans themselves. Sharon Suh’s discussion of Korean Buddhists (chapter 6) provides an example: her respondents insist that Buddhist teachings, with their emphasis on self-reliance, are more consistent with the American ethos of individualism than are the theologies and orientations of the Christian churches with which most Korean immigrants affiliate.

A second theme invokes the involvement of religious institutions in ethnic community building. Historically, this was a pivotal role that churches and synagogues played for European immigrant groups in the United States. As numerous observers have noted, one of the first activities of immigrants who settled in compact concentrations in American cities in the early 20th century was to collect funds to erect a religious center and to recruit the clergy to lead it (Orsi, 1985). In the case of Catholic immigrants, churches serving different ethnic and language groups were often erected within sight of each other, since the American Catholic Church recognized the critical need for national parishes (parishes whose membership was based on common ethnicity, language, and national origin instead of geographical proximity). These religious institutions, within
which the mother tongue was the secular language of communication between clergy and laity, served as visible representations of the establishment of an ethnic community and sometimes of its material success. They provided spaces where this community qua community could congregate and recognize itself beyond the individual needs and mundane activities that dominated workaday life.

In one respect, the need for such institutions is perhaps even greater today than it was during the previous high point of immigration. True, the immigrants of the turn of the 20th century tended to cluster in the lowest rungs of American society and were probably placed generally in a more powerless position than is the case today. Yet many contemporary immigrant groups are more spatially dispersed than those of a century ago: advances in transportation and the affluence and professional standing of some groups, such as Indians, have led to this outcome (Kurien, 1998; Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Therefore, they have at least as much need as the impoverished southern and eastern Europeans for spaces to come together as a community—for reasons of respite from the pressures of living in a strange society; maintaining connections to and sharing experiences with others from the same places and homelands; and introducing children, the second generation, into the ethnic community. Quite famously, Korean Christian churches fulfill these functions for the immigrant generation, though less so for the second generation (Min and Kim, 2005).

This is not simply a need met on the institutional level. The strains of the immigration experience are difficult: some individuals are placed in extremis. Religious systems of meaning can be invoked to provide guidance and significance for such persons. At times, they produce answers that border on the nationalistic, proclaiming the superiority of the immigrants to the surrounding society. Thus, it is not uncommon to find theological answers to immigrant dilemmas that declare the mission of the group as one of “saving” American society from its impending moral fall. In reflecting on why Jews and Muslims find themselves in American society, theological discourse in both groups has identified a salvific role they can play; and Korean Christians have sometimes cast themselves in a similar role, as revitalizers and purifiers of American Christianity.

Closely associated with the communal aspects of immigrant religion is the third theme, the theme of connection to the homeland. Sometimes such a connection is built indissolubly into a religion, such as when the homeland is recognized as its sacred center or the seat of religious
authority. The latter was the case for Italian Catholics and, during the period of Protestant proselytizing, added to the intensity of the struggle for their loyalties, since they were defined as the “Pope’s people.” But even when the connection does not have this essential nature, it arises generally out of a straightforward institutional logic, since, for instance, the recruitment of clerics who speak the mother tongue requires it. Likewise, the circulation of sacred objects between the parent religious body in the homeland and its satellites abroad creates connections. In these senses, religions are, by their natures, transnational institutions that link places separated by great distances on the earth’s surface in fraternal embrace (Smith, 2006; Levitt, 2007). Indeed, the re-creation of important religious sites establishes immigrant holy sites as translocative. As Elizabeth McAlister and Karen Richman demonstrate here (chapter 12), the Madonna of 115th Street in East Harlem became the translocated site of pilgrimage to the Haitian lwa Ezili Danto (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel) for Haitian immigrants in New York.

The relationship of the immigrants to the homeland also is frequently taken up by systems of religious meaning. A case discussed at length by Richman and McAlister is that of Haitian immigrants whose connection to an ancestral plot of land represents a spiritual and moral tie to family and kin relationships that is reaffirmed in economic responsibilities sanctioned by Vodou. For some immigrants, these responsibilities become such a drag on their economic and social advance in the new environment that they seek to jettison them by converting to evangelical Protestantism.

The final, fourth, theme of broad significance arises from the plural religious environment of the United States, which has varied ramifications for religions and for immigrants. Many religious groups come to the United States from homelands where they were the dominant presence, the religion of the majority, while others, such as eastern European Jews, had survived in hostile surroundings where group members were segregated in separate communities and conversion to the religion of the majority was a possibility rarely taken. They find themselves in the United States in a society where many religious groups exist and are free to compete for members. After a long period of being able to take the loyalty of their members for granted, they find themselves in a religious marketplace, an agora, where their members may be tempted by the wares of other denominations; and the new setting may thus provoke innovations. National parishes for Catholic immigrants at the turn of the 20th century
served, in part, as the American hierarchy’s response to the unexpected success of Protestant proselytizers, who made inroads among Italian and other immigrants. Eastern European Jews, too, recognized the need to attend to religious loyalty in an open society where anti-Semitism was not strong enough to wall Jews into a sort of ghetto. As Calvin Goldscheider describes (chapter 7), mid-20th-century Jews drew a line at intermarriage; but the rapid rise of outmarriage by Jews during the last quarter of the last century has led to other strategies for preserving a demographic core. For the immigrants themselves, the availability of many more religious options than they previously were familiar with can have profound consequences. For African American migrants from the South, the greater religious spectrum in the black communities of the North provided novel ways of translating the basic problems of racial inequality into religious terms. Thus, the immigrant who might have been a Baptist or Methodist in rural Georgia might become attached to the Garveyite group in the North as one strategy for laying claim to greater rights; or she might become a devotee of Father Divine, implying another strategy for attaining material and social well-being.

For some groups, the relative openness and tolerance of American society provides acute theological challenges, to which different generations have responded in different ways. This phenomenon is elegantly presented in Arnold Eisen’s discussion of Judaism (chapter 8). Eisen demonstrates that, for many, the notion of Jews as God’s chosen people required revision in the United States; here, within the frame of a pluralist democracy where anti-Semitism abated, that notion resonated with a sense of superiority that produced discomfort. Even the meaning of being Jewish shifted for many Jews in the less oppressive atmosphere of American society, leading to such widespread variants as self-identified Jews who maintain cultural and social attachments to the ethnic group but do not practice the religion.

Entrance to the agora was fraught with difficulties for non-Protestant immigrants during the 19th century and for much of the 20th as well, due to the legally unestablished but socially pervasive hegemony of evangelical Protestantism, which viewed Catholics and Jews as inimical to the ideals of a Christian “redeemer nation,” chosen by God for a special salvific role among the nations of the world. Matched with a xenophobic “Anglo-Saxonism,” periodic outbreaks of religious bigotry led to the organization of various societies to protect America from subversion by foreigners within, who held allegiance to foreign powers, such as the papacy, or to
international secret cabals, “exposed” by propaganda like the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Old stereotypes died hard and were dusted off and reused during periods of perceived threat such as the presidential campaign of the Roman Catholic, Al Smith, in 1928 and even that of John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Despite these hurdles, religious minorities, as Smith and Kennedy illustrate, have successfully used the free exercise clause of the First Amendment, the universalistic rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence, and their own upward social and economic mobility to achieve gradual acceptance, often begrudging at first, into the public square of religious tolerance, thus expanding and realizing the national ideal of pluralism. Ongoing tensions about the extent of admission to the agora still trouble newer immigrants such as Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and especially Muslims in post-9/11 America, as Yvonne Haddad’s essay argues (chapter 9).

**Design of the Study**

In our conception, the study had a natural $2 \times 2$ design. One twosome originated with disciplinary affiliation: pairing a social scientist who could speak to the demographic and institutional aspects of an immigrant religion with a religious scholar who attended to meaning and symbolic aspects. This pairing also had to cover two different bodies of knowledge in another way: one scholar, in our view, should have an understanding of the immigration and incorporation history of the group; the other, its religious affiliations.

The other twosome was implied by the comparative nature of the investigation. Our conceit was to compare the religious aspects of incorporation of groups from the classical and contemporary periods of immigration that have similarities in their location within the immigration spectrum and also in their religious location. Thus, the Italians and Mexicans were chosen because they are both examples of large, low-wage labor immigrations—indeed, each epitomizes this phenomenon for its respective era (Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997; Perlmann, 2005)—and they are overwhelmingly Catholic groups with homeland histories of low rates of observance and of a fusion of Catholicism with folk practices. As the subsequent comparisons reveal, however, one can never declare a faithful parallelism to exist between two groups with two distinct experiences. The Italian-Mexican comparison is imperfect in some important respects, as
are each of the others. The fruitfulness of the comparison comes through, nevertheless, because it sheds new light on the institutional discrimination confronting Mexicans in the West and Southwest through much of the 20th century. Briefly put, Catholicism did not help Mexicans nearly as much as it helped Italians to advance in American society.

The 2 × 2 design led us to the notion of each comparison as staffed by a quartet of scholars, like a bridge table. In fact (and with some difficulty), we commissioned scholars to fill these roles at each table. While we initially imagined that each scholar would write a separate paper from his or her particular vantage point and from this four-way conversation a larger story would unfold, for a variety of reasons various scholars teamed up to write joint papers. In the end, only the comparison of eastern European Jews and middle-eastern Muslims lived up to the original, four-paper plan.

In many ways, the most difficult part of the plan was arriving at a suitable set of comparisons, and even far into the process, participants were raising questions about the precise comparisons we chose. In conceiving of the comparisons, we attempted to lay out a theoretically designed set of boxes, one for each comparison. Given the religious history and constitution of the United States, it seemed appropriate to use the comparisons to understand the incorporation of the following:

1. Immigrant groups whose religion is already well established in the United States (Italian and Mexican Catholics). Abstractly, it would seem as if religious and social incorporation could proceed according to a set of preexisting templates that eventually bring members of the group, perhaps especially of the second and third generation, into multiethnic congregations and hence increasing integration into communities beyond those of the immigrant group. This is an old idea and was the core of the hypothesis of the Triple Melting Pot, formulated by sociologist Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy in the 1940s and 1950s. According to the hypothesis, the descendants of European immigrants were being absorbed into multiethnic communities defined along religious lines, exemplified in patterns of intermarriage that took place between individuals of different ethnicities but common religions (Kennedy, 1944, 1952).

2. Immigrants whose religion is related to, but not one of, the “charter” religions of American society (eastern European Jews and Arab Muslims). The charter religions are those that, because of historical “agreements,” have become identified with the American mainstream.
Today, these religions include the major Protestant denominations, Catholicism, and Judaism, and their charter role is represented by the common description of the United States as a “Judeo-Christian society.” Moreover, these religions and their observances have become institutionalized in the everyday realities of the mainstream society in a way that sets them above the situations of other religious groups, which are faced with difficult struggles to have, for example, their claim on holiday exemptions recognized. This is indisputable in the case of the Christian denominations, given the society-wide exemptions from normal quotidian responsibilities observed during their two major holidays, Easter and Christmas.

The definition of the charter religions can change over time. Groups once defined as outsiders can succeed in making their way into the inner circle. This is exemplified by Judaism. When eastern European Jews arrived en masse in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they found a society that resolutely defined itself as Christian, even Protestant, and identified them as outsiders. Yet, during the second half of the 20th century, Judaism gradually achieved a charter status, at least in the regions of the country where many Jews are settled and where, today, many school systems close down for the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. A reasonable question is whether Muslims can achieve the same feat, and in fact (and ironically) Muslims often take Jews as the model to be emulated, as Yvonne Haddad points out (chapter 9).

3. Immigrants who bring religions unrelated to any of the charter religions (Japanese and Korean Buddhists). Many observers of the contemporary immigration scene have noted its religious diversity, some going as far as to predict the end of Christian hegemony in the foreseeable future. Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others have increased in number and, in some cases, planted their initial congregations in the United States as a result of contemporary immigration. Much of this diversity is associated with Asian immigrants. Yet this is not the first time that religions entirely outside the Judeo-Christian family of faiths have arrived on American shores, for they were brought also by the sizable streams of immigrants from Japan and China that were part of the classical era. Thus, we can hope to learn something about contemporary religious incorporation by examining how religion was implicated in the incorporation of these earlier groups.
The comparison between Japanese and Koreans focuses on groups coming from countries where Buddhist traditions are predominant in the religious faiths of the majority but where Christianity had made inroads before the onset of immigration and conversions to Christianity among the immigrants were frequent.

4. The previous comparison involves groups that are racially different from the largely white mainstream. Before the legal and institutional changes brought about by the civil rights movement, which led to the radical elimination of racial bars to immigration in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the ability of members of the Asian groups to enter the mainstream was almost nil due to institutionalized racism, which, for instance, until 1952 prevented Asian foreign-born residents from naturalizing as citizens of the United States. How much the changes of the civil rights period and the more tolerant climate ushered in by them and by the resurgence of immigration have reduced the impact of racism on Asian groups is the subject of debate.

The continuing impact of racism on individuals of African ancestry is not open to debate, however. Research on contemporary Afro-Caribbean immigrants, exemplified by Mary Waters’s acclaimed *Black Identities* (1999), has established unambiguously that these immigrants—and, even more, their children—are treated on numerous occasions as members of an undifferentiated black group and that their life chances in consequential domains, such as residence, are hemmed in by race. Moreover, a long-established literature has demonstrated the significance of churches as sites for the contestation of race and racial oppression by African Americans. Hence, the interaction between race and religion has a special significance for African-ancestry migrants. There could also be similarities in this respect between black immigrants, who cross a national boundary, and migrants, who move within the territory of the United States.

The comparison for this conceptual cell involves contemporary Haitian immigrants, on the one hand, and the southern African Americans who moved north during the era of the Great Migration.
What Do We Learn from the Comparisons?

With such a varied set of comparisons, it is not clear, at first, what conclusions might be extracted from the quartet of comparisons as a whole. Before we can address this question, though, we need to examine the results of each of the comparisons in turn. Needless to say, there is much that must be regarded as tentative because our effort has been exploratory, covering terrain that has been overlooked by many scholars of contemporary immigration. To an important extent, also, the studies in this volume specify the questions that subsequent research should address.

The Italian-Mexican comparison was conceived as one where religion, especially in its social and institutional dimensions, might be thought to provide long-run advantages for an immigrant group, one belonging to an established, mainstream religion, which already has many American adherents. This initial hunch, however, has not panned out. Instead, the comparison of the study of Italian Americans by Richard Alba and Robert Orsi (chapter 1) to those of Mexicans by Roberto Lint Sagarena (chapter 2) and David Lopez (chapter 3) seems to reveal a previously unrecognized aspect of the exclusion of Mexican Americans from the mainstream.

What made this comparison particularly appealing were some sociological similarities that have led some scholars to see the Mexicans as potentially the Italians of today. The two groups represent the great low-wage labor migrations of their times. In both cases, too, mainstream Americans have doubted the assimilability of the immigrants and their children. These sociological similarities are bolstered by religious ones: both groups brought a syncretic Catholicism mixed with folk practices that distinguished the immigrant religious practice and belief from those of mainstream American Catholics. The groups are alike also in that the weak attachments of many group members to the Catholic Church have engendered relatively high rates of conversion to Protestantism.

The most intriguing aspect of the comparison is that, for the most part, the Italians have entered the American mainstream. Indeed, as the chapter by Alba and Orsi reveals, the Italians exemplify as well as any other European group the paradigm of generation-by-generation progression into the mainstream that has traditionally dominated thinking about the incorporation of immigrant groups. Not only was their social ascent paralleled by transitions in their Catholicism, but also the options for religious inclusion within the church were implicated in their rise up the
social ladder. The point of immigrant inclusion was typically an Italian parish located in an area of immigrant settlement. As upward movement occurred, in the second or the third generations, outward movement (migration away from urban ethnic enclaves) typically did as well. In the geography of post–World War II America, this migration often led Italian Americans into suburban settings where parishes were multiethnic and set the stage for further intermarriage.

Paralleling this movement were changes in piety and in the relationship to Catholic schools. Italian immigrant piety, with its emphasis on relationships to saints, exemplified in festas, and its casual norms about church attendance, especially for men, was quite distant from the American—or perhaps more accurately, Irish American—understanding of religiosity. But over generations, Italian American Catholics appear to have grown much closer to American Catholic norms. The same was true for the parochial school system. Italians were well known during their first decades in the United States for keeping their distance from parochial schools and sending their children to the public system. However, as they rose socioeconomically, they became more likely to send their children to Catholic schools; in this respect, Catholic education, which for many provided the initial entrée to the university world, became a mark of success and inclusion.

This could have been the storyline for Mexican Americans, but it has not been, at least up to this point. The chapters by Lopez and Lint Sagarena tell a story in counterpoint to the Italian one. For much of the 20th century, the Mexicans, who had become a largely immigrant, rather than indigenous, group by then, were not regarded as an integral part of the European American Catholicism that was developing in the West and Southwest, especially in California. Indeed, the American Catholic Church was not as ethnically anchored in the western United States as it was on the East Coast, because it was largely dependent on migrants from the East and Midwest, who in many cases were cutting their ties to their ethnic communities of origin through migration. As Lint Sagarena describes, the church was attempting to gain acceptance as an American religion, and thus its western leaders drew distinctions between European American Catholics and Mexican American ones. They thereby shared with Anglo Protestants a set of demeaning attitudes toward Mexican American Catholics, seeing their practices, for instance, as involving folk superstitions.
The Catholic Church did not provide Mexican Americans with the avenues leading to the mainstream in the way that it did for European American ethnics. In the West, Mexican Americans kept their distance from the Euro-American-dominated church—for instance, worshipping at home altars and preserving their veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was maintained more by lay devotional societies than by parish clergy. The church’s investment in Catholic educational institutions, which provide alternatives for families in poor neighborhoods where the quality of public education may be low, was heavily concentrated in the areas of European immigrant settlement. Thus, Mexicans have not had the helping hand of Catholic schools and colleges to assist them in breaking through educationally to the same degree that Italians and Poles have.

The comparison between eastern European Jews and Arab Muslims also reveals a thought-provoking blend of similarities and differences. When immigrant Jews arrived in large numbers in the early decades of the 20th century, there seemed to be little reason to expect that their descendants would be seen as part of the mainstream. American society, while not nearly as oppressive as Russia and other parts of eastern Europe, was still anti-Semitic. Yet, as the essays by Eisen (chapter 8) and Goldscheider (chapter 9) indicate in different ways, America turned out to be open to an extraordinary upward mobility by many Jewish families; and Judaism itself, which has come to be identified as a mainstream religion, is the only non-Christian one so far. Ironically, then, many Muslim Americans, seeing their religion under attack, look to Jews and Judaism for a model of how to gain acceptance and influence.

These may seem hopeless goals in light of the scrutiny and suspicion that have fallen on Muslims since 9/11. However, one does well to remember that other ethnic and religious groups have prospered after enduring similar periods of trial. The paramount example is that of Japanese Americans, who had recovered socioeconomically and dispersed throughout society within two decades of the disaster wrought on them by World War II internment. The blinding light of suspicion was cast on Jews, too, during the McCarthy period, but not long afterward their intermarriage rates had begun a sharp upward climb. Thus, it is too early to draw strong conclusions on whether the tensions and suspicions of the present will exclude Muslims from the mainstream.

These two groups are alike, moreover, in the close relationship of their faiths to Christianity; indeed, all three—Jew, Muslim, Christian—are now
acknowledged as kindred branches of the Abrahamic tree. Their mono-
theism has common roots, and they share prophetic traditions, along with
some of their texts and spiritual forebears. Of course, such commonal-
ties are related also to historic entanglements that have left behind memories
of hostility and battle. Nevertheless, they also place Islam, like Judaism,
in a fundamentally different position with respect to the Christian ma-
jority than is the case for religions like Buddhism that are unrelated to
Christianity.

The similarities do not end there. As Ann Shih Lin observes in the es-
say on Detroit Arabs (chapter 10), “Islam is a noninstitutional faith: like
Judaism, the rituals of faith are lived through daily life and personal prac-
tice.” The absence of hierarchy and the lack of attachment of the majority
of Muslims to mosques suggest the possible evolution of the religious ob-
servances of many Muslims in directions that are compatible with a high
degree of social intermixing with non-Muslims. The same evolution oc-
curred in the case of eastern European Jews, although, as Goldscheider
reminds us, many of the immigrants were secular to begin with. There is
also an enormous difference, however. Jews were coming from European
societies in which they were ghettoized minorities, suffering from oppres-
sive strictures on their educational possibilities and economic activities, as
well as from occasional murderous assaults. For the most part, Muslims
are coming from societies in which their religion is dominant, although
in some cases they belong to branches of the faith or ethnic groups that
are discriminated against.

The American environment has created major challenges for the self-
understandings of both religions, and the Jewish case suggests that they
can provoke theological evolution in the direction of the mainstream. Eisen
brilliantly dissects the dilemmas of Jews’ self-understanding as the “chosen
people,” which was appropriate for group survival in the face of Christian
exclusion in Europe but unsuited to the more tolerant, democratic envi-
ronment of America. Thus began an intellectual quest for an answer to the
question of what it means to be a Jew in America. According to both Eisen
and Goldscheider, most American Jews have arrived at a position that al-
lows them to be fully integrated into society while they maintain some
degree of ethnic and religious distinctiveness. One catches sight of a simi-
lar process of self-examination in the case of Muslims, who, in Haddad’s
depiction, struggle with the question of whether they reside in dar al-harb
(the abode of war), rather than dar al-Islam (the abode of the faith). For
the most part, they arrive at hopeful answers, which recognize the freedom
that America offers to the practice of their faith, and thus avoid this fundamental dichotomy in the Muslim worldview. Whether the evolution in their understandings of their place in American society will follow the trajectory already blazed by American Jews, it is too early to say.

The Japanese-Korean comparison was initially conceived by us as a way of investigating the incorporation of groups that come from countries dominated by religions outside of the Judeo-Christian mainstream of American society. In this case, too, the comparison when fleshed out moved in directions that we did not anticipate initially. For one thing, it demonstrates the slipperiness of the notion that non-European immigrant groups bring nonwestern traditions that are altered in the American context by the intense pressures of adaptation. For while the Japanese and Koreans came from societies in which variants of Buddhism were dominant, by the time of outmigration the religious landscapes of both had been altered by the efforts of Protestant missionaries. It seems likely that migration was selective of those who had already converted to Christianity—they were and are overrepresented in the migration streams, compared with their percentage of the population.

In addition, many other immigrants were probably familiar with Christian ideas before immigration and readily converted to Christianity within a short period after arriving—this happened in both cases, as Lori Pierce, Paul Spickard, and David Yoo observe (chapter 4), though it has undoubtedly been more common among Koreans, some 40 percent of whom are estimated to have converted to Christianity in the United States. Nevertheless, as Pierce et al. document, this similarity between the groups has not produced similar religious configurations in the United States. Buddhism was characteristic of the Japanese during the migration period, while Christianity, especially of an evangelical kind, has been typical of the Koreans.

The chapters also suggest the impact of race on the forms that religious incorporation took. Indeed, the overrepresentation of Christians among the Japanese and Korean immigrants by itself hints at this impact, for it seems to indicate that many nonwhite immigrants, recognizing the constraints that race might impose on their opportunities, sought to minimize other differences from the American mainstream. Certainly, during the first half of the twentieth century, this strategy did not help the Japanese very much; whether they were Buddhist or Christian, they were still the targets of institutionalized discrimination, such as California’s Alien Land Acts, which sought to impair the success of Japanese American farmers.
However, this strategy may have greater chances for success in post-1960s America, and this is one of the questions these chapters pose for future scholars.

In any event, the sense of being vulnerable strangers, subject not only to the liabilities associated with immigrant status—for example, standing out because of an accent or lack of proficiency in English—but also to possible racial discrimination, has probably heightened the protective role of religious institutions for both groups. This theme of religious institutions as refuge and as sites of community building emerges very prominently in the chapters on the Japanese and Koreans. As Pierce, Spickard, and Yoo argue for the Japanese, Buddhist “churches,” especially those associated with the Nishi Hongwanji sect, fulfilled these roles in the pre–World War II period.

In the competitive religious agora of the United States, the strategies that non-Christian religions have taken have affected their success. Suh’s chapter on Korean Buddhists brings this point into sharp relief. The Korean Buddhist congregation that she studied has not attempted to meet the practical needs of immigrants during the initial phases of adapting to the United States. Indeed, it has taken a reserved stance with respect to the immigrants, in effect serving as a presence for those who want it, while ignoring the many who have been courted successfully by Christian congregations. The result has been a massive streaming of the immigrants and, even more so, the second generation in the direction of Christianity. One question that needs to be addressed, however, is whether this Christianity always takes the form of one that is circumscribed by ethnicity and race. That the first generation adheres overwhelmingly to Korean Christian churches, where they can socialize with other Koreans and speak Korean, is well known. That the second generation is frequently uncomfortable in this immigrant environment and seeks out other Christian churches is also well known. What is not known is whether the churches attended by the U.S.-born tend mainly to be Asian American congregations, which have arisen in some parts of the country, or ones that are more ethnically heterogeneous.

One must not lose sight here of the multiple orientations of these ethnic congregations of the immigrants. While they have been to some degree inward-looking, protective carapaces for the immigrants, they have also looked outward, but in two directions—one way toward the homeland and the other way toward American society. The homeland orientation of the Japanese Christian churches is remarkable, given that conversion to
Christianity presumably marked a step of Americanization, of acceptance of the dominant religion of the receiving society. Nonetheless, in the pre–World War II period, Japanese immigrant Christians were exhorted by some of their pastors and co-ethnics to conceive of their Christianity as in service to Japan and to their fellow Japanese. As Pierce et al. describe, the Japanese American Protestant churches attempted to meld Japanese nationalism with American cultural values.

At the same time, religious institutions became the places where immigrants could formulate claims for inclusion in the society in which they were now located. These seem to be one aspect of the Japanese American civil religion, centered on the travails of the group’s experience, that Jane Iwamura identifies (chapter 5). At other moments, such claims have taken the extreme form of assertions of ultra-Americanness, of being more American in some ways than native-born white Americans. Thus, we find Japanese Christians claiming in the prewar period that Japanese Christianity was superior to the American versions: that it was more faithful to the model that Jesus provided. As Suh shows, a similar claim is asserted by contemporary Korean immigrant Buddhists, who argue that Buddhism is more consonant than Christianity with the core American values of self-reliance and individualism.

The comparison of Haitians and African Americans is exceptional, for it is the only case in this volume in which international and national migrants are compared. Our decision to compare the Haitian immigration to U.S. cities such as Miami and New York with African American migration from the rural South to the urban North was premised on the common origin of both groups in the forced migration of their African ancestors to the Americas in the Atlantic slave trade and a common legacy of racial discrimination that oppressed both groups long after slavery’s demise. We surmised that the long-term effects of slavery and racism created, at least in part, the conditions that led African Americans to migrate in the early 20th century and Haitians to immigrate later. It seemed that the two groups also matched our comparative grid of “old” and “new” (im) migration. As the chapters demonstrate, the common history of slavery and racism took different trajectories in Haiti and the United States, however, resulting in interesting similarities and divergences (and surprising interactions) between the two groups and the roles of religion in their migrations.

For both African Americans and Haitians, religion served to blunt the internal and external effects of racism, but their experiences and hence
their strategies were different. African Americans took the Christianity of their masters and used its narratives and moral logic to powerfully counter the oppression from which they suffered. Thus, the narrative of Exodus with its optimistic motif of escape from slavery and entrance into the Promised Land served as a means of group valorization and a moral argument against racial discrimination. Exodus as a symbolic map of meaning enabled African Americans to counter racist stereotypes of themselves and to project a hopeful future of social justice and equality.

For Haitians, the Revolution of 1791–1804, the only successful overthrow of a slave society in the Western Hemisphere, severed their experience from that of African Americans. Haitian independence led to an alternative black identity distinct in language, religion, culture, and history from the pejorative qualities of blackness ascribed to African Americans. This departure from the black experience in North American slavery was strongly marked in the sphere of religion, where Vodou preserved a manifest link to the religious traditions of the west African societies from which the slaves had been brought. Religion, Roman Catholicism as well as Vodou, thus served as a marker of their transnational identity as Haitians and a rejection of being placed in the subordinate category of “African American.”

Given this very different experience, one might ask: How would Haitian immigrants to the United States, facing the prospect of a racialized incorporation, locate themselves religiously? Would they, like African Americans, look to religion both as a shelter from the racism beyond the sanctuary walls and as a site for forging discourses and symbols to combat it? Or would they, like many other contemporary Roman Catholic immigrants, see in conversion to evangelical Protestant sects principally an opportunity for trying out the possibilities of assimilation, by putting on the cloak of an American identity?

The questions turn out to be too simply formulated, in part because American versions of Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, had already infiltrated Haiti before immigration ever became substantial. We find both similarity and divergence in the ways that religion has figured in the postmigration experiences of the two groups. In the process of resettling, both have explored new religious options in their new environments and adopted a diversity of elements from them, in part or whole, as seemed instrumentally adaptive and useful in the new context. At the same time, a key divergence lies in the religious transnationalism of many Haitian immigrants.
James Grossman and Albert J. Raboteau (chapter 11) take up the religious ramifications of the Great Migration of African Americans, which began in the early 20th century, when unprecedented numbers of black laborers and their families left the land for the cities and the South for the North and West. The double process of migration and urbanization recast both the physical and social landscape for the migrants, creating new opportunities while presenting new challenges. Yet the reliance on religious ideas—on those of Christianity, in particular—carried over into the Great Migration. In the North, too, religion was central to African Americans’ attempts to forge positive identities for themselves, which could be linked to moral schemes that made white racism comprehensible and provided strategies for undermining it. In addition, the pluralism of the urban religious marketplace in the North helped in the establishment of surrogate public spaces for civic activity, which would ultimately constitute the basis for the development and growth of black political organization.

Liza McAllister and Karen Richman (chapter 12) present evidence that transnational Haitians living in the United States have created a religious landscape that is at once American and diasporic. For Haitians in Haiti and in North America, the religious landscape consists of overlapping fields: (1) the indigenous Afro-Haitian religion called Vodou, (2) Haitian Roman Catholicism, and (3) the evangelical Protestant denominations such as Baptist and Pentecostal. Each of these religious fields is separate from, yet overlaps with, the others. Their religious frameworks and religious practices span transnational social spaces, interacting in complex and various ways with processes of migration. Each sphere is the site of a different dynamic of imagining, and entering into, American culture. The religious choices that immigrant Haitians make correlate with a variety of social and economic agendas that seem likely to enhance their chances of success in the American setting.

One of the striking discoveries to emerge from this comparison is migration as a source of religious pluralism and exchange. Haitian Pentecostalism derives from a Pentecostal movement in Los Angeles in 1906, which involved African Americans from its outset. Pentecostalism, as many observers have noted, has had the “unintended consequence” of facilitating upward mobility among several generations of African American migrants. Indeed, a new “gospel of wealth” has been articulated by a current group of black Pentecostal televangelists to large audiences. What institutional ecclesial relationships have and will develop between Haitian and African American Pentecostals remains to be studied. Similarly,
Roman Catholicism has a long, if statistically small, presence among African Americans. What relationships exist or will emerge between these communities remains to be discovered.

Conversely, Haitian Vodou has contributed to the reawakened interest of African Americans in the traditional religions of Africa, as has Cuban Santería. African Americans have converted to these religious communities; the scale and significance of such conversions remain to be studied, as does the impact of the migration of independent African churches from Nigeria, Ghana, and elsewhere. But the Haitian migration has clearly added new possibilities to the already rich religious palette in African American communities.

Final Thoughts

What the studies in this volume establish beyond any doubt is that research on immigration ignores the religious aspects of incorporation at its peril and, likewise, that scholars of religion must pay attention to the profound impacts of immigration on the spiritual landscape of the United States and on specific religious bodies, their institutions, and beliefs.

Religion, as Jose Casanova and others have observed before us, is the one truly valid form of expressing ethnic difference in the United States (Casanova, 1994). A comparison with language is instructive, for the United States is known as a graveyard of mother tongues (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Even in the contemporary, globalized era, when communications of many sorts between immigrant communities and their homelands have been facilitated by technological advances, English still prevails over mother tongues in the second and, even more, the third generations (Alba et al., 2002). But religious distinctiveness is sanctioned by mainstream America, which places great emphasis on the value of religious observance, and, consequently, it is not eroded to the same degree, even if immigrant religions do undergo significant changes in the American environment.

The services of religious congregations are undoubtedly the most regular and widely observed of the manifestations of immigrant and ethnic communities. We can think of no other institution that provides so frequently the sites and occasions for the members of these communities to come together, recognize each other, engage in a variety of communications and transactions, and give meaning, both transcendental and
secular, to their experiences. Immigrant congregations are thus social spaces where an overloaded palette of purposes and needs is served: these can be instrumental, sociocultural, or psychological and spiritual. Thus, congregations enable immigrants to keep abreast of events in the community and in the homeland and to learn about occupational, educational, residential, and other opportunities for their own advancement in the receiving society. They also provide an array of services for persons in need, whether these needs arise from, say, the stresses of overwork in the typical immigrant jobs or the centrifugal forces frequently tearing at immigrant families (Hirschman, 2004). They are sites where the second generation can be introduced to the wider immigrant and ethnic community, learn its rituals, and appreciate the significance of its culture (Kurien, 1998). Finally, through religious systems of meaning and the interpretive efforts of pastors and laypersons, congregations offer the possibility of lifting the personal travails experienced by immigrants onto a higher plane, infusing them with moral purpose and transcendent value.

Any institution capable of serving such a dizzying array of purposes for a large number of people deserves more attention than it has received so far in the literature on immigrant incorporation. In addition, as some of the chapters in this volume demonstrate convincingly, immigrants are not simply the passive beneficiaries of religious institutions but work out their personal strategies of incorporation in and through them. For this reason, students of religion cannot afford to ignore the impact of immigration on religions, their institutions, and their practices and beliefs.

The religions of immigrant groups usually find that they must change in the American environment to meet an unexpected set of novel needs or risk losing their adherents. The Korean Buddhist congregation described by Suh exemplifies the latter possibility, while the change of Islamic imams from prayer leaders to pastors of American-style congregations, as described by Haddad, exemplifies the former. But even the beliefs and values of religions may undergo shifts, in emphasis at least, to face the challenges of the American context and its agora of religions. This certainly has been the case for American Jews’ interpretation of the doctrine of chosenness.

Some of the largest changes lie in the future as a result of the continuing flow of immigrants into established religions. In this respect, the most momentous are likely to be seen in the American Catholic Church because of the enormous inflow of Latin Americans, especially Mexicans. Even though evangelical Protestant churches have made inroads in the
Latino population, the great majority of Latinos are Catholics. The cliché is that many are nominal Catholics. However, a consistent pattern to be observed in incorporation into American society is that immigrant groups, especially in their native-born generations, tend to become more religious over time. If that pattern holds for Latino Catholics, and we see no reason it will not, and if the projections of a rapid growth in the Latino population in coming decades hold, and we think this likely, then two conclusions seem obvious: the proportion of Catholics in the U.S. population, currently around 25 percent, will grow appreciably; and Latinos will make up a larger and larger fraction of American Catholics, perhaps as many as half by mid-century. What will the consequences be for the Catholic Church itself and for the place of the church and the people it serves within American society? We do not know, but we are certain that these questions demand consideration.

It seems appropriate that we end this introduction with questions because the study of the interaction of contemporary immigration and religion is not far enough along that we should allow ourselves the conceit of presenting firm conclusions. But, then, difficult questions have always been the purview of religion.