



Window on America
Вікно в Америку

Religion in the United States

Window on America Center
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Chizhevsky

Country Study Series

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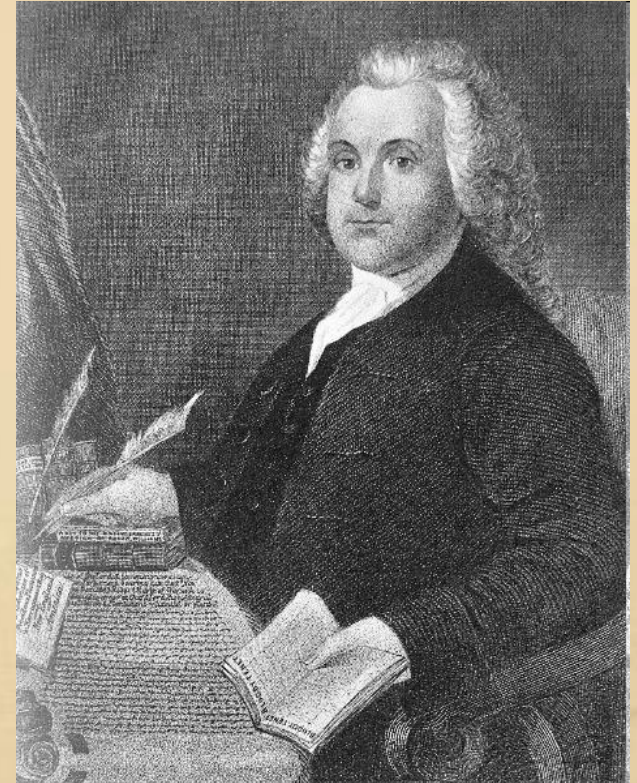
Introduction

- Among developed countries, the United States is one of the most religious.
- Since the early colonial days, when English and German settlers came in search of religious freedom, America has been heavily influenced by religion.
- That influence continues even today in American culture, social life, and politics.
- In the U.S., religion is viewed as a matter of personal choice and freedom to practice religion is guaranteed by the United States Constitution.



History of Religion in the United States

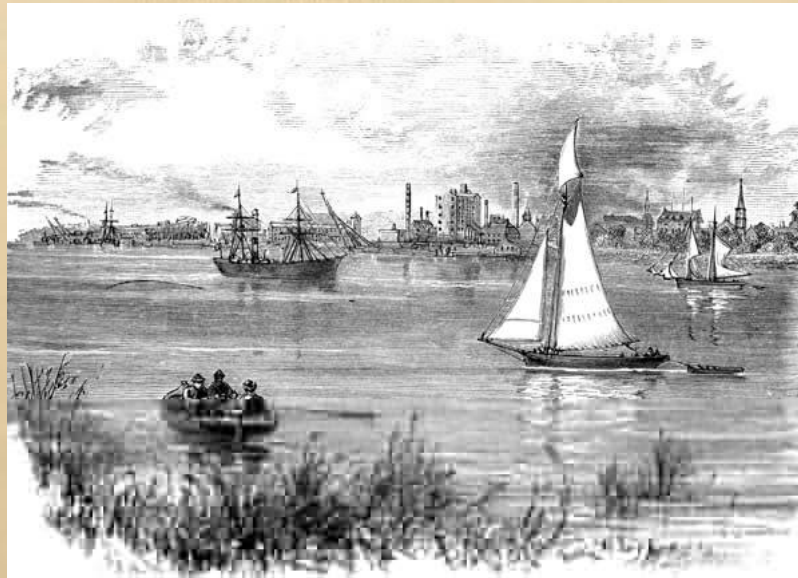
- The religious history of the United States begins more than a century before the former British colonies became the United States of America in 1776.
- Many of the North American colonies that eventually formed the U.S.A. were settled in the 17th century by men and women who left Europe because of religious persecution.
- Early emphasis on religious conformity led some members to break away and move to new colonies.
 - Roger Williams, a Puritan clergyman, founded the colony of Rhode Island after being kicked out of Massachusetts in 1635 because he disagreed with the colonial government.
 - He established the principles of separation of church and state, religious tolerance for all, and freedom of religious expression.



Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island

History of Religion in the United States

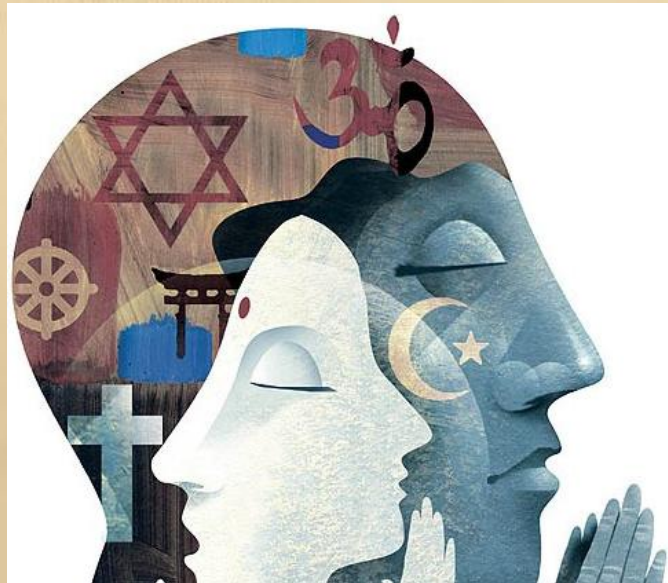
- Several of the original Thirteen Colonies were established by settlers who wished to practice their own religion.
 - The Massachusetts Bay Colony was established by English Puritans (Congregationalists),
 - Pennsylvania was established by British Quakers,
 - Maryland was established by English Catholics, and
 - Virginia was established by English Anglicans.
- During the American Revolution, most state constitutions provided for freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state.



Colony of Maryland

Religion in the United States

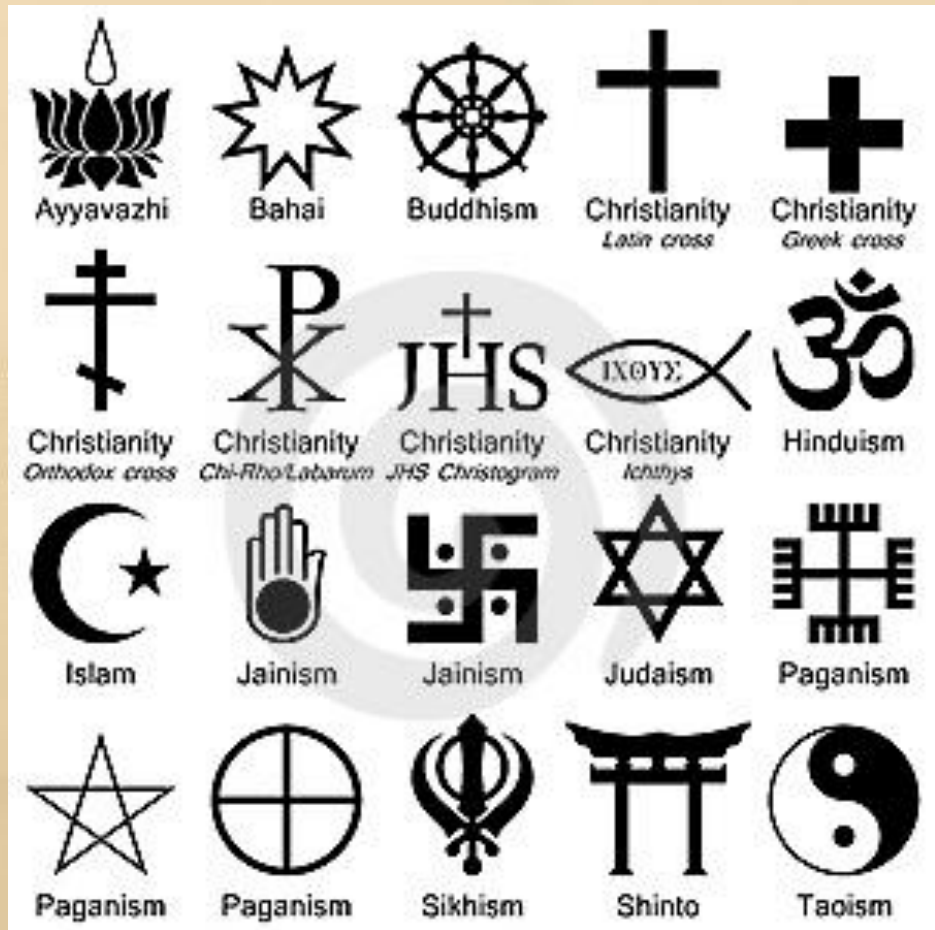
- The U.S. has been the birthplace of a number of new sects in the Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and other religions.
- Today the U.S. population remains highly religious in its beliefs and practices, and religion continues to play a prominent role in American public life.



Religion in the United States

- There is a great diversity of religious affiliation in the U.S.

- Christianity
- Judaism
- Islam
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Baha'i
- Sikhism
- Other



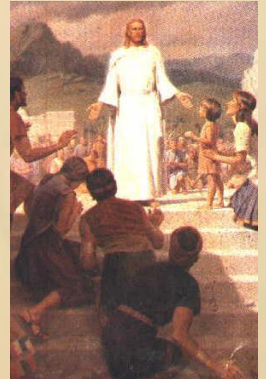
Christianity



- Christianity, with over 2 billion followers, is the most popular religion in the world.
- 78% of adults in the U.S. identify themselves as Christian.
- Christianity was introduced to the U.S. during the period of European colonization.
- Christianity has many different branches and forms with accompanying variety in beliefs and practices.
- In the U.S., Christians are divided into three groups: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox.
- Christianity developed out of Judaism in the 1st century C.E. It is founded on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Traditional Christian beliefs include the belief that Jesus is the divine and human Messiah sent to save the world.

Christianity

- One of the most important concepts in Christianity is that of Jesus giving his life on the Cross (the Crucifixion) and rising from the dead on the third day (the Resurrection).
- Christians believe that there is only one God, but that there are three elements to this one God:
 - God the Father
 - God the Son
 - The Holy Spirit
- Christians worship in churches.
- Spiritual leaders are called priests or ministers.
- The Christian holy book is the Bible, and consists of the Old and New Testaments.
- Christian holy days such as Easter and Christmas are important milestones in the Western secular calendar.



Judaism



- In 2007, there were 13.1 million Jewish people in the world.
 - Most of them live in the residing in the U.S. and Israel..
 - 40.3% of the world's Jews live in the U.S.
- Jews have been present in what is now the U.S. since the 17th century, though large scale immigration did not take place until the 19th century, largely as a result of persecutions in parts of Eastern Europe.
- 1.7% of the U.S. adult population identify themselves as Jewish.
- 43% of Jews in the U.S. describe themselves as Reform Jews.
- 31% of Jews in the U.S. describe themselves as Conservative Jews .
- 10% of the Jews in the U.S. describe themselves as Orthodox Jews.
- A significant number of people identify themselves as American Jews on ethnic and cultural grounds, rather than religious ones.
- There are three times as many Jews among immigrants coming before 1960 than among those coming after 1989.
- Judaism is the original of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Judaism

- Judaism originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago.
- Jews believe that there is only one God with whom they have a covenant.
- In exchange for all the good that God has done for the Jewish people, Jewish people keep God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.
- Judaism has a rich history of religious text, but the central and most important religious document is the Torah.
- Jewish traditional or oral law, the interpretation of the laws of the Torah, is called halakhah.
- Spiritual leaders are called Rabbis.
- Jews worship in Synagogues.
- Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust in an attempt to wipe out Judaism.



Buddhism

- There are currently 376 million followers of Buddhism worldwide.
- 0.7% of the U.S. population identify themselves as Buddhist.
- Buddhism entered the U.S. during the 19th century with the arrival of the first immigrants from Eastern Asia.
- The first Buddhist temple was established in San Francisco in 1853 by Chinese Americans.
- Only 32% of Buddhists in the U.S. are Asian; 53% are white.
- Buddhism is 2,500 years old.
- Buddhism traces its origin to Siddhartha Gautama (or Gotama), who is typically referred to as the Buddha (literally the "Awakened" or "Enlightened One").
- In Buddhism, there is no belief in a personal God. It is not centered on the relationship between humanity and God.



Buddhism



- Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent - change is always possible.
- Buddhism focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature of life.
- Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected, so compassion is natural and important.
- Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple.
- There are currently three major branches of the tradition, the Theravada ("Doctrine of the Elders"), the Mahayana ("Great Vehicle), and the Vajrayana ("Diamond Vehicle," often simply called "Tibetan Buddhism"), although there are many sects and groups within each of these branches.
- Buddhism has spread from its roots in India to virtually every corner of the world, and in each place it has spread it has adopted and adapted local practices and beliefs.

Islam



- Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers.
- Islam is the youngest of the world's great religions.
- American Islam effectively began with the arrival of African slaves. It is estimated that about 10% of African slaves transported to the United States were Muslim.
- 0.6% of the U.S. population identify themselves as Muslim.
- Half of the Muslims in the U.S. identify as Sunni and 16% are Shia; however, about 33% either say they are affiliated with a different Muslim group or describe themselves as “just a Muslim.”
- According to some sources, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. Much of the growth has been driven by immigration.
- Muslims are the most racially diverse group in the U.S.
 - 37% are white, 24% are black, 20% are Asian and 19% are of other races.
- Muslims believe that Islam was revealed over 1400 years ago in Mecca, Arabia.

Islam



- One of the defining characteristics of Islam is the primacy of sacred places including Mecca, [Medina](#), and Jerusalem.
- According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to His law.
 - Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God.
 - They believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad.
- Muslims base their laws on their holy book the [Qur'an](#), and the [Sunnah](#).
- Muslims believe the Sunnah is the practical example of Prophet Muhammad and that there are five basic Pillars of Islam.
 - These pillars are the declaration of faith, praying five times a day, giving money to charity, fasting and a pilgrimage to Mecca (at least once).
- Islam expanded almost immediately beyond its birthplace in the Arabian peninsula, and now has significant influence in Africa, throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

Hinduism

- Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal.
- It has over 900 million followers worldwide.
- 0.4% of the U.S. population identify themselves as Hindu.
- More than 80% of Hindus in the U.S. are foreign-born.
- The Hindu religion is growing in the U.S. Hinduism is expanding in popularity and influence on the public life.
- More than four times as many Hindus are found in the U.S. among those immigrating after 1989 than among those who arrived before 1960.
- 88% of Hindus in the United States are Asian.
- Unlike most other religions, Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed set of teachings.
- The origins of Hinduism can be traced to the Indus Valley civilization sometime between 4000 and 2500 BCE.



Hinduism

- Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose qualities and forms are represented by the multitude of deities which emanate from him.
- The basis of Hinduism is the belief in the unity of everything, called Brahman. The purpose of life is to realize that we are part of God and by doing so we can leave this plane of existence and rejoin with God.
- This enlightenment can only be achieved by going through cycles of birth, life and death known as samsara.
- A person's progress towards enlightenment is measured by his karma.
 - This is the accumulation of all one's good and bad deeds and this determines the person's next reincarnation.
 - Selfless acts and thoughts as well as devotion to God help one to be reborn at a higher level. Bad acts and thoughts will cause one to be born at a lower level, as a person or even an animal.
- The main Hindu texts are the Vedas and their supplements (books based on the Vedas). Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning 'knowledge'. These scriptures do not mention the word 'Hindu' but many scriptures discuss dharmā, which can be rendered as 'code of conduct', 'law', or 'duty'.



Baha'i



- The United States has perhaps the second largest Bahá'í community in the world.
- The Baha'i Faith arose from Islam in the 1800s based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah and is now a distinct worldwide faith.
- Baha'i followers believe that God has sent nine great prophets to mankind through whom the Holy Spirit has revealed the "Word of God". This has given rise to the major world religions.
- The central idea of the faith is that of unity. They believe that people should work together for the common benefit of humanity
- The faith does not attempt to preserve the past but does embrace the findings of science.
- Baha'is believe that every person has an immortal soul which can not die but is freed to travel through the spirit world after death.

Baha'i



- Baha'i teaches that God is utterly transcendent and ultimately unknowable to humanity.
- Baha'i religious practices and rituals include daily prayer and devotions.
- The Baha'i do not have any clergy; all spiritual authority is held by local and national councils called "Spiritual Assemblies".
- Baha'i followers are expected to fast for nineteen days a year and participate in the Nineteen Day Feast.
- The Baha'i faith accepts all religions as having true and valid origins.
- The idea of progressive revelation is of central significance for the Baha'i faith.
 - Baha'u'llah taught that God intervenes throughout human history at different times to reveal more of himself through his messengers (called Divine Messengers, or Manifestations of God).
- Baha'i has spread to virtually every country in the world, and Baha'i temples can be found on every continent except Antarctica.

Sikhism



- There are 20 million Sikhs in the world, most of whom live in the Punjab province of India.
- Between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Sikhs live in the United States.
- Sikhs have been a part of the American populace for more than 130 years.
- Sikhism was founded in the 16th century by Guru Nanak and is based on his teachings, and those of the nine Sikh gurus who followed him.
- Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, and Sikhs believe in a single formless God with many names, who can be known through meditation.
- The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual.
- Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals.
- The Sikh place of worship is called a Gurdwara.

Sikhism



- Sikhs pray many times each day and are prohibited from worshipping idols or icons.
- They believe in samsara, karma, and reincarnation. They believe that everyone has equal status in the eyes of God.
- The Sikh scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib, a book that Sikhs consider a living Guru.
- Sikh scholars and theologians started in 1931 to prepare the Rehat Maryada - the Sikh code of conduct and conventions. This has successfully achieved a high level of uniformity in the religious and social practices of Sikhism throughout the world.
- The community of men and women who have been initiated into the Sikh faith is the Khalsa.

Unaffiliated

- 16.1% of American adults are not currently affiliated with any particular religious group.
 - Atheist 1.6%
 - Agnostic 2.4%
 - Nothing in particular 12.1%



Atheism



- Atheism is the absence of belief in any Gods or spiritual beings.
- Atheists say that human beings can devise suitable moral codes to live by without the aid of Gods or scriptures.
- People are atheist for many reasons, among them:
 - They find insufficient evidence to support any religion.
 - They think that religion is nonsensical.
 - They once had a religion and have lost faith in it.
 - They live in a non-religious culture.
 - Religion doesn't interest them.
 - Religion doesn't seem relevant to their lives.
 - Religions seem to have done a lot of harm in the world.
 - The world is such a bad place that there can't be a God.

Other Religions

- Other religions are represented in the United States, including Native American Spiritualism, Jainism, Shintoism, Taoism, Caodaiism, Wicca, Germanic paganism, Neopaganism, Zoroastrianism and many forms of New Age spirituality.



Interesting Facts about Religion in the United States

- Mormons and Muslims are the groups with the largest families; more than one-in-five Mormon adults and 15% of Muslim adults in the U.S. have three or more children living at home.
- Men are significantly more likely than women to claim no religious affiliation.
- One quarter of all adults under age 30 are not affiliated with any particular religion.
- Jews, Hindus and Buddhists tend to have higher levels of education than members of other religious traditions, and they are also the most likely to have a post-graduate degree.
 - 48% of Hindus, 35% of Jews and 26% of Buddhists have a post-graduate education.
- People who have never been married or who are living with a partner are much more likely than their married counterparts to be unaffiliated with any particular religion.
 - Among those who have never been married, 24% are not affiliated with any particular religious group. Eight percent of people who have never married describe themselves as atheist or agnostic.
 - Among married people, 14% are not affiliated with any particular religion. Three percent of married people overall are atheist or agnostic.
- 28% of American adults have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another religion– or no religion at all.

Religion and the Law



- Freedom of religion was first applied as a principle of government in the founding of the colony of Maryland, founded by the Catholic Lord Baltimore, in 1634
- The United States was the first nation to have no official state-endorsed religion.
- The framers of the Constitution rejected any religious test for office, and the First Amendment specifically denies the federal government any power to enact any law respecting either an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise, thus protecting any religious organization, institution, or denomination from government interference.

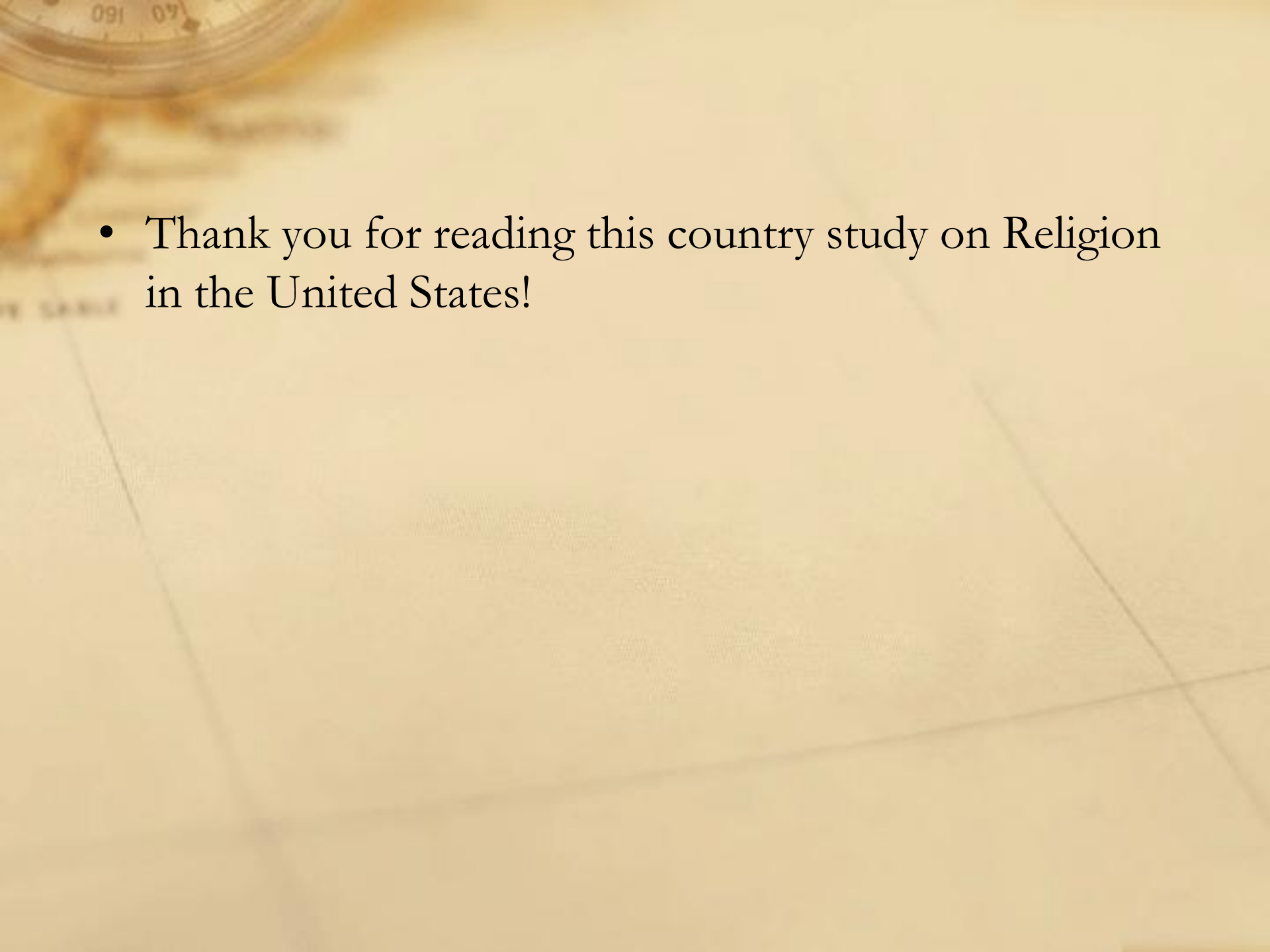
Religion and the Law

- All spiritual beliefs are protected in the United States. Not only does it provide freedom for Americans to choose how they want to worship, but it also prevents any religious group from violating the law or infringing on the liberty of others.
- The modern legal concept of religious freedom as the union of freedom of belief and freedom of worship with the absence of any state-sponsored religion, originated in the U.S.



Religious Discrimination

- Although religious tolerance is a cornerstone of American society, religious discrimination has also been a part of America's history.
- Most Americans, from early colonists to members of the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) in the 20th century, have viewed Native American spiritual beliefs as superstition.
- European immigrants also sometimes faced religious intolerance. Roman Catholics suffered from popular prejudice, which turned violent in the 1830s and lasted through the 1850s.
- In the early part of the 20th century, the [Ku Klux Klan](#) sought a Protestant, all-white America. The Klan was a white supremacist organization first formed in the 1860s.
- Jews were subjected to anti-Semitic attacks and discriminatory legislation and practices from the late 19th century into the 1960s.

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- Thank you for reading this country study on Religion in the United States!