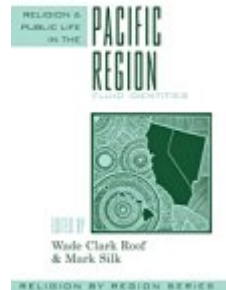


**Wade Clark Roof, Mark Silk, eds..** *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2005. 197 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7591-0639-0.



**Reviewed by** Sara Patterson

**Published on** H-Amstdy (March, 2006)

The authors and editors of *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities* seek to illuminate the intricate relationships between religion and politics in California, Nevada, and Hawaii. This collection is the seventh of eight volumes that examine the variations in religion's effect on public life from region to region across the United States. This unique and far-reaching series is a project of the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. The Center designed the series to move scholarly discussion beyond the usual narratives that reduce religion in the United States to "a series of monochrome portraits of the spiritual state of the union, of piety along the Potomac, of great events or swings of mood that raise or lower the collective religious temperature" (p. 5). Instead, the series teases out the mini-narratives that inform and enliven the history of each region of the United States, demonstrating the true complexity of religion in America.

It is this level of specificity that is the foundation of the seventh volume. Characterizing the Pa-

cific region as a "crossroads of global encounters," the volume emphasizes the pluralism and fluidity found in the three states it includes (p. 10). The pattern that emerges throughout the collection shows, in fact, that the most truly helpful concept for characterizing the religious world of the Pacific region is pluralism. Pluralism has had a major effect on the public life of the region. Groups as large as the Catholics and evangelical Christians of southern California and as small as the neo-pagans of northern California have played and are playing a role in public and political discourses. The second most helpful concept in conceiving of religion in these states is fluidity. Populations and individuals are constantly migrating to the region as well as within it. This continuous fluctuation and impermanence insures that no religious monopolies take control in the region.

One of the many strengths of the volume is its extensive use of statistical data to demonstrate the true diversity of the Pacific region. The supportive charts and graphs of both regional and national statistics show that "the Pacific region is at the forefront of what has been called an 'exag-

gerated America,' mirroring ever more closely the religious makeup of the world and signaling what the future will look like" (p. 11). Editor Wade Clark Roof describes the region as one with "a history of continuous migrations of diverse peoples and cultures, an open and fluid religious environment, and a borderland consciousness born out of the region's location on, or proximity to, the Pacific Rim" (p. 25).

As with all collections based on region, the editors of the volume must define the boundaries of the region they study and make a convincing case for those states that are included and excluded. Any time scholars draw regional boundaries, the region they create is imperfect; certain pieces fit together well while others refuse to fall into the boundaries. The series editors here have included California, Nevada, and Hawaii in the Pacific region, while Oregon and Washington are grouped with Alaska in the volume on the Pacific Northwest. This choice at times causes the volume to lack in cohesion and clarity. First, the majority of the volume focuses on California and, if an author bases choices solely on population, rightfully so. California most clearly reflects the characterizations the authors and editors make about the Pacific region's pluralism and fluidity; Nevada, on the whole, does not. Throughout the analyses of California, Nevada comes across as a satellite, either similar to or different from the California "norm." It is rarely considered on its own. Second, only one of the essays addresses Hawaii in any significant way. Put quite simply, this joining of three states does not convincingly a region make.

That being said, each of the articles in this collection adds to the complexity of discussions about the role of religion in public life. Wade Clark Roof provides a great deal of statistical data about the demographic patterns and religious perspectives of the region's populations. Where Douglas Firth Anderson explores the "familiar players" in the region's public life (Catholicism, Judaism, Mormonism, and Protestantism) and

demonstrates these traditions' inability to maintain a monopoly on political power, Tamar Frankiel shows that alternative religions often promote a personalism so focused on individual needs and spiritual journeys that members rarely connect their religious beliefs to public/political action. David W. Machacek offers readers a compelling analysis of the religious world into which post-1960 immigrants arrived and demonstrates the increase in racial and ethnic diversity that has had the largest effect on Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. Finally, George J. Tanabe Jr. presents an engaging discussion of Hawaiians' pre- and post-contact use of *kapu* systems (taboos) to maintain *pono* (equilibrium) in the public realm. Perhaps the single largest strength of the collection is that it assumes that economics, education, race, and ethnicity all play a role in the formation of public life. Though religion is the focus of the collection, it does not uplift religion at the expense of the multitude of other factors shaping communities in the American west.

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**Citation:** Sara Patterson. Review of Roof, Wade Clark; Silk, Mark, eds. *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Region: Fluid Identities*. H-Amstdy, H-Net Reviews. March, 2006.

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