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AMERICAN SACRED SPACE

David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, editors

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INTRODUCTION
David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal

Over the past few years, we have both somehow convinced our respective universities that we had to go to the Hawaiian Islands to conduct research on American sacred space. Obviously, the fiftieth state of the Union is rich in sacred sites. From the ancient heiaus, burial grounds, places of refuge, and sacred valleys, waterfalls, and volcanoes of traditional Hawaiian religion, through the Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, and multitude of Christian churches, to the national monument of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor, certain places have been marked out of Hawaiian space for a special kind of attention. At first glance, the traditional Hawaiian sacred site and the national shrine at Pearl Harbor—the most ancient, the most modern—appear to have little in common. They seem to speak to alien worlds. However, the heiau and the battlefield continue to be reproduced as sacred sites through similar spatial practices. For purposes of analysis, we will identify those practices here as ritualization, reinterpretation, and the contest over legitimate ownership of the sacred.

While one of us explored ancient, primordial sites, the other examined the local emplacement of an American patriotic orthodoxy in Hawaii. In search of the sacred, we immediately had to recognize that these places were intimately entangled in such “profane” enterprises as tourism, economic exchange and development, and the intense conflict of contending nationalisms. As tourist attractions, Hawaiian sacred sites promised access to an ultimate or transcendent reality, a promise usually captured in advertising brochures in the phrase, “experience of a lifetime!” Tourist propaganda raised significant questions about the relation between representation and reality. On the island of Maui, for example, visitors were urged to visit the “Seven Sacred Pools.” Truth in advertising, however, would have required the admission that the pools were neither seven, since there were actually twenty-four, nor sacred, because they had been used by warriors, not for ritual, but for the more mundane purpose of bathing. As
a sacred tourist site, therefore, the “Seven Sacred Pools” was emblematic of the kind of postmodern simulation that has come to characterize international tourism. Nevertheless, ancient sacred sites had been marked out as national parks and tourist destinations in ways that recalled practices of religious ritualization. For example, at Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau, the sacred place of refuge on the Big Island, ritual rules and observances, kapu laws, had traditionally placed strict proscriptions on conduct. Under the supervision of the National Parks Service, however, the ritual rules had been revised. On entering the sacred precincts, visitors were advised of the new kapu laws by a sign that read, “No picnicking, sunbathing, or smoking.”

As in ancient times, this ritualized consecration of a site identified the precise conditions under which that sacred place could be desecrated. In general, desecration can take two forms, defilement or dispossession. In the first case, desecration registers as a violation of the ritual order through which the purity of a sacred place is maintained. While most tourists observed the ritual regulations established by the National Parks Service at Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau, the journalist and social critic Hunter S. Thompson selected its most sacred enclosure for his own manic refuge from the world, constantly smoking, occasionally sunbathing, and picnicking, periodically calling out to the Park Ranger to bring more ice for his whiskey. Although a serious offense, defilement is a form of desecration that can be easily addressed through rites of purification or rites of exclusion, such as excommunication, banishment, or execution, which effectively eliminate a polluting influence from the pure space of the sacred. In Hunter S. Thompson’s case, the Park Ranger apparently dealt with his defiling presence by denial. “You are not here,” the ranger reportedly told him. “The heiau is kapu. Nobody can be here.” However, the second type of desecration, the dispossession of a sacred site, is much more difficult to redress. Under conditions of dispossession, ritual acts of consecration can only be performed in exile, alienated from their sacred ground. At Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau, as well as at other disposessed sacred sites on the Islands, Hawaiian traditionalists gained access by night, after the tourists had gone, to reconsecrate the precincts and remember the contours of a lost sacred place. In an important sense, ritual thereby became an act of reclamation.

Accordingly, recent reinterpretations of traditional Hawaiian sites have been advanced in reaction to their perceived desecration. At Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau, which had traditionally established different places for the king and the priests, the physical separation of royal from priestly spheres had provided a lens through which Hawaiians could think about relations between religious and political forces in the larger society. In this respect, the sacred site had been a tangible medium through which people could reflect upon the harmonies and tensions of the Hawaiian social order. Consecration, therefore, had depended, not only upon maintaining ritual purity, but also upon the interpretive potential of the site, its efficacy in giving location to certain ways of thinking about human relations in Hawai‘i. Under conquest and colonization, however, everything changed, including ways of thinking. Anticipating the approach of January 17, 1993, which would mark the centenary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation, various sovereignty groups mobilized funds and popular support. They sponsored twice-monthly programs of Sovereignty Education. They advanced campaigns for self-governance. They claimed a right of national self-determination that demanded recognition by the Hawaiian State, the U.S. federal government, and the community of nations under international law. In that context, Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau and other sacred sites were reinterpreted as highly charged places to focus attention upon the oppression and liberation of the Hawaiian nation. As their meaning was dramatically recast, ancient sacred places became potent counter-sites of political resistance.

In the early 1990s the conflict of interpretation over the meaning of sacred sites was embedded in political struggles and legal battles over their legitimate ownership. Contests over sacred space entered the court system. On Oahu a highway was being built over two ancient heiaus. A golf course was being planned on an ancient burial ground on Maui. The geothermal drilling project on the Big Island of Hawaii was boring deep into the volcano of the goddess, Pele. Legal actions sought to protect these sacred sites from defilement. But they also tried to establish new terms for the legitimate use and ownership of these sacred places. In that context, ritualization and reinterpretation were both exercised as strategic maneuvers on a battlefield. Ancient sacred places became modern sites of struggle over nationality, economic empowerment, and basic civil and human rights to freedom of religion and self-determination. In the 1990s the struggle continued.

If sacred places could be battlefields, battlefields could also be sacred places. December 7, 1991, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, recalling a “day of infamy,” but also an event that has been sanctified and commemorated at the national monument of the USS Arizona Memorial. Like other American battlefields, this memo-
rial site has been ritualized by its demarcation from profane space, by its ceremonial displays, and by the pilgrimages to its sacred precincts of tourists, veterans, survivors, and other devotees of an American patriotic faith. Tourist pilgrims come to pay their respects, but also to buy such relics as T-shirts, books, slides, videotapes, maps, and photographs, illustrating a “venerative consumption” that enables visitors to take some part of the sacred shrine back home. As both shrine and tomb, however, the USS Arizona Memorial has a unique place among the battlefields that punctuate the American patriotic landscape. The memorial commemorates the sacrifice, but also houses the remains, of American sanctified dead. Accordingly, the USS Arizona Memorial is a particularly charged sacred site at which Americans can enact the ongoing ritual relations between the living and the dead that form such an important part of a national patriotic faith.

The fiftieth anniversary celebration was an occasion for special ritual observances at Pearl Harbor. Commemoration, however, was also an opportunity for reinterpretation, as different readings of America were asserted by speakers at the site. Some participants remembered World War II as the last “good war,” drawing familiar patriotic lessons about American heroism, divine mission, and the redemptive power of martial sacrifice, while others called for an end to all wars that could only happen in a new era of international friendship and cooperation. These different readings highlighted the fact that Pearl Harbor has been the site of a particularly intense conflict of interpretation. Chief Historian of the National Park Service Edwin C. Bearss noted that his office received “more questions and complaints about the historical interpretation and management of this site than about all the other historical areas of the National Park System put together.” This conflict of interpretation was intensified by a popular perception that the National Park Service was sponsoring a reinterpretation of Pearl Harbor that not only included, but even glorified, Japanese perspectives on the event. Conflicting interpretations, therefore, could be situated in contests over the legitimate, authentic ownership of the site, a question of ownership intensified by American insecurities about economic competition with Japan.

As an indication of popular involvement in this contest, people from all over America wrote to their congressmen, to the President, and to the staff of the Memorial to complain about the National Park Service’s management of the sacred site. The most serious criticism asserted that the Park Service was not an appropriate guardian of the sacred memory of those Americans who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Some proposed that the site should be transferred into the care and supervision of the U.S. Navy. Many, however, like syndicated columnist Thomas Sowell, just demanded that the sacred site should be taken away from the National Park Service, insisting that “people who are squeamish about telling the truth and apologetic about being Americans are the last people to be left in charge of a national shrine like that at Pearl Harbor.” Obviously, the controversy surrounding the fiftieth anniversary celebrations at Pearl Harbor involved conflicting interpretations, and competing appropriations, not only of an historical event, but also of the meaning and power of America. Like the ancient heiau, the “national shrine” at Pearl Harbor had become a site of struggle over the legitimate use and ownership of sacred space. Many Americans perceived Pearl Harbor as a sacred place that had been made more intensely sacred because it seemed in danger of being defiled or dispossessed. New ritualizations, competing reinterpretations, and contestable reappropriations of its symbolic power all appeared to place the site at risk. Like any production of sacred space, however, these practices also revitalized the site as a place at which important religious concerns and interests could be adjudicated precisely because they were at stake. In similar ways, sacred space has been ritualized, reinterpreted, and contested all over America.

I. Sacred Space

This book is an opportunity to rethink what anthropologist Rodney Needham once called “that contested category of the sacred” by exploring the meaning and power of sacred space in America. What is the sacred? In the study of religion, two broad lines of definition have been advanced, one substantial, the other situational. In the first instance, some definitions of the sacred presume to have penetrated and reported its essential character. Familiar substantial definitions—Rudolph Otto’s “holy,” Gerardus van der Leeuw’s “power,” or Mircea Eliade’s “real”—might be regarded as attempts to replicate an insider’s evocation of certain experiential qualities that can be associated with the sacred. From this perspective, the sacred has been identified as an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance. By contrast, however, a situational analysis, which can be traced back to the work of Emile Durkheim, has located the sacred at the nexus of human practices and social projects. Following Arnold van Gennep’s insight into the “pivoting of the sacred,” si-
tutional approaches have recognized that nothing is inherently sacred. Not full of meaning, the sacred, from this perspective, is an empty signifier. As Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed, the sacred is “a value of indeterminate signification, in itself empty of meaning and therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning whatsoever.”6 In this respect, the term is better regarded as an adjectival or verbal form, a sign of difference that can be assigned to virtually anything through the human labor of consecration. As a situational term, therefore, the sacred is nothing more nor less than a notional supplement to the ongoing cultural work of sacralizing space, time, persons, and social relations. Situational, relational, and frequently, if not inherently, contested, the sacred is a by-product of this work of sacralization.

The divergence between a substantial and situational definition of the sacred is perhaps most evident in the analysis of sacred space. Mircea Eliade held that the sacred irrupted, manifested, or appeared in certain places, causing them to become powerful centers of meaningful worlds. On the contrary, Jonathan Z. Smith has shown how place is sacralized as the result of the cultural labor of ritual, in specific historical situations, involving the hard work of attention, memory, design, construction, and control of place. Not merely an opposition between “insider” and “outsider” perspectives, this clash between substantial and situational approaches to definition and analysis represents a contrast between what might be called the poetics and the politics of sacred space.8

While the poetics of sacred space has been most prominent in the study of religion, the politics of its construction and contestation has always been a subtext, even in attempts to work out a substantial, essentialist definition of the sacred. In his landmark text in the phenomenology of religion, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, Gerardus van der Leeuw imaginatively explored the implications of his substantial definition of the sacred, “power,” in spatial terms. In a chapter on sacred space, Van der Leeuw celebrated a poetics of sacred space, a romantic imagination most evident in his enthusiasm for natural sacred sites, the forests and caverns, rocks and mountains, waterfalls and springs, in which the sacred has often been located. However, Van der Leeuw’s implicit distinction between natural and built environments was in tension with his recognition elsewhere that the very category of “nature” was a nineteenth-century invention, and, therefore, could not stand as a stable, independent term in his analysis of sacred space. In the poetics of the sacred, “natural” and “artificial” sacred sites were equivalent as positions in which power was localized.9

In concentrating primarily upon built environments, Van der Leeuw outlined an inventory of typical sacred places that have appeared in the history of religions. Van der Leeuw’s inventory was a basic series of homologies through which he asserted the metaphoric equivalence of home, temple, settlement, pilgrimage site, and human body. According to Van der Leeuw, a home was a temple, a temple a home. The city of Jerusalem, which he identified as sacred space in its most “typical form,” was a temple in the beginning and would be a temple in the end. The pilgrimage site, as a home, temple, or sacred settlement away from home, could ultimately be found at the center of the body in the human heart. Sacred places, therefore, formed a recursive series of metaphoric equivalences. The only reason we can speak of these places as sacred is because they can be discerned as transferable metaphors for the same kind of powerful space. In addition, however, and concurrently, Van der Leeuw tracked a second series of homologies, consisting of synecdoches for the items in the first series, that linked the hearth (of the home), the altar (of the temple), the sanctuary (of the settlement), the shrine (of the pilgrimage site), and the heart (of the human body). At the heart of each sacred place, therefore, was another heart, a center of power located at the core of each sacred center. Although these homologies were not explicitly schematized or theorized by Van der Leeuw, remaining implicit in his analysis, the two series of equivalences established a basic vocabulary for the analysis of sacred places. As they recurred in his analysis, they provided the key terms for a poetics of sacred space.

At the same time, even if unintended, Van der Leeuw laced his analysis with hints of a politics of sacred space. First, we can identify a politics of position. In some moments, like Eliade, Van der Leeuw attributed sole, transcendental, and ultimate agency to sacred power, even holding that sacred power actually positioned itself in the world. Geographer David Harvey has referred to such a mystification as the “aestheticization of politics,” an exercise of poetic imagination “in which appeal to the mythology of place and person has a strong role to play.”10 However, this mystifying of power, a kind of “mystical intuitionism” of sacred space, was tempered by Van der Leeuw’s recognition, however it might have been submerged in his text, that the positioning of a sacred place was a political act, whether that positioning involved, in his own terms, selection, orientation, limita-
tion, or conquest. Ultimately, Van der Leeuw recognized that every establishment of a sacred place was a conquest of space.

Second, we can observe that Van der Leeuw consistently linked sacred space with a politics of property. A sacred place was not merely a meaningful place; it was a powerful place because it was appropriated, possessed, and owned. In several important passages of his text, Van der Leeuw referred to the sacred power of property, even suggesting, perhaps somewhat enigmatically, that property was the "realization of possibilities." However, since "possibility" was a technical term in his analytical vocabulary, Van der Leeuw linked power, possibility, and property as forces in the production of sacred space. Recently, cultural analysts have shown a growing interest in the importance of symbolic objects as sacred property. In particular, analysts have documented the ways in which exclusive claims on the ownership of sacred objects can serve political interests. As Norbert Peabody has noted, "For many years now it has been a commonplace observation in history and anthropology that the monopolistic possession of sacred objects, heirlooms, talismans, or regalia helps perpetuate political rule." Likewise, the ownership of the "intellectual property" of religious symbols, myths, or rituals can be shown to operate in economic contexts and to serve specific social or political interests. In a similar way, symbolic space can also be appropriated. The sacred character of a place can be asserted and maintained through claims and counter-claims on its ownership. The sacrality of place, therefore, can be directly related to a politics of property.

Third, we can recognize another relational, situational aspect of sacred space by paying attention to the politics of exclusion. Van der Leeuw proposed that a sacred place, such as a home, was a space in which relations among persons could be negotiated and worked out. Some persons, however, were left out, kept out, or forced out. In fact, the sanctity of the inside was certified by maintaining and reinforcing boundaries that kept certain persons outside the sacred place. By recognizing this process of excluding persons, even if in passing, Van der Leeuw raised the possibility that a politics of exclusion might be an integral part of the making of sacred space.

Fourth, and finally, Van der Leeuw ultimately positioned sacred space, and his analysis of sacred space, in the context of a politics of exile. Insistently, he highlighted a modern loss of the sacred, or alienation from the sacred, or nostalgia for the sacred, in his use and interpretation of basic data of religion. Repeatedly, Van der Leeuw noted that primitives had it;
dialectic in the role of ritual in the production of sacred space. Ritual acts of worship, sacrifice, prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, and ceremonial consecrate sacred space. Conversely, however, the demarcation of a set-apart, special place gives ritual acts their very character as a type of highly charged symbolic performance. Since ritual is a defining feature of sacralization, explorations of sacred space and places in America will require particular attention to ritual practices and performances.

The human body plays a crucial role in the ritual production of sacred space. Ritual action manipulates basic spatial distinctions between up and down, right and left, inside and outside, and so on, that necessarily revolve around the axis of the living body. Spatial practices—the "techniques of the body," the formalized "gestures of approach," and the location and direction of embodied movement—all contribute towards producing the distinctive quality and character of sacred space. As Pierre Bourdieu has proposed, embodied practice produces a *habitus*, a localized fusion of thought and action in and through which human beings negotiate the social relations and practical knowledge of their worlds. Rather than the temple, settlement, or pilgrimage site, Bourdieu's primary example of a ritualized *habitus*, agreeing with Van der Leeuw on the point, was the home. "Through the intermediary of the divisions and hierarchies it sets up between things, persons, and practices," Bourdieu has observed, "this tangible classifying system continuously inculcates and reinforces the taxonomic principles underlying all the arbitrary provisions of this culture."16 Through embodied practices, the ritualized *habitus* of the home, like the *habitus* of other sacred sites, is produced and reproduced as a dynamic spatial ordering of knowledge and power.

Ritualized disciplines of the body, which regulate its gestures and rhythms, its speaking, eating, and excreting, situate embodied practices in place. In the domestic space of the home, for example, American rituals of dining emerged during the nineteenth century to define the table as the focus for a particular kind of cultural *habitus*. As a "tangible classifying system," the dining table, with its prescribed embodied practices, became a ritualized space for distinguishing among different classes of persons, reinforcing a cultural knowledge which held that brutes feed, barbarians eat, but only "cultured man" dines.17

If embodied practices can consecrate, they can also desecrate a sacred place. Throughout the history of religions, the production of sacred space has depended upon control over purity.18 Often purity has been associated with the ritualized control of bodily excretions. Rabbinic Judaism, for example, adapted biblical proscriptions for maintaining the sanctity of a camp or settlement to the ritual demands for creating a pure space for prayer. When sanctifying such a place, the Mishna asked, "how far should one distance oneself from excrement?" The answer, according to one account, was "Four cubits."19 In that exact measurement, which suggested a meticulous management and control of the embodied practices that produce ritual space, the rabbis specified the precise condition for the consecration, but also for the potential desecration, of a sacred place of worship. By contrast, Chinese practitioners of the meditation traditions of Ch'an Buddhism encountered a different problem in managing and controlling the excretions of the body in relation to sacred space. If the Buddha essence, the Dharmakaya, was everywhere, then, in principle, sacred space was coextensive with the universe. "Since the Dharmakaya fills all space," one Ch'an master complained, "where in the entire universe can I find a place to shit?"20 These two approaches to sacred space suggest contrasting relations between the body and ritual purity. In a defiling world, ritual purity can be achieved by control of the body. In a pure world, however, the body poses a different kind of problem. If sacred space is everywhere, where does the profane body fit? Can the body itself be holy, a source of pure actions, extensions, or excretions that cannot defile sacred space?

In America these two dispositions towards the body have defined different "gestures of approach" to the production of sacred space. At one extreme, rigorous discipline of the body has been required for the production and maintenance of sacred space. Accordingly, some American strategies have demanded a meticulous ritual control over embodied space in the interests of purity. As American theologian Jonathan Edwards declared, "This world is all over dirty. Everywhere it is covered with that which tends to defile the feet of the traveller." Body and soul had to be defended from defilement. From Edwards's perspective, however, the body itself was a microcosm of the defiling world. "The inside of the body of man," Edwards held, "is full of filthiness, contains his bowels that are full of dung, which represents the corruption and filthiness that the heart of man is naturally full of."21 In a world so thoroughly defiled, almost nothing can be done to establish purity. It cannot be constructed through ritual, but must depend upon an unmerited grace. Nevertheless, American heirs of Jonathan Edwards have persisted in observing various ritualized practices for exercising control over the body in the interest of establishing purity in a defiling world.

During the 1950s, the American poet Allen Ginsberg proposed a sym-
bolic strategy for dealing with the dilemma, similar to the Ch'an Buddhist case, of living in a world in which sacred space extended everywhere. Ginsberg declared: "The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!" In a world so completely pure, almost anything can be done, since even the body, in all its extensions and apertures, is a pure space. Although Ginsberg's symbolism of the body must be regarded as a minority report, it nevertheless highlights, by stark contrast, the dominant, conventional symbolism of the body in America, a disposition more consistent with the concerns of Jonathan Edwards, as Americans have drawn upon the human body in the ritual production and maintenance of sacred space. In all its gestures and motions, its rhythms and workings, the body is necessarily an integral part of the ritual production of sacred space.

Second, sacred space is significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world. The geographer Neil Smith has observed that "the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production." In its material production and practical reproduction, sacred space anchors a worldview in the world. As the anthropologist Robert Redfield suggested, a worldview is comprised of at least two dimensions: classification of persons, and orientation in space and time. Sacred space is a means for grounding classifications and orientations in reality, giving particular force to the meaningful focus gained through these aspects of a worldview. As significant space, sacred places focus a classification of persons, carving out a place for a human identity that can be distinguished from superhuman persons, perhaps to be worshiped, and those classified as subhuman who can be excluded, manipulated, dominated, degraded, or sacrificed. Furthermore, sacred places focus more general orientations in space and time that distinguish center from periphery, inside from outside, up from down, and a recollected past from a meaningful present or an anticipated future. "Symbolic orderings of space and time," as the geographer David Harvey has noted, "provide a framework for experience through which we learn who or what we are in society." Therefore, to understand the symbolic orderings of American sacred space, considerable attention will have to be paid to the interpretive labors that have gone into making space significant. As a heuristic device, we can distinguish among three domains—natural environments, built environments, and mythic orientations—that represent overlapping and interweaving arenas in which differing interpretations of space as sacred have been advanced.

Natural environments have been subject to interpretation and reinterpretation throughout American history. From the religious practices of American Indians to the spiritual politics of modern environmentalists, the religious interpretation of land and landscape, which Catherine Albanese has recently identified as "nature religion," has defined an open set of interpretive strategies for investigating the natural environment with sacred significance. All this interpretive industry, however, suggests that nature, in its human meaning and significance, is a cultural product. During the nineteenth century, for example, a romantic naturalism transferred a sacred web of sentiment from God to nature. As Leo Marx has observed, "The movements of the heavenly bodies, space [an awesome, unimaginable infinity of space] and the landscape itself all were to become repositories of emotions formerly reserved for a majestic God." Some analysts have argued, however, that this nineteenth-century religious valorization of nature disguised the political, social, and economic forces at work in the production of American space. On the one hand, romantic nature religion obscured the military conquest of American Indian societies that made natural environments available for appropriation by "Nature's Nation," the United States. Such a religious interpretation of nature operated to naturalize conquest, thereby serving, in the words of Barbara Novak, as "the rhetorical screen under which the aggressive conquest of the country could be accomplished." On the other hand, romantic religious sentiments about nature have blurred a recognition of the economic production, packaging, and presentation of natural environments in America. As Neil Smith has observed, wilderness and wildlife areas, such as Yellowstone or Yosemite, are "produced environments in every conceivable sense." They are "neatly packaged cultural experiences of environment on which substantial profits are recorded each year." Therefore, nature in America is not a "natural" but a thoroughly cultural production of space.

Built environments are more obviously constructed as cultural locations of religious meaning and significance. Clearly, places of worship, such as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, have been marked off, ritualized, and interpreted as specific sites of sacred space in America. Often these sites operate as "nodal points" in a network of sacred places that defines some larger religious landscape. For example, an Aztec temple, the spatial arrangements of Puritan New England, the churches of colonial Virginia, the settings of early nineteenth-century evangelical
camp meetings, the architecture of communitarian socialism, the transformations of American synagogues, and the sites of Mormon sacred geography have all comprised different spatial networks of "nodal points" in the production of alternative religious orientations in American space.

Extending the interpretation of specific sites, many other built environments have been identified and analyzed as sacred space in America. A preliminary inventory would have to include the following sites: cities, homes, schools, cemeteries, hospitals, asylums, prisons, tourist attractions, museums, and even shopping malls. At one time or another, each of these sites has been interpreted as a sacred space in America. As we have noted, the "pivoting of the sacred" that occurs through the work of ritualization and interpretation allows virtually any place to become sacred. What kind of interpretive labor, however, would endow a place like a post office with sacred significance? As Jacques Derrida once confessed, "When I enter the post office of a great city I tremble as if in a sacred place." Seeming to pivot wildly in this case, sacred meaning and significance, holy awe and desire, can coalesce in any place that becomes, even if only temporarily, a site for intensive interpretation.

In America these constructed religious environments are inevitably positioned in relation to a patriotic landscape. Centered in the ritual core of Washington, D.C., this national sacred geography is punctuated by shrines, memorials, monuments, and battlefields at which patriotic orthodoxy has been ritualized and reinterpreted. As Wilbur Zelinsky has argued, American nationalism, particularly as it moved towards celebrating increasingly statist or centralist symbols of national identity and power, became locally embedded all over the country in a patriotic network of sacred places. However, as we have seen, a national shrine such as Pearl Harbor has localized, not only the interpretive framework of an orthodox patriotic faith, but also the conflict of interpretations that advance competing visions of America's place in the world.

While grounded in specific sites, environments, or geographical relations, religious worldviews embody broader spatial orientations that locate human beings in a meaningful, powerful world. Interpretations of sacred space entail strategies of symbolic or mythic orientation. In the study of religion, an earlier concern with the importance of symbolic centers for spatial orientation has been more recently modified to recognize that every center has a periphery, every symbolic centering also decenters those persons and places that stand on or beyond a center's periphery. Therefore, attention to geographical relations between center and periphery locates specific sacred sites or environments within a larger network of political, social, economic, and symbolic relations of power.

As another example of an advance in the analysis of spatial orientation in the study of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith has offered the useful distinction between two general spatial orientations, locative and utopian. Locative space is a fixed, bounded, sacred cosmos, reinforced by the imperative of maintaining one's place, and the place of others, in a larger scheme of things. By contrast, utopian space is unbounded, unfixed to any particular location, a place that can only be reached by breaking out of, or being liberated from, the bonds of a prevailing social order.

At the same time, however, general symbolic or mythic orientations toward sacred space—symbolizing center and periphery, inside and outside, up and down, fixed and free—might be entangled with symbols of class location, racial classification, or ethnic identification. They also might be embedded in systems of economic exchange. In the modern economy of sacred space, the symbolic medium of money, which has been described as "the 'space' of the capitalist world," produces an empty, infinite extension through which, in principle, all commodities can pass and freely circulate. By altering perceptions of space, money has become the primary symbol of mobility, access, and ownership in the production of modern American sacred space. Sacred space is often, if not inevitably, entangled in politics. Since the nineteenth century, the most potent mythic orientations have linked sacred space with nationalism, celebrating the "sacred nation" as the most encompassing spatial symbol of inclusion (and exclusion) in the world. In this respect, the spatial orientation of American nationalism, like many other nationalisms, has been particularly ambivalent. American nationalism has been locative in defending its boundaries and borders, but utopian in its appeals to a manifest destiny of territorial expansion and its aspiration to transcend all geographical limits in assuming a position of world power.

Third, and finally, sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols. As Michel Foucault insisted, "space is fundamental in any exercise of power." Conversely, power is asserted and resisted in any production of space, and especially in the production of sacred space. Since no sacred space is merely "given" in the world, its ownership will always be at stake. In this respect, a sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed, it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests. As Jonathan Z. Smith once observed, "Where we have good eth-
nography, it's always clear that myth and ritual are owned by certain subsets within the collective. The same is clear for sacred space. Sacred places are arenas in which power relations can be reinforced, in which relations between insiders and outsiders, rulers and subjects, elders and juniors, males and females, and so on, can be adjudicated. But those power relations are always resisted. Sacred places are always highly charged sites for contested negotiations over the ownership of the symbolic capital [or symbolic real estate] that signifies power relations. Although spearheaded by specific cultural entrepreneurs, cultural brokers, or cultural workers, struggles over the ownership of sacred space inevitably draw upon the commitment of larger constituencies that hold an investment in the contest. The analysis of sacred space in America, therefore, will require not only attention to how space has been ritualized and interpreted but also to how it has been appropriated, contested, and "stolen" back and forth in struggles over power in America.

3. Contested Sacred Space

This insistence on the contested character of sacred space must seem strange for readers who are only familiar with the vantage point adopted and promoted by Mircea Eliade. In popular works of interpretation, such as Patterns of Comparative Religion, The Sacred and the Profane and The Myth of the Eternal Return, Eliade developed three basic axioms for the analysis of sacred space in the history of religions. First, sacred space is set apart on a horizontal dimension from ordinary, homogeneous space. Second, sacred space—as center, omphalos, or axis mundi—allows for passage between different levels of reality. Third, sacred space is a revelation, an irruption or manifestation of the real, a hierophany. While these axioms, and their application, have been criticized within the history of religions, they have occasionally been accepted uncritically by humanistic geographers as if they were the sole contribution of the study of religion on the topic of sacred space. For example, the geographer Robert David Sack has invoked the authority of Eliade to observe that mountains, rivers, and other "features of the landscape, which to the outsider may have no significance, have emotional import and anchor the emotions to places. Such places become a part of the mythology of a culture. They become holy places, places which are believed to have been created and molded by gods and spirits." In keeping with an Eliadian approach to sacred space, the geographer's observation is framed entirely in the passive voice. Human

agency, including all the ritual, interpretive, social, economic, and political labor that goes into consecrating space, is erased by attributing all the action to "holy places" and "gods and spirits." They become sacred; they anchor emotions; they create and mold a mythological environment. Instead of contributing to an analysis, these assumptions merely announce a mystical theology of sacred space. Attention to the contested character of sacred space might provide a necessary corrective to this analytical naivety, whether it takes the form of theological dogmatism or mystical intuitionism, that holds out for a view of sacred space as simply "given" or "revealed."

This book reopens the investigation of sacred space by creatively subverting Eliade's axioms. Sacred space may be set apart, but not in the absolute, heterogeneous sense that Eliade insisted upon. Against all the efforts of religious actors, sacred space is inevitably entangled with the entrepreneurial, the social, the political, and other "profane" forces. In fact, as the case studies in this book demonstrate, a space or place is often experienced as most sacred by those who perceive it at risk of being desecrated by the very forces—economic, social, and political—that made its consecration possible in the first place. In one way or another, the chapters of this book set to rest the Eliadian notion that the sacred is necessarily the opposite of the profane or absolutely separate from the profane.

Sacred space may involve "levels of reality." Often, however, the most significant levels of reality in the formation of sacred space are not "mythological" categories, such as heaven, earth, and hell, but hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession. A certain theological dogmatism might hold, for example, that the city of Jerusalem is "really" sacred. But, as one geographer has observed, "Jerusalem could symbolize both a religious center of the Judeo-Christian world and a contested, occupied city." This ambivalence is not peculiar to Jerusalem; it is part of the reality of sacred space. Therefore, sacred space anchors more than merely myth or emotion. It anchors relations of meaning and power that are at stake in the formation of a larger social reality.

Finally, the assertion that the sacred irrupts or manifests is a mystification that obscures the symbolic labor that goes into making space sacred. It erases all the hard work that goes into choosing, setting aside, consecrating, venerating, protecting, defending, and redefining sacred places. This mystification is even more seriously misleading, however, when it covers up the symbolic violence of domination or exclusion that is frequently
involved in the making of sacred space. Sacred places have been exploited by dominant political and economic interests, and they have been re-claimed and even desecrated by those who have been dominated or excluded, all in the context of often violent contests over power and purity. As the case studies in this book show, power and purity are not inherent in sacred space. Power is always at stake in the symbolic, yet also material, struggles over appropriation and dispossession. Purity is always at stake in struggles over inclusion and exclusion. Advancing analysis, rather than a mystical theology, the authors of this volume have had to enter a more complex, contested world of sacred space.

Why should sacred space be inherently contested? Although the chapters of this book examine specific cases of conflict over sacred space, two general reasons might be suggested. First, sacred space is contested for the simple reason that it is spatial. The academic discipline of human geography has advanced several attempts to account for the inevitable conflict that occurs over space and place in human relations. Adopting a geometrical mode of analysis, geographer John Urry has suggested that the spatial dynamics of conflict can be explained by the fact that no two objects can occupy the same point in space. "Hence," Urry has concluded, "space is necessarily limited and there has to be competition and conflict over its organization and control."52 Whether explained as competition over scarce resources in a human ecology, or as relations of domination and resistance in class struggle, conflict has been analyzed by geographers as a necessary feature of spatiality. Therefore, we should not be surprised that sacred space is entangled in competition over scarce spatial resources, including conflicts over the hypothetical resource of spatiality itself.

However, sacred space is inevitably contested for a second, and perhaps, at first glance, contradictory reason. When space or place becomes sacred, spatially scarce resources are transformed into a surplus of signification. As an arena of signs and symbols, a sacred place is not a fixed point in space, but a point of departure for an endless multiplication of meaning. Since a sacred place could signify almost anything, its meaningful contours can become almost infinitely extended through the work of interpretation. In this respect, a sacred place is not defined by spatial limits; it is open to unlimited claims and counter-claims on its significance. As a result, conflict in the production of sacred space is not only over scarce resources but also over symbolic surpluses that are abundantly available for appropriation. Although "the sacred" might be regarded as an empty signifier, a sign that by virtue of its emptiness could mean anything or noth-
represented, contested, and inverted. A utopia might have no real place in the world. But a heterotopia, in Foucault's sense, can be located as a real site for altering spatial relations. At Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, for example, Hunter S. Thompson produced a hybrid sacred site by mixing up the spatial distinctions of Hawaiian tradition and the National Park Service, producing a surrealist heterotopia for gonzo journalism. At Pearl Harbor, some commentators argued that the inclusion of Japanese perspectives, which blurred the spatial distinction between allies and enemies, threatens to turn that sacred site into a hybrid space. Frequently, the counter-strategies of inversion or hybridization are resisted by dominant cultural interests. The specific contours of dominant spatial orientations might even be defined or reinforced by repressing illicit inversions or mixtures. However, it might be argued that all sacred sites are produced through mixing and manipulating cultural and material relations. After all, Pearl Harbor itself is a hybrid of national park, patriotic monument, and military cemetery. In spite of the efforts of religious actors to sanctify space, there are no pure places in the world. Through appropriation and exclusion, inversion and hybridization, sacred space is produced and reproduced. Relational, situational, and contested, sacred places are necessarily located within these conflictual strategies of symbolic engagement.

4. American Sacred Space

American sacred sites, environments, and spatial orientations have been intensely contested. The essays collected in this volume reopen the exploration of contested American sacred space. They begin with the land. The first three essays explore conflicts over land that have been pursued not only by military, legal, or economic force but also in and through highly charged sacred symbols. The specific conflicts examined here—over land and property rights, over the preservation of wilderness areas, and over the significance of the Black Hills—are richly suggestive of the inherently contested character of sacred space. Among other things, they show how sacred space is perceived as sacred precisely because it is always in danger of desecration. In the midst of this tension between the desire for consecration and the danger of desecration, radical environmentalists have engaged in a kind of ritualized guerrilla warfare over sacred space in America. Although apparently a marginal, fringe movement in modern America, the activists of radical environmentalism have mobilized forces in the ongoing contest over sacred space that has been central to the religious and political life of America as a whole.

As one front on which the symbolic warfare over American environments has been waged, the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming has focused an ongoing conflict of interpretation over the meaning and power of American sacred space. Competing religious interpretations of the Black Hills were provided in the nineteenth century by Lakota prophets and U.S. Army generals. In the twentieth century, conflicting religious interpretations of the region have continued to be advanced by Native Americans, environmentalists, mining and logging industries, government agents, and others, each claiming to have penetrated, in mutually exclusive ways, the central meaning and significance of the Black Hills. At
the center of this conflict, the patriotic edifice of Mount Rushmore has substantially altered the terms of engagement in this struggle. Part patriotic monument, part entrepreneurial initiative, and part intrusion on the landscape, Mount Rushmore has focused attempts to define the meaning of this natural environment. This conflict of interpretation, however, has underwritten and perhaps disguised a more fundamental struggle over legitimate access to and ownership of the area. The conflict over the meaning of the Black Hills, therefore, illustrates a more basic conflict over place and power in an American sacred environment that reveals the contested character of sacred space throughout America.

The next two essays explore the symbolic and material construction of two built environments, the Christian home and the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Both the home and the museum have been produced as specific sacred sites. At first glance, the home might seem the locus of the ordinary, the everyday, or the mundane in American symbolic life. However, domestic space in America has also been set apart as a special, sacred site of religious significance. What has been called a “cult of domesticity” emerged in nineteenth-century America to ritualize human relations between males and females, elders and juniors, family and strangers, and so on. These symbolic relations were all centered and reinforced in the domestic architecture, discourses, and practices of the home. Giving the “cult of domesticity” an explicitly religious content, conservative Christians in the late twentieth century have worked hard to construct a domestic sacred place set apart from the larger space of America. An examination of this particular type of domestic space in the worlds of conservative Christians reveals how the home has operated as a specific sacred site, not only idealized and promoted, but also constructed, negotiated, and even sometimes resisted in practice as a nexus of religious meaning and power.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum raises the question of how an ostensibly “foreign” event should be commemorated at the heart of the American patriotic landscape. As an examination of the construction of this museum demonstrates, sacred places are places of memory. The significance of memory for sacred space in America is nowhere better revealed than in shrines, monuments, battlefields, and other specific sites of ritualized commemoration that anchor collective recollections of an American past in the present. As a case study in the production of a sacred site for memory, this examination of the Holocaust Memorial Museum, located at the ceremonial center of the American patriotic landscape adjacent to the Washington Mall, reveals both persistent and changing aspects of American sacred space at the end of the twentieth century. The negotiations over space and memory in the construction of that memorial site have focused crucial and intensely contested issues concerning America’s place in the world. Not only a ritualized recollection of the past, however, the Holocaust Memorial Museum, in the ways that it commemorates the past and gives shape to a public memory, suggests that specific sacred sites may symbolically open or foreclose possible futures for America. In this respect, memory of the past might produce the space of the future.

The last two essays investigate symbolic or mythic orientations towards the meaning and power of America as a whole. That sacred totality, however, is revealed, ironically, in a range of alienated, dislocated, or foreign visions of America. A significant dimension of American sacred space appears in the ways in which America has registered and has been represented as a “foreign” space in other parts of the world. As a symbolic totality, the meaning and power of America in the world might best be revealed outside of the geographical boundaries of the United States. At the very least, certain aspects of America as sacred space can only be discerned outside of America. Adopting the distinction between utopian and locative space, it is possible to explore the ways in which America has operated as a potently ambivalent sacred space in the world. In South Africa, for example, America has been a symbol of sudden, apocalyptic liberation, most evident in the “American” movement that mobilized a large following during the 1920s with its promise of the imminent advent of black American liberators. More recently, however, America has symbolized the center of a locative, dominant, and often oppressive world order. Through a case study of America as sacred space in South Africa, some general conclusions can be drawn about the ways in which America’s ambivalent sacred significance has been external to America yet at the same time central to the meaning and power of America in the world.

In a radically decentered America, modern spatial orientations often seem more like disorientation. America fails to appear as a single, uniform, coherent space, as a meaningful totality “from sea to shining sea,” as it might appear in the patriotic orthodoxy. Rather, America appears as an ironic space in which the differences between location and dislocation have become obscured in disorienting, dangerous, but nevertheless revealing and sometimes revelatory ways. In the immediacy of a modern subjectivity, as mediated, however, through distinctive narrative strategies, or, more often, as fragmented and multiplied under the effects of modernity, American sacred space has been rediscovered as mobile and pluriform,
harrowing, yet still perhaps hallowed, suggesting a mythic orientation that is not securely anchored in a stable sacred landscape but is at risk in a modern world of media and mobility. These considerations raise significant questions about the future of sacred space in America. A spatial "disalienation," particularly in the midst of the endlessly signifying, but essentially meaningless, "hyperreality" of a postmodern world, as the critic Fredric Jameson has observed, will require more than merely a new recognition of the significance of place. It depends upon more than merely developing new techniques for "cognitive mapping." A recovery of place, in Jameson's terms, depends upon a cultural politics dedicated to "a practical reconquest of a sense of place."56 Not the home, therefore, but the battlefield, provides the governing metaphor in such a poetics and politics of space. In the explorations of sacred space advanced in this book, we find ourselves over and over again on the battlefield. Ritualized and reinterpreted, American sacred space remains contested space.

Obviously, American sacred space is a rich, complex field for investigation. Each chapter in this book combines historical depth with a detailed, sensitive analysis of current conflicts over the ritualization, reinterpretation, and authentic ownership of the sacred in America. It should be clear, however, that this book merely charts some of the possibilities. Our exploration of American sacred space in this volume marks only a beginning. Much work remains to be done. Crucial issues have been raised in these chapters by documenting symbolic and material conflicts over property and land, environment and ecology, patriotism and resistance, purity and defilement, inclusion and exclusion, and foreign and domestic perceptions of America. In the end, however, we are left with a lingering question that is implicitly raised by the chapters of this book: Are we exploring distinctively American sacred space or sacred space that only happens—by accident of geography, by coincidence of history—to be located within America? This is a problem. On the one hand, the authors in this volume adopt a broadly comparative perspective, drawing upon theoretical initiatives that have been advanced in the general history of religions. In this respect, there is nothing unique about American sacred space. Its production has followed the same strategies of ritualization, interpretation, and contestation that can be observed in the creation of sacred space and sacred places everywhere else in the world.

On the other hand, however, each chapter of this book is deeply immersed in some specific localization of American sacred space. In meticulous detail, each chapter grounds larger issues of the production and construction of sacred space within American historical experience. By focusing upon the land and the environment, the religious home and the commemorative museum, the foreign imagination and the domestic alienation, these essays directly engage the question, "What is American about American sacred space?" The answer to this question, we suggest, resides in the details, in the specific character and contours of American struggles to produce, construct, and negotiate the sacred. As the case studies in this book suggest, these struggles have inevitably been conducted in and through human relations, through relations that have been negotiated between Native Americans and Euroamericans, between capitalist entrepreneurs and pagan environmentalists, between Christian fundamentalists and secular society, between Jews and a patriotic establishment, between African-Americans and official American foreign policy towards Africa, between the people and a popular culture. What is American about American sacred space can be found precisely in these networks of overlapping, conflicting human relations that have made America and have forged its historical experience.

American historical experience has shaped the production of sacred space in America in distinctive ways that need to be acknowledged. The production of sacred space also involves time; it depends, not only upon a symbolic conquest or construction of place, but also upon the temporal processes of ritual and practice, memory and narrative, and the ongoing engagement with historical factors and change. Each chapter of this book, in different ways, locates the production of sacred space in a dramatic history of social change. Since each account is necessarily grounded in a specific locale within the American cultural landscape, no single "master narrative" based on these case studies can hope to encompass the diversity of historical change in the whole of America. At the risk of drawing very broad generalizations, we can only hint at some of the basic features of American historical experience that have influenced the symbolic and material production of American sacred space.

First, without necessarily reviving Frederick Turner's classic frontier thesis, we can recognize the ways in which American historical experience has been shaped by frontier situations. As recent comparative research has proposed, a frontier is not a line, border, or boundary; it is a zone of intercultural contact and interchange. Opening with the encounter of two or more previously separated cultures, a frontier zone closes when one has established hegemony. In American history, the encounter between Euroamerican and Native American cultures opened frontier zones that...
closed—unevenly, but inexorably—across North America during the nineteenth century. Hegemony was established, not only over a diversity of American Indian societies, but also over African-Americans who were incorporated as forced labor. However, as the chapters by Michaelsen, Taylor, and Glass show in this volume, the hegemony established on those closed frontiers has remained unstable and contested. Of course, throughout American history, there are many examples of frontiers as zones of encounter and conflict. For example, as immigrants streamed into northern urban centers by the millions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they often lived in ethnic enclaves that provided reassuring orientation in an unfamiliar place. Traditional music, foods, and language helped transform new world space into a community in which to live and work. The old world was, in part, recreated in the midst of the new world. Such ethnic space was not immune from various incursions: from other immigrant groups competing for jobs and living space, from the seemingly corrosive effects of public education—carried out in “secular” space where the pull of tradition was weakened—and from the lure of the evocative myth that had drawn so many to the New World to begin with, America as a land of promise and redemption, a land where immigrants could begin again. Disorientation, dislocation, and alienation, were imbedded in the immigrants’ consciousness, try though they might to use their former identities as a buffer to soften the impact of their new condition. Various peoples met, clashed, and were changed in urban zones of conflict. Traditional social structures broke apart, as Catholic married Protestant, and Protestant married Jew; new music was created, as fluid rhythms of jazz floated oblivious to ethnic boundaries. New religions—the Nation of Islam, for example—were formed in response to the bitterly resented omnipresence of white ownership of urban economic space. Race and class shaped the boundaries of urban frontiers, every bit as much as had fences on the western frontier, as exclusionary policies were encoded in zoning regulations, redlining, and the ominous metaphor of the city as a modern jungle, inhabited by human predators, those “others” of urban modernity. But no frontier has ever been so closed that it has not allowed scope, however limited, for counter-maneuvers of resistance and recovery. As part of the arsenal of the “weapons of the weak,” the symbolic resources of narrative and ritual have been drawn into struggles to keep frontier zones open for the recovery of sacred space.

Second, the historical development of the American legal system has lent a distinctive character to the production of American sacred space. America has been imagined by many as a free space, as a land of liberty, largely by virtue of the constitutional rights enshrined in the laws and upheld by the courts of the United States. At its inception, the American constitutional guarantee of civil rights was limited in scope, because it excluded children, women, African-Americans, Native Americans, and EuroAmericans without property from the right to vote. However, as the scope of civil inclusion was gradually, haltingly extended, the courtroom increasingly became a crucial location for adjudicating conflicts over American sacred space. It is significant that so many of the chapters in this book find themselves in the courtroom. Clearly, as Michaelsen recounts, the courts have been sites of struggle for contesting American Indian sacred places. Taylor documents the civil lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service over Mt. Graham; Glass alludes to the American Indian Movement taking its struggle over the Black Hills to the U.S. Supreme Court. Although most appeals have been unsuccessful, they have nevertheless shown that the courtroom has developed into the principal arena for conducting the politics of American sacred space. Certainly, the influence of the American legal system has extended into other areas of American religious and symbolic life. For example, behind the initiatives in home schooling recounted by Colleen McDannell stand crucial Supreme Court decisions during the 1960s that interpreted the First Amendment constitutional limits on establishing religion, through prayer, devotional Bible reading, or religious instruction, in the public schools. In the most litigious nation on earth, American courts have focused, but also, to a certain extent, have defused and ameliorated religious conflict over sacred space in America.

Third, a distinctive managerial ethos has emerged out of American historical experience to influence the production and preservation of sacred space. Drawing upon a Christian religious ethics of stewardship or custodianship, this management style has especially characterized the sanctification of natural environments and wilderness areas. By placing them under the bureaucratic management of federal agencies—the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service—their enduring sanctity has been secured. This managerial ethos has also been crucial in creating and maintaining national sites of a patriotic orthodoxy in America. Under federal regulation and bureaucratic supervision, this managerial ethos has operated on the basis of an implied consensus. In most cases, the grounds for consensus have remained invisible because they have been delegated to committees. However, as Linenthal shows in this volume, the production...
of sacred space by committee can be an intensely contested process, especially when upholders of the managerial ethos have to negotiate every detail with stakeholders making competing claims on that space.

Fourth, the commodification of space, which Michaelsen documents in his analysis of the Euroamerican ideology of property rights, has pervaded every aspect of the production of sacred space in America. Certainly, as we argue, the issue of "ownership" has been a consistent feature of sacred space everywhere in the world. Since they are not simply "given," sacred places must inevitably be appropriated. However, the commodification of space—in the right of discovery, in the right of entitlement, in the right to development, in the right to access and use—has entailed distinctive spatial consequences in American historical experience. Quite literally, sacred space can be bought and sold. The history of the American preservation movement clearly illustrates the deeply felt need to identify, shelter, and preserve places deemed historic through purchase, if necessary. As most chapters in this book note, efforts to secure sacred space in America have often been directed towards removing them from the marketplace or protecting them from any contaminating contact with economic exchange, entrepreneurial enterprise, or motives of financial gain. However, to put the issue bluntly, the very production of sacred space depends upon money. Perhaps echoing a Protestant aversion to the buying and selling of sacred relics, benefices, or indulgences, many Americans have assumed that sacred space must be outside of the cycle of economic exchange. However, if all space is commodified, not only real estate, but also air space, air waves, intellectual property, and all the works of the human imagination, then sacred space cannot escape the economic forces of ownership and alienation.

Fifth, America has witnessed a series of dramatic and extensive information revolutions that has substantially affected the historical production of sacred space in America. If the production of sacred space depends upon intensive interpretation, then that hermeneutics of place must be grounded in shared information. The face-to-face encounters of oral tradition and folklore, conversation and confession, argument and debate, characterized the dominate verbal mode of transmitting information among all segments of the American population—Native American, African-American, and Euroamerican—until well into the nineteenth century. While the kingdom of print certainly expanded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it never completely conquered these oral forms of information exchange. Perhaps in hindsight, we will view print as a brief interlude in the history of communication. As the twentieth century draws to a close, with print already submerged under radio, television, and computer networks, we face the prospect of an emergent "cyberspace" in which information explodes in every direction. As hinted by Chidester and developed by Sherrill in this volume, this rapidly changing information technology already shows signs of altering the contours and experiential dynamics of American sacred space.

Sixth, American historical experience has produced a national orientation, supported by specific national sites, that has been saturated with a distinctive kind of patriotic sacrality. All sacred sites in America, linked together in complex and often conflicting ways, encourage the cumulative perception that America, in all its manifest diversity, is a national unity. "This land is your land, this land is my land," because we share the same historical geography of sacred sites "from sea to shining sea." However, as the chapters in this book show, Americans do not in fact share the same historical geography. They do not all live in the same America. While John Winthrop and his ideological descendants could view America as the new Israel, the chosen land, African-Americans held in bondage spoke of America as the oppressive Egypt, alien space transformed only briefly during the Civil War into the promised land of the north. Members of new religions of the nineteenth century—Shakers and Mormons, for example—expressed the optimism that the Kingdom of God was indeed at hand by constructing clearly defined sacred space in which their sanctified life could be led. Some Pentecostalists draw rigid lines between the space of their church—where the baptism of the Holy Spirit transforms their lives—and the "world," a threatening and evil place to be resisted. In many ways, the boundaries they draw between sacred space and everyday space are more pronounced than cloistered monks, who, while seemingly cut off from the "world," seek to sanctify all space through their identification with the natural—and sacred—rhythms of everyday life. As the chapters by Linenthal and Chidester in particular suggest, the question of what "belongs" in American sacred space remains intensely contested. At the ceremonial core of American sacred space, does a ritualized commemoration of a "foreign" event belong? At the distant periphery, do foreigners have any claim on defining the sacred space of America? In these questions, America's past is recast, its future foretold. While the national question in America has always been an intercultural conflict of interpretations, the future of
America will inevitably and increasingly be global. In the process, any distinction between national sacred space, growing out of American historical experience, and international sacred space will be blurred.

Seventh, and finally, American historical experience has fashioned a national, public, or civil religion that has depended heavily upon the production of sacred space. Independent of any organized religious institution, whether church, temple, synagogue, or mosque, this civil religiosity is as firmly implanted on American soil as it is in the American calendar or in American creeds. It encompasses elements of the patriotic landscape that celebrate the nation, as well as places that mourn abandoned ideals, the National Park Service site of the Manzanar concentration camp for Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II, for example. However, as Sherrill observes in this book, American civil religion is currently undergoing yet another time of trial. Following Robert Bellah's initial formulation of the notion of American civil religion, we might regard the first period of trial during the American Revolution as the challenge of national independence, the Civil War of the 1860s as the challenge of national unity, and the Vietnam era of the 1960s as the challenge of national integrity. Entering the twenty-first century, America confronts new challenges, although still undefined, that seem to be emerging as distinctively spatial. As the chapters in this book suggest, the challenge to American civil society and civil religion will be decided spatially, especially when they involve the profound conflicts over space and place that arise under conditions of alienation, dislocation, and disorientation.

As the chapters of this book demonstrate, the question of the meaning of America is constantly being raised in specific sacred places. Made sacred through the work of ritualization, the labor of intensive interpretation, and the struggles of contestation, these sites enact a politics of the sacred that remains crucial for the life of the nation. In most cases, this politics is a micro-politics: Contests over sacred meaning and power are anchored in specific locations—a courtroom in Arizona, a forest in California, a mountain in North Dakota, a home in Texas, a memorial museum in Washington, D.C., a baseball stadium in New York—but these local instances of sacred politics resonate with larger questions of national memory of the past and aspirations for the future. At these sites, local sacred space is negotiated and renegotiated in ways that shape the religious contours and character of the entire nation.

Historians of religions have not been the only ones to notice the importance of sacred space in the formation of modern nationalisms. In 1977 the French Marxist Regis Debray insisted on the sacred character of any nationalism. As Debray proposed:

We should not become obsessed by the determinate historical form of the nation-state but try to see what that form is made out of. It is created from a natural organization proper to homo sapiens, one through which life itself is rendered untouchable or sacred. This sacred character constitutes the real national question.

In specifying the sacred substance of the national question, Debray pointed explicitly to two "anti-death processes," the production of sacred time and sacred space. In the first case, the national question depends upon "a delimitation of time, or the assignation of origins." Like Eliade, who documented the "myth of the eternal return" in the history of religions, Debray observed that the mythic temporal origin, the "zero point or starting point is what allows ritual repetition, the ritualization of memory," with ritual reenactment "signifying defeat of the irreversibility of time." In the second instance, the national question depends upon the "delimitation of an enclosed space." Within the highly charged confines of that delimited sacred space, whether a sacred site, environment, or territory, national interests intersect with "an encounter with the sacred." The national question, according to Debray, raises over and over again the problem of the precise location of "a sacred space within which divination could be undertaken." In the production of sacred space and places, meaning and power coalesce, the national question is answered in the ritualization of memory and the divination of a shared future.57

With careful attention to local detail, the chapters of this book show how America has been produced out of sacred material. Clearly, America has been constructed and contested at the intersection of many sacred spaces. In an important sense, the authors of the essays collected in this book have rediscovered America. Not content with the guidebooks, formulas, and comforts of academic tourism, the authors have risked the uncharted dangers of exploration to see America new. At the very least, that work of rediscovery reveals that America has not been a single space, but an arena of multiple centers, changing environments, shifting geographical relations, and ambivalent symbolic orientations, all contested and at stake in the dynamics of sacred space in America. The essays collected in this volume are intended to be suggestive, and perhaps even challenging and provocative, in charting new territories for further discovery. In that spirit, we propose this itinerary through some of the sites, environments,
and spatial orientations in which America has appeared as sacred space. America may not appear the same again.

Notes

4. Memo, “Pearl Harbor Anniversary Commemoration: History Division Report,” from chief historian to Associate Director, Cultural Resources, April 6, 1992, USA-

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MASS.

16. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 89. Bourdieu has defined the *habitus* as embodied practices of classification and orientation. “The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. Orienting practices practically, they embed what some would mistakenly call values in the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body...and engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world.” *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 466. On the embodied practical strategies and tactics of ordinary life, see Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).


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David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal


32.


30. N. Smith, Uneven Development, 57.


27. N. Smith, Uneven Development, 57.


34. As noted, theories of the production of sacred places and the relevant dispositions towards sacred space have often been anchored in the home. In addition to Van der Leew and Bourdieu, see David E. Sopher, "The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning," in D. W. Meinig (ed.), The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 125-95; but also see the cautionary observation that "home" has "no easy universalism," in J. Z. Smith, To Take Place, 30. For an insightful analysis that situates the sacralization of the home in the relationship to both local and larger social environments, see Juan Eduardo Campo, "Shrines and Talismans: Domestic Islam in the Pilgrimage Paintings of Egypt," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 55 (1987): 393-305; and Campo, The Otherness Paradise: An Inquiry into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). The history of domestic housing in America has been recounted in Dwynwyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (New York: Pantheon, 1982). For a discussion of

35. As Robert Michaelsen once observed, the American public school has operated as if it were the established church of a common, public, or civil religion. “Is the Public School Religious or Secular?,” in Elwyn A. Smith [ed.], The Religion of the Republic [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971], 22–44. A recent account of the ritualization of the school that occurred when flag ritual was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century is found in Scot M. Guenter, “Flag Ritual Comes to the Public Schools: Development and Dissemination of the Pledge of Allegiance,” The American Flag, 1777–1924: Cultural Shifts from Creation to Codification [Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990], 114–15. Differences in identifying the specifically Christian religious interests at work in public schooling seem to depend largely upon whether the analyst emphasizes the role of Protestant liberals or evangelicals in the nineteenth-century formation of the American common school. For this contrast, compare Charles Leslie Glenn Jr., The Myth of the Common School [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988]; and David B. Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820–1980 [New York: Basic Books, 1982]. From a revisionist perspective, the school has appeared as a space for ritualizing and reinforcing American ideals of personal discipline and social order. See David Nasaw, Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States [New York: Oxford University Press, 1979].


38. Theoretical analysis of pilgrimage and pilgrim sites has benefited from the work


DIRT IN THE COURT ROOM

Indian Land Claims
and American Property Rights

Robert S. Michaelsen

The land they settled on was ours. We knew not but the Great Spirit had sent them to us for some good purpose, and therefore we thought they must be a good people. We were mistaken.

—Lenape [Delaware] Indian

I fear . . . that God Land will be . . . as great a God with us English as God Gold was with the Spaniards.

—Roger Williams

The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being.

—John Locke

Land is, more than anything else, the immediate reason for conflict between Indians and non-Indians.

—Milner Ball

I. Introduction

"What is a medicine man?" the U.S. District Court judge asked in response to the efforts of the Navajo Medicine Men’s Association to stop the expansion of a ski resort on National Forest Service land on the slopes of the San Francisco Peaks. The attorney for the Navajo, in supporting documents and in his direct response, pointed out that soil and other items from these peaks, and from the three other sacred mountains of the Navajo people, are carried in the medicine man’s pouch. Thus he moved adroitly from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic, from the bit of dirt in the pouch to the massive landform. In a word, he made a mountain out of a molehill.

In the Navajo cast of characters medicine men and women are healers,