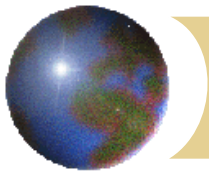


Religions and Cultures in the United States

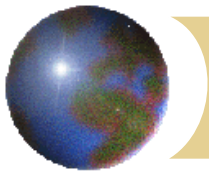
John Hooker
Carnegie Mellon University

Religions and Cultures
Chautauqua Institution
August 2025



Cultural profile

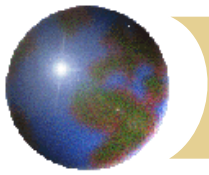
<i>Relationship-based</i>	<i>Rule-based</i>
Collectivist	Individualist
High power distance	Low power distance
High context	Low context
Shame based	Guilt based
Dionysian	Apollonian



Cultural profile

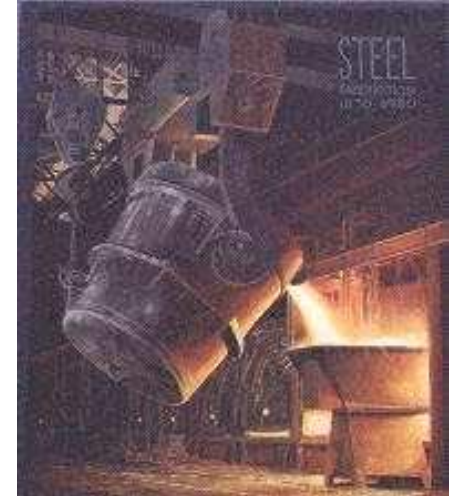
- The USA has been shaped by two overarching conditions:
 - The frontier
 - Reinforced **individualism**, rugged **independence**, focus on the **future**.
 - **Utopian** thinking.
 - “Multiculturalism”
 - A nation of immigrants.
 - Cultural/political system that can **assimilate immigrants**
 - But **resistance** from those who arrived earlier

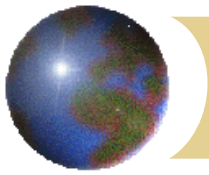




Cultural profile

- Melting pot?
 - Monocultural: Everyone assimilates to dominant northern European culture
- Salad bowl?
 - Multicultural: Different subcultures exist side by side





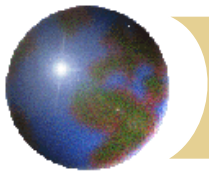
Cultural profile

- The solution:
 - Modified melting pot
 - But not cheese fondue



- More like Mulligan stew

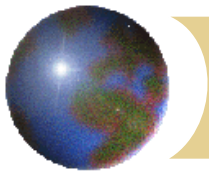




Cultural profile

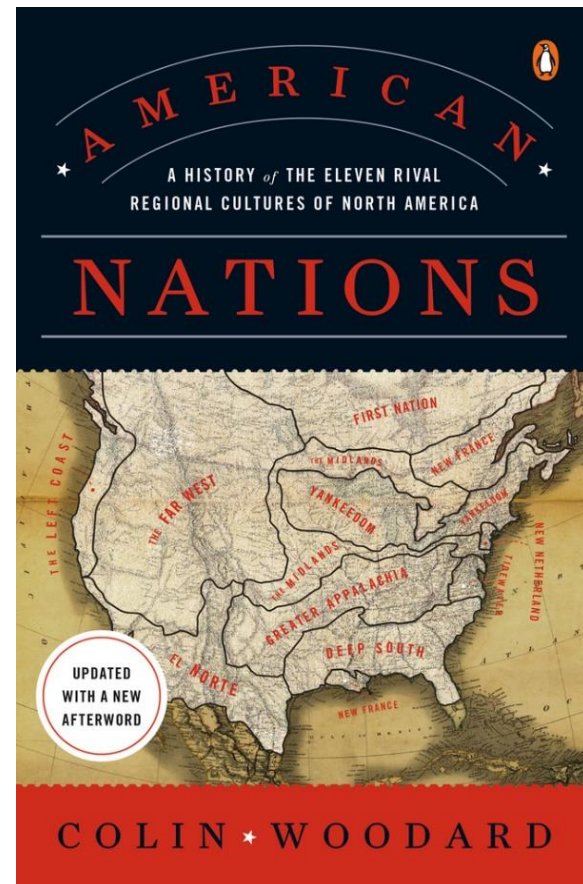
- Strongly rule-based
 - Social cohesion based on a **common rulebook**
 - ...not on a common ethnic background.
 - Rules are the “broth” that holds the stew together.
 - Ethnic groups provide the “flavors” of the other ingredients.

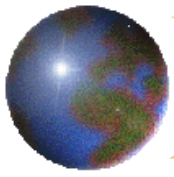




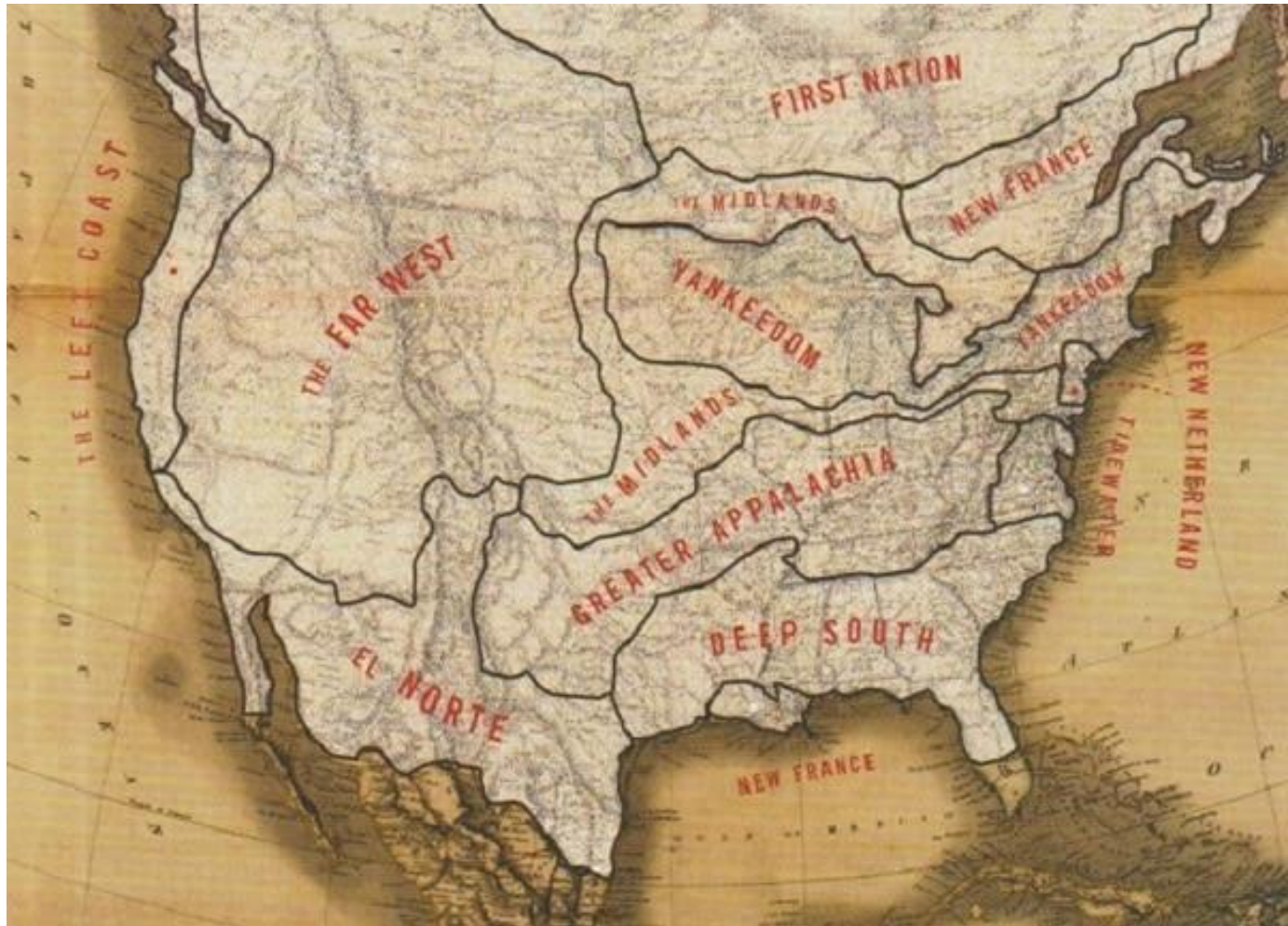
Cultural profile

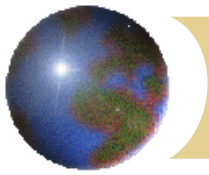
- Major subcultures are strongly regional
 - Immigrants generally adapt to the regional culture in which they settle.
 - Most regional subcultures are **no longer ethnic groups**
 - To understand U.S. regional subcultures, **read this book**





Cultural profile



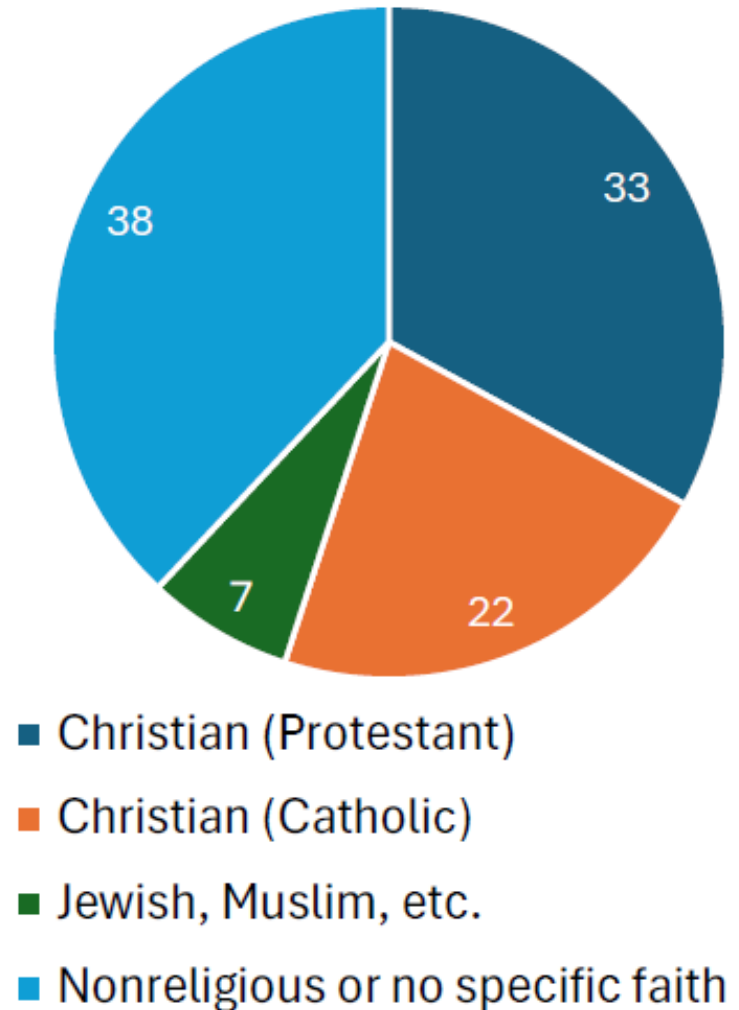


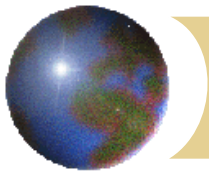
Religious profile

- Religion is increasingly a matter of consumer choice rather than identity
 - We speak of one's "religious preference" rather than one's "religion"

Source:
Gallup poll, March 2024

Religious Affiliation in USA



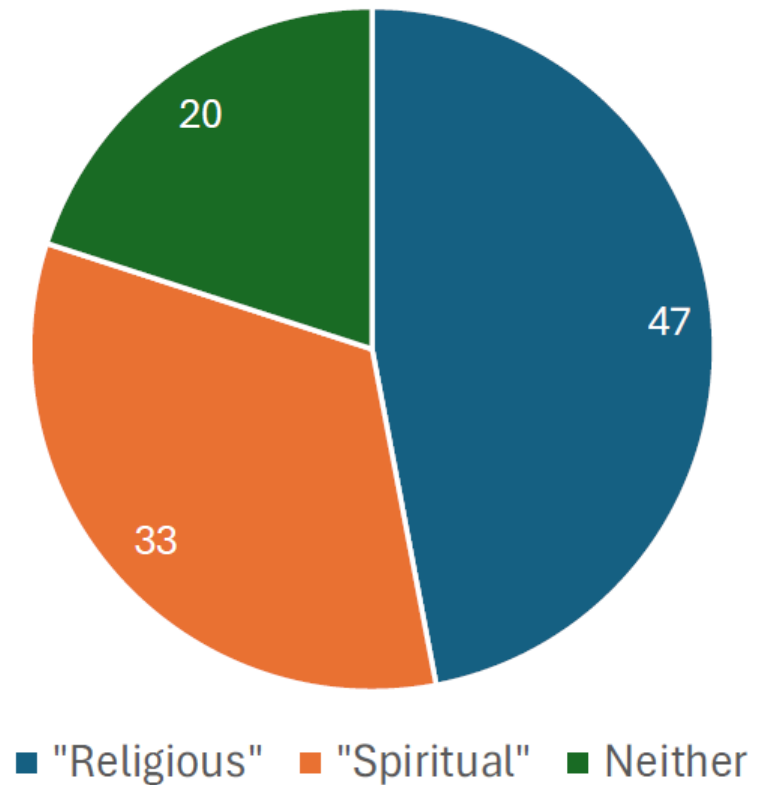


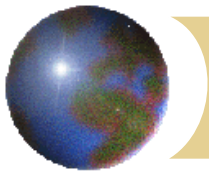
Religious profile

- “Spirituality” is displacing “religion”

Source:
Gallup poll, March 2024

Religious Orientation in USA



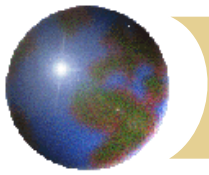


Religious profile

- Fastest growing: conservative Christianity and “spirituality without religion”
 - Shrinking: mainline Protestants and church attendance.
- Conservative Christianity
 - Fundamentalist
 - Strict doctrine
 - Puritanism
 - Creation science
 - Reflects rule-based culture
 - Evangelical/Pentecostal
 - Personal religious experience
 - Emotionalism
 - Reflects individualism



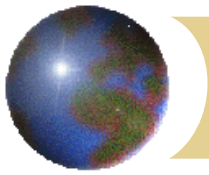
Noah's Ark theme park, Kentucky



Evangelical religion

- American religion has always had a strong experiential component.
 - As in Great Awakenings, Pentecostalism.
 - 1st Great Awakening (1730s-1740s)
 - 2nd Great Awakening (1790s-1840s)
 - 3rd Great Awakening (1857-1859)
 - 4th Great Awakening (1890s-1920s)
 - This reflects a strong Dionysian element in the society.

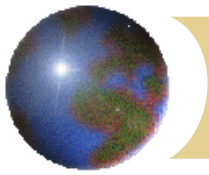




Evangelical religion

- The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) is the most dynamic new evangelical movement .
 - Some prominent right-wing figures have associated themselves with NAR.
 - Samuel Alito, Tucker Carlson, Mike Johnson, Elon Musk, Donald Trump, J.D. Vance
 - Strong political support for MAGA
 - ...and Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.





Evangelical religion

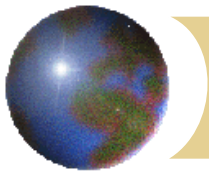
- Characteristics of NAR.

- Core beliefs:

- Christian **apostles** and **prophets** are again active, as in old times.
 - Christians must have **dominion** over world affairs.
 - Christians must stand atop the **Seven Mountains of Society** (media, government, education, economy, family, religion, arts & entertainment).
 - “Unhumans” and demonic forces that now run these institutions must be “**crushed**.”

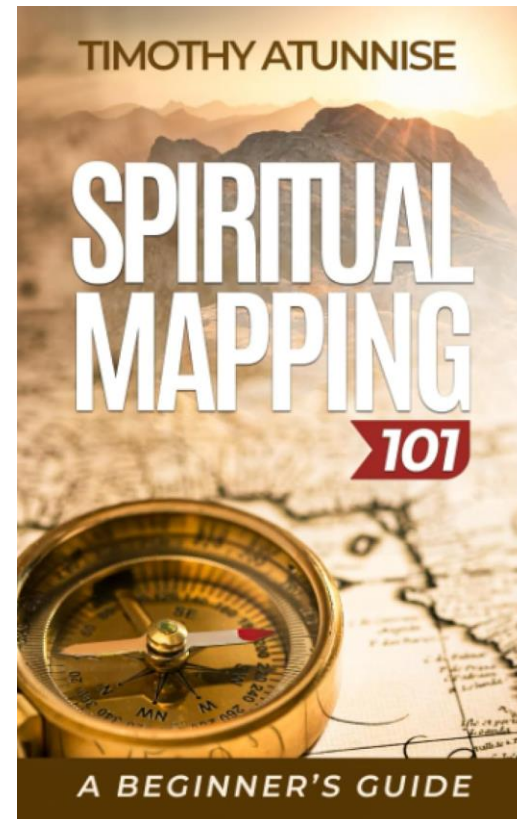
Rev. 17:9

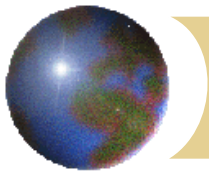
**The New
Apostolic
Reformation
(NAR)**



Evangelical religion

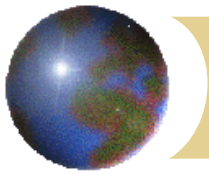
- Characteristics of NAR.
 - Core beliefs:
 - Demonic forces concentrate in certain geographical areas (“spiritual mapping”)
 - The path to Christian dominion is by way of **free market capitalism** and **elimination of secular democracy**.
 - This will establish the **Kingdom of God** that Jesus promised.



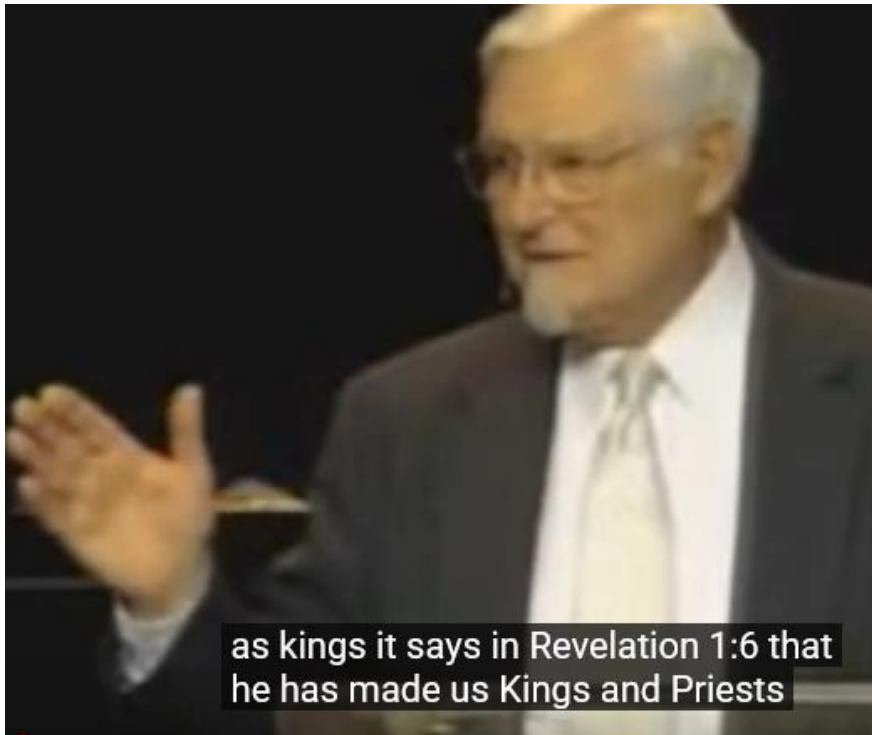


Evangelical religion

- Characteristics of NAR.
 - History:
 - Roots in Pentecostalism of early 1900s, Latter Rain movement of 1940s, Charismatic Christianity of 1960-80s.
 - C. Peter Wagner (1930-2016) coined the term “New Apostolic Reformation” and developed the concept of **dominionism**.
 - Wagner was missionary to Pentecostal groups in Latin America but was alarmed by socialist flavor of Liberation Theology and sought an alternative.
 - NAR came to national prominence after aligning with Donald Trump.

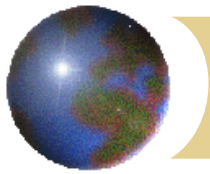


C. Peter Wagner on YouTube*



Rev. 1:6 actually says “...and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”
So, God has dominion, not us.

*NAR Apostle C. Peter Wagner teaching its key doctrine of Dominionism, posted 27 May 2014



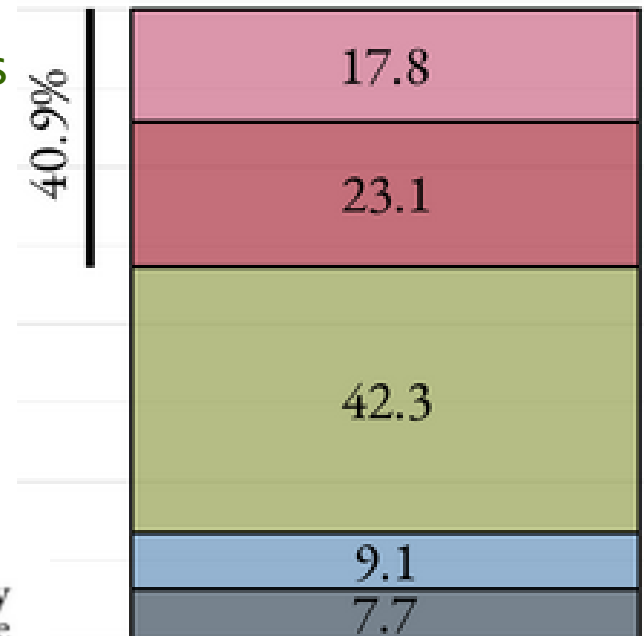
Evangelical religion

- Characteristics of NAR

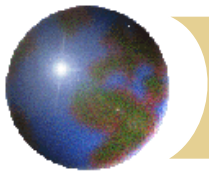
- Widespread support?

- Denison University poll of evangelical and non-evangelical Christians, January 2024:
 - “Do you agree: God wants Christians to stand atop the ‘7 Mountains of Society’ (government, education, business, etc.)”
 - Evangelicals: 55% said **yes**.
 - Non-evangelicals: 27% said **yes**.

 Strongly Agree  Agree  Neither  Disagree  Strongly Disagree



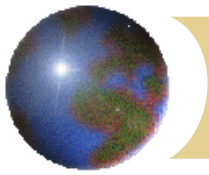
January 2024



Evangelical religion

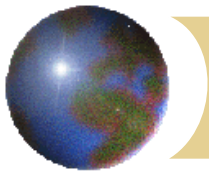
- Characteristics of NAR
 - Multiracial, multiethnic
 - Meetings reportedly attended by Blacks, Whites, Latinos, rich, poor, immigrants.
 - Some meetings in Spanish.
 - Not clear how this fits with political opposition to immigration.





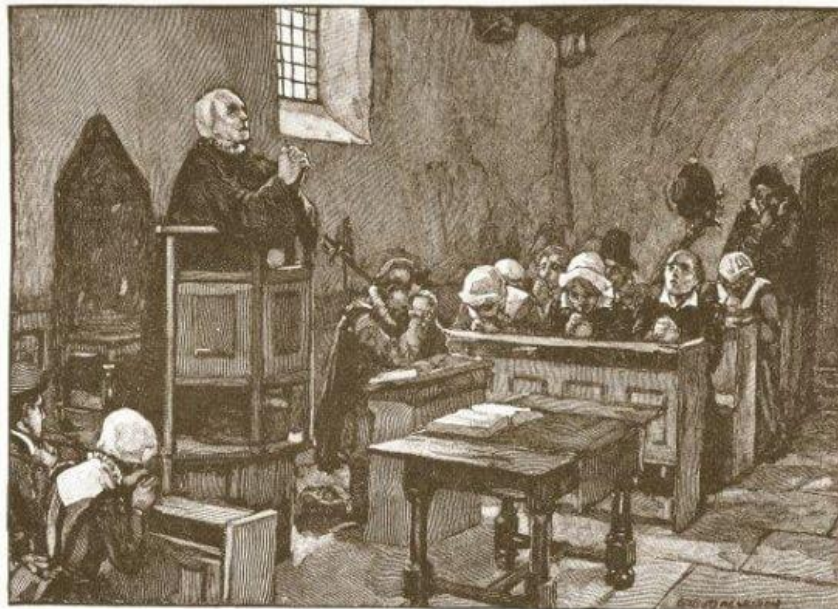
Evangelical religion

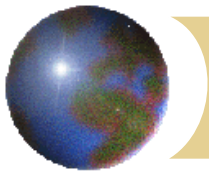
- How does NAR reflect U.S. culture?
 - Individualism
 - An element of Pentecostalism in general.
 - Support for free market economics (neoliberalism).
 - Opposition to government.
 - Universalism: all the world should have the same values/norms (i.e., **ours**)
 - But how does Christian dominion square with individual freedom?



Evangelical religion

- Religious freedom?
 - This is not historically a U.S. **cultural** value.
 - Puritans sought religious freedom for **themselves**.
 - Massachusetts Bay Colony was a theocracy.

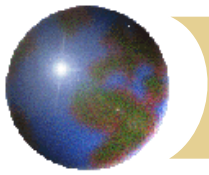




Evangelical religion

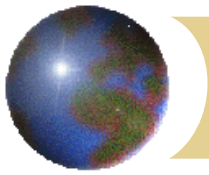
- Religious freedom?
 - This is not historically a U.S. **cultural** value.
 - Most colonies were establishmentarian
 - Only Rhode Island & Pennsylvania guaranteed religious freedom





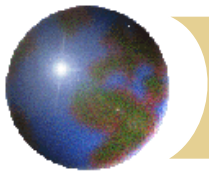
Evangelical religion

- Religious freedom?
 - Separation of church and state is an **enlightenment** value.
 - Promoted by founders, especially Jefferson & Madison
 - Broader goal was separation of **culture** and state.
 - There was no concept of “culture” at the time (introduced by Matthew Arnold in 19th c.)
 - Founders wanted a state unified by **shared, self-evident principles**, not by ethnicity.



Evangelical religion

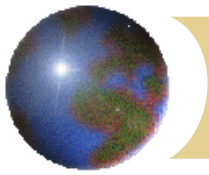
- Religious freedom?
 - Separation of church and state is an **enlightenment** value.
 - Broader goal was separation of **culture** and state.
 - Or rather, building a common, overarching, rule-based **culture** grounded in Enlightenment values.
 - This is the **American experiment**.
 - It has worked to fair degree.
 - Can it last?
 - Or will the persistence of inherited culture eventually win out (a la Matthew Arnold)?



Evangelical religion

- Enlightenment in decline
 - A 200-year-old process.
 - Started with Robespierre & guillotine in France.
 - Technical rationality & **positivism** blamed for 20th century horrors (Horkheimer & Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*)
 - **Critical theory** blames enlightenment values for racial and sexual oppression (whence “identity politics”)
 - **Postmodern nihilism** (1970s-90s) rejects universal reason and even truth as a basis for society.
 - **Today** we see erosion of universal human rights and the rule of law.

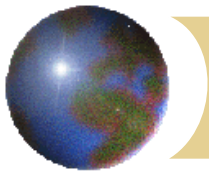




Evangelical religion

- Enlightenment in decline
 - Response: **impose** unity, by whatever means necessary.
 - Christian dominion will solve society's problems.
 - No need for secular welfare state, as Christian love will reign.

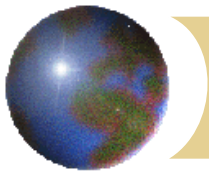




Evangelical religion

- Enlightenment in decline
 - Response: **impose** unity, by whatever means necessary.
 - Christian dominion will solve society's problems.
 - No need for secular welfare state, as Christian love will reign.
 - Similar utopian vision: Silicon Valley autocracy.
 - Techno-authoritarianism will yield optimal outcomes.
 - Sympathizers include Peter Thiel, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, J.D. Vance
 - Future-orientation of U.S. culture persists, but in a different form.

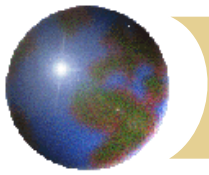




Evangelical religion

- Revitalization cult?
 - A response to rapidly changing culture.
 - Fundamentalism was a response to massive immigration of late 19th c.
 - Another surge of immigrants came with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality (Hart-Celler) Act, which removed preference for northern European immigrants.

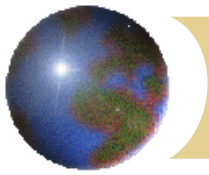




“Spiritual but not religious”

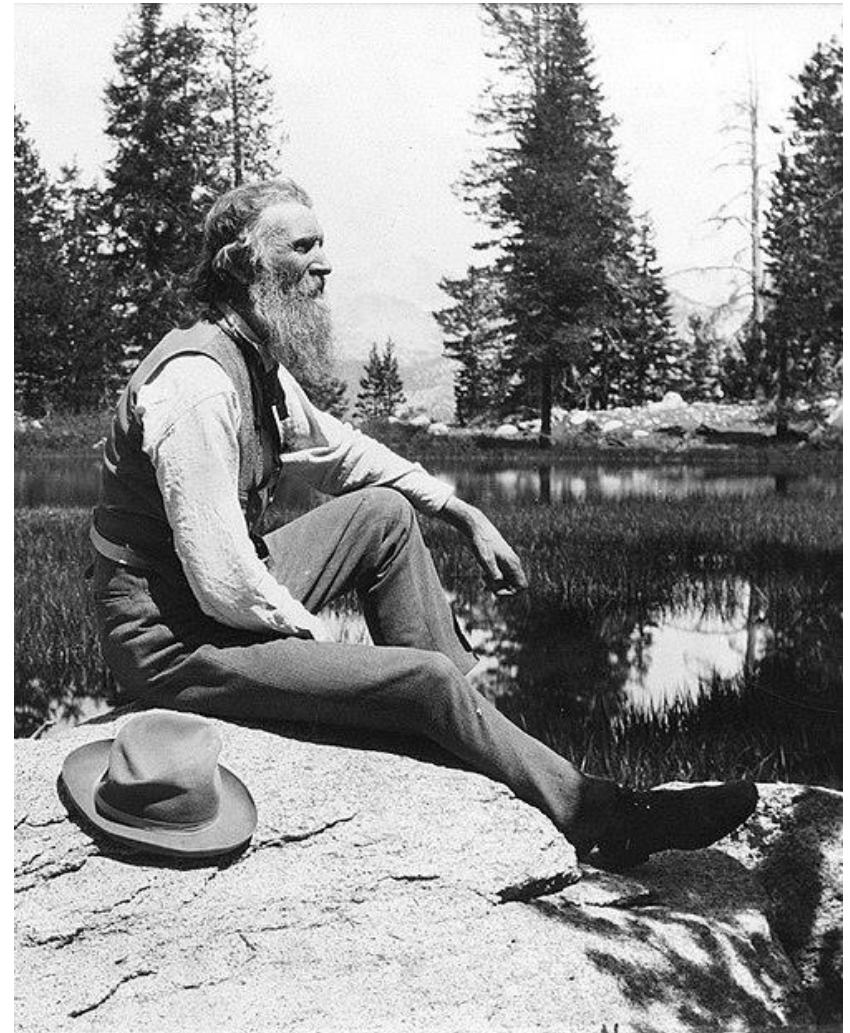
- The **other growing element** of U.S. society
 - “Religion” identified with **organized religion**
- Much of this is self-help, therapy
 - Escape from alienation, stressful lifestyle
 - Perhaps too narrow to serve a fully religious function
- But there is another branch...

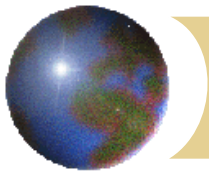




“Spiritual but not religious”

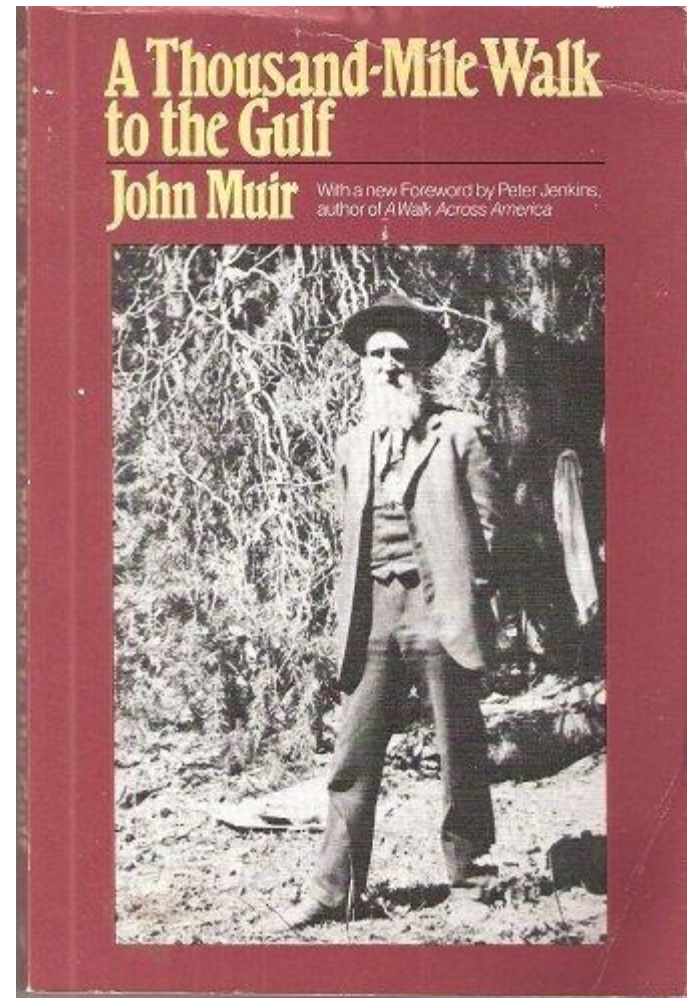
- The “mystical” approach of John Muir
 - He encapsulates the spirit and contradictions of an American sensibility
- Proponent of wilderness values
 - Major influence behind national parks
 - “America’s best idea”
 - Pilgrimage sites

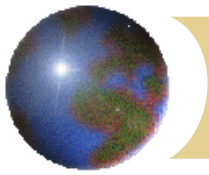




“Spiritual but not religious”

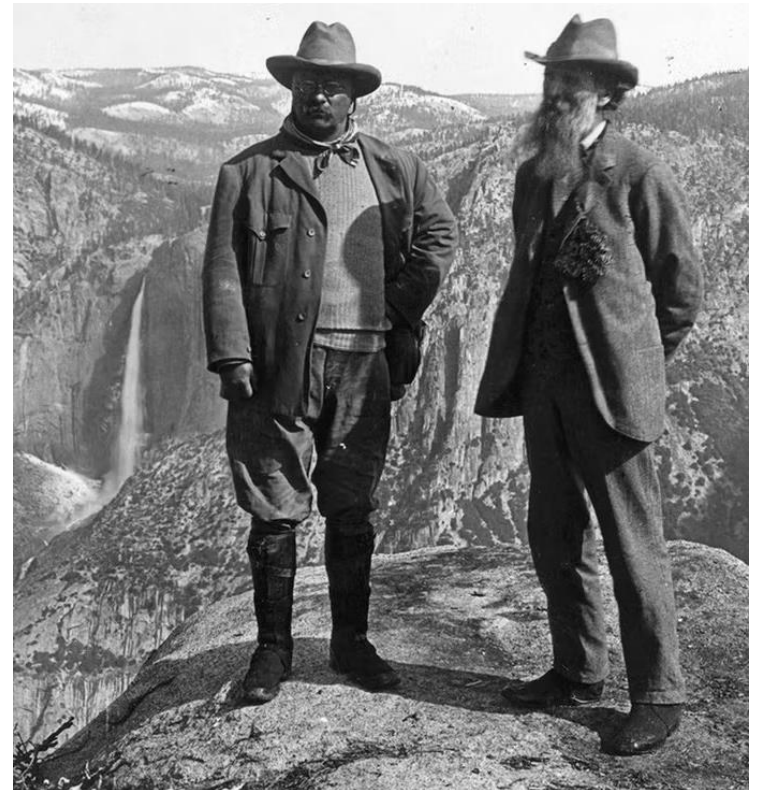
- A Buddha-like beginning
 - Rejected strict Christian views of his father.
 - Set out on journey thru the Reconstruction South.
 - Almost died from malaria in Florida.
 - Hazards of nature cleansed him of any romanticism.
 - Developed the idea of “oneness with the earth”
 - Nature does not exist for us to exploit it..
 - We are part of nature.





“Spiritual but not religious”

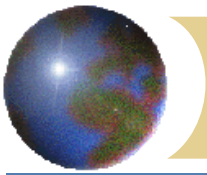
- Wilderness values
 - We can experience the sacred in unspoiled nature.
 - Another confirmation of Eliade's analysis
 - Wrote passionate articles that promoted environmentalism.
 - Founded Sierra Club



T. Roosevelt with Muir in Yosemite



Yosemite National Park



Yellowstone National Park



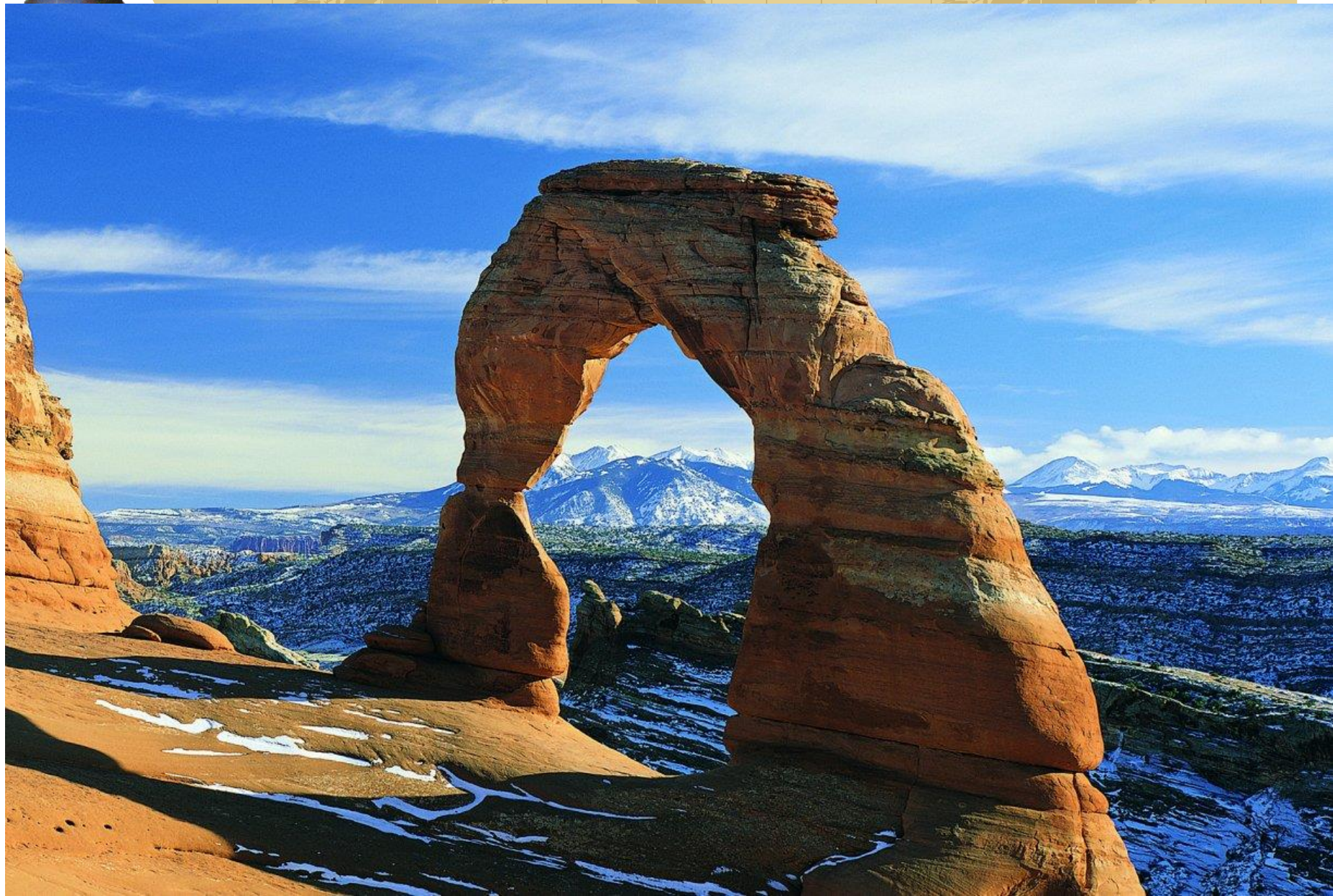
Rocky Mountain National Park



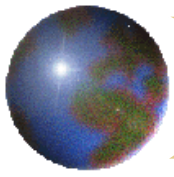
Great Smoky Mountains National Park



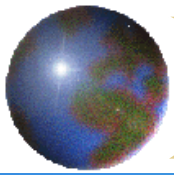
Grand Teton National Park



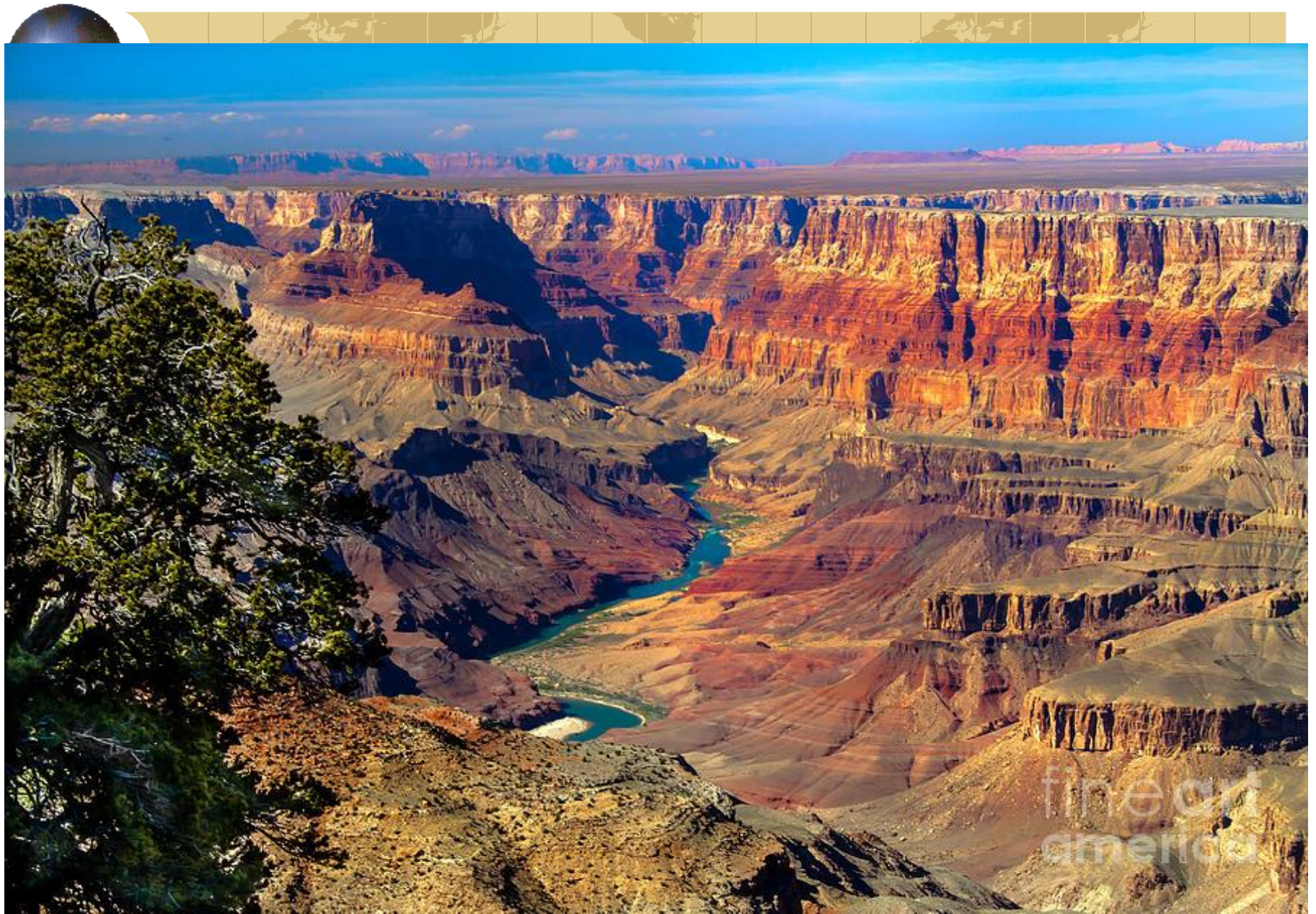
Arches National Park



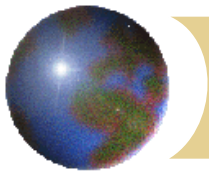
Everglades National Park



Glacier National Park



Grand Canyon National Park

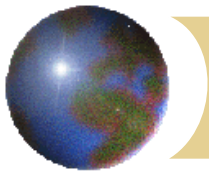


“Spiritual but not religious”

- How far can this take us?
 - We can't all live in Yosemite.
 - Isn't environmentalism a northern European thing?
 - This won't work in today's diverse society.
 - Muir's writings sometimes suggest white supremacy.
 - Although the native peoples Muir denigrated had a perspective not unlike his own.

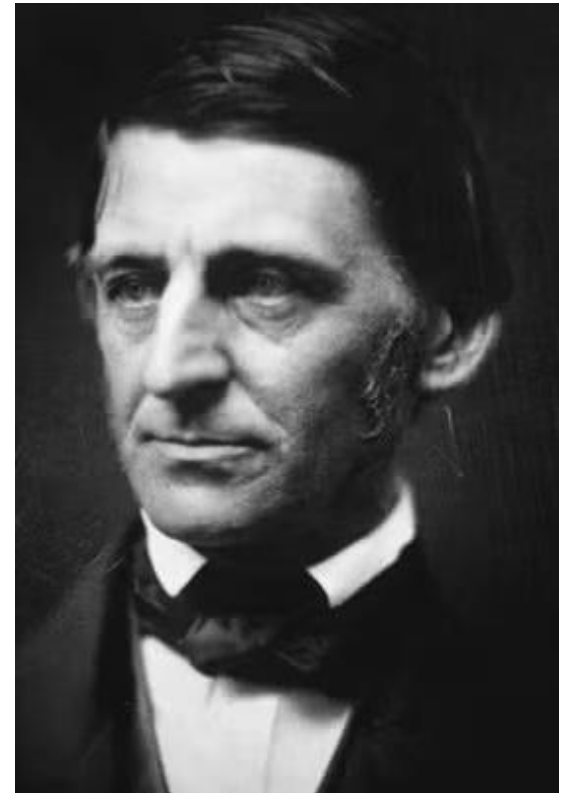


Entry into Yosemite
(and some other parks)
must be booked in advance

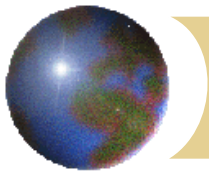


“Spiritual but not religious”

- Support in U.S. culture?
 - Roots in transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau
 - which emphasized American **individualism** and **self-reliance**
 - ...while regarding nature as **sacred** and providing a **connection** with the “Over-soul” that unifies all things.

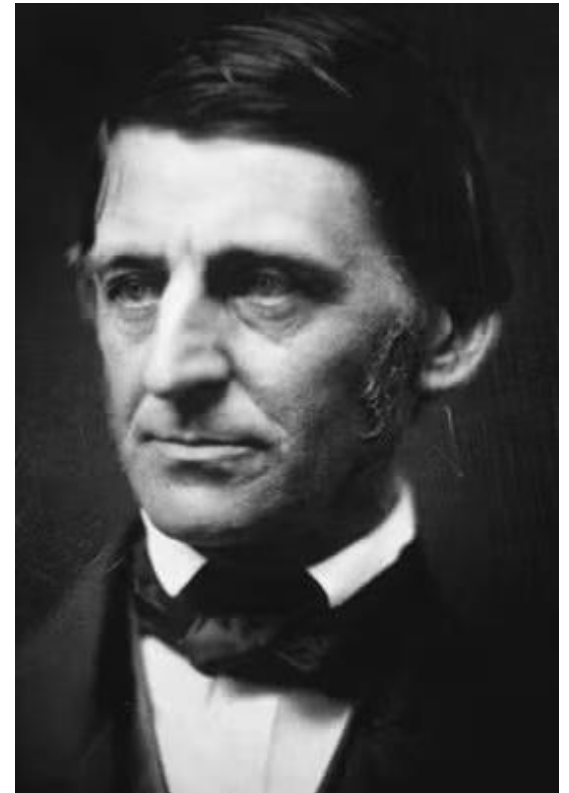


Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882

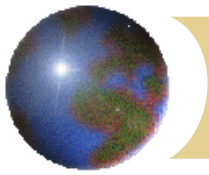


“Spiritual but not religious”

- Support in U.S. culture?
 - Roots in transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau
 - which emphasized American **individualism** and **self-reliance**
 - ...while regarding nature as **sacred** and providing a **connection** with the “Over-soul” that unifies all things.
 - ...and rejecting overconsumption in favor of a simple lifestyle.



Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882

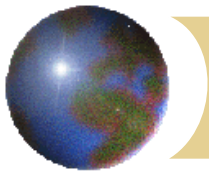


“Spiritual but not religious”

- Support in U.S. culture?
 - But... transcendentalism was essentially an offshoot of 19th c. Romanticism.
 - It rejected reason in favor of **individual experience and intuition** (similar to Pentecostalism), while...
 - Muir emphasized **ecological science**, a necessity today
 - and accepted technology (he started life as an inventor)
 - ...while valuing experience of nature.

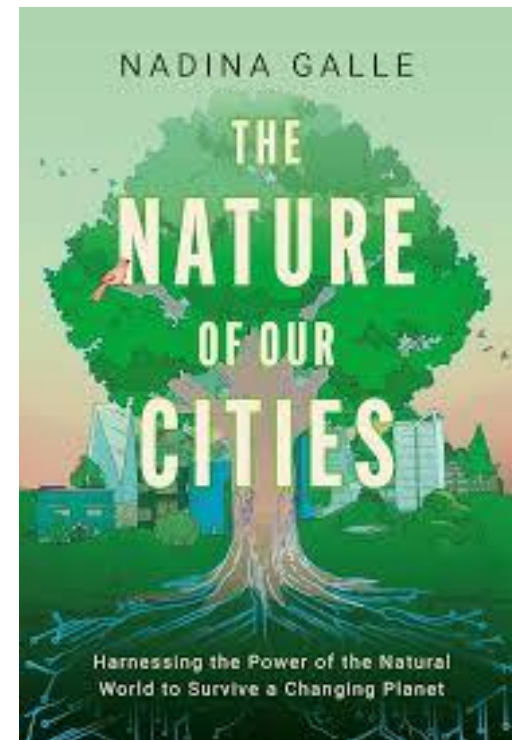


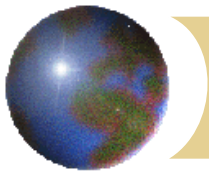
John Muir was an avid collector of plant specimens



“Spiritual but not religious”

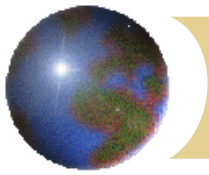
- Support in U.S. culture? Yes, in some ways...
 - Based on updated transcendentalism as an alternative to evangelical religion
 - Individualism and self-reliance
 - (Ecological) science and technology
 - Individual experience
 - Movement toward bringing nature into our cities with help of technology





“Spiritual but not religious”

- But can this perspective carry the full weight of religion/culture?...
 - How does it help us live together?
 - It rejects social norms and rationality-based ethics.
 - Similar to “moral sense” theories of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Adam Smith



“Spiritual but not religious”

- But can this perspective carry the full weight of religion/culture?...
 - How does it help us live together?
 - It rejects social norms and rationality-based ethics.
 - Similar to “moral sense” theories of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Adam Smith
 - How does it help ordinary people deal with hardship, suffering, and death?
 - Maybe combine with Buddhist-style self-help?
 - We already see interest in **Stoicism**.

Emperor of Rome, 161-180 ce

