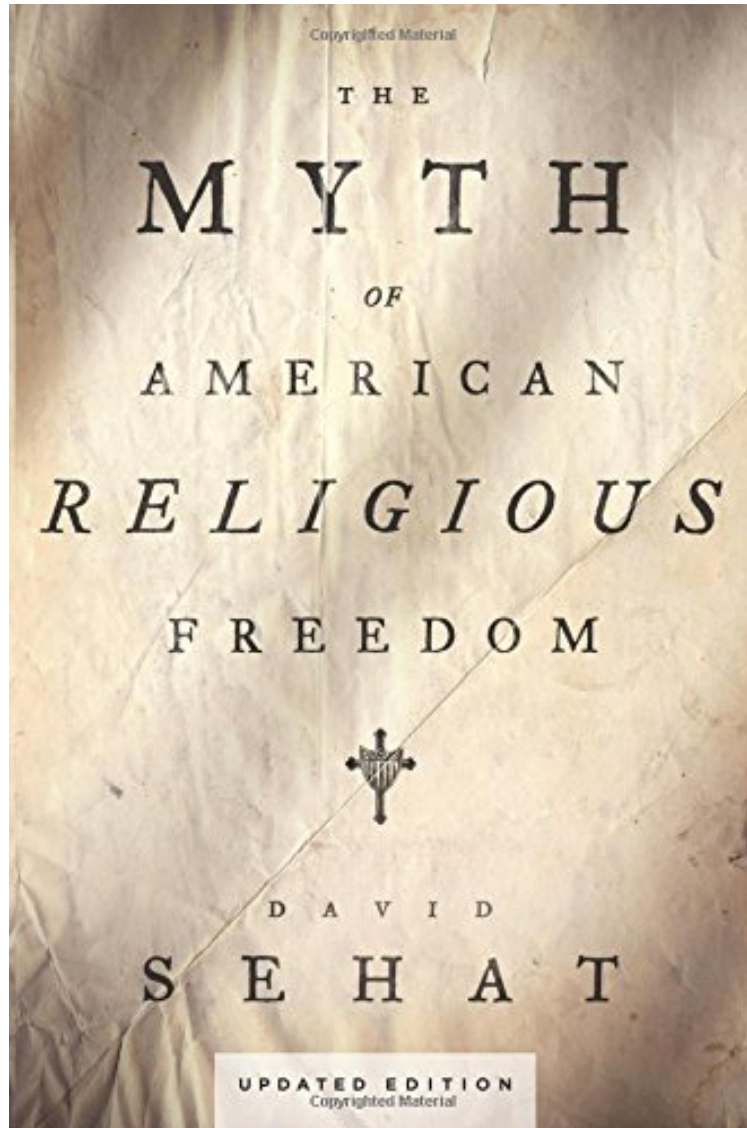


(Download free pdf) The Myth of American Religious Freedom, Updated Edition

# The Myth of American Religious Freedom, Updated Edition

*David Sehat*

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#1247534 in Books David Sehat 2015-11-01 2015-11-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 6.10 x 1.00 x 9.10l, .0 #File Name: 0190247215382 pages The Myth of American Religious Freedom Updated Edition | File size: 38.Mb

**David Sehat : The Myth of American Religious Freedom, Updated Edition** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of American Religious Freedom, Updated Edition:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The demythologizing of American history. By Francis J. Casper Reading Dr. Sehat's book one can hear echoes of Howard Zinn's "A Peoples History". Where Dr. Zinn tries to tell the history of the United States from, as he puts it, the perspective of its victims, Dr. Sehat tries to tell it from the

perspective of its dissenters. In both cases the result is not the history that most of us grew up with, the history that the government of most any nation tends to tell of itself, as Zinn has it, like that of a family, "a giant web of nationhood pretending to a common interest", a history that obscures, ignores, or even denies fierce disagreements and conflicts of interest. The reason both authors take this approach is not to condemn the government, or romanticize the virtues of the victims, in Zinn's case, or the dissenters in Sehat's, but to advance the dialogue on who we want to be as a people and why, based on a broader and more accurate grasp of who we have actually been, and why. In Dr. Sehat's case, the polarization of views on the nature and role of religion in American politics over that last 50 or so years is, for the most part, because the debate on both sides has suffered from the perpetuation of three distinct but related myths. The first is the liberal myth of church-state separation. The First Amendment, he says, was itself a bitter compromise that did not create the separation advocated by Madison and Jefferson. The second myth follows from the first, that religious believers fled the persecution in Europe in order to establish religious tolerance in the United States. Quite the contrary had been the case. If anything, the early settlers came here to establish their own theocracy, and much of the book thoroughly documents the development of what the author calls the moral establishment, meaning the close, cooperative, and coordinated relationship between Protestant Christianity and the State toward the regulation and control of public and private behavior. This was not done by persuasive means, but by force of law, beginning, notably, with the legal prohibition of blasphemy. It was argued then that blasphemy undercut religion, and religion, in the view of virtually all the Founders, was critical for the support of morality. Though the First Amendment prohibited the establishment of an official religion of the State, the moral aspects of the gospel were regarded as so important to the preservation of the State that legal enforcement of the moral code of Protestant Christianity became commonplace throughout much of U.S. history. This leads to the demolition of the third myth enjoyed largely by religious conservatives, that American religious liberty is and always has been the cornerstone of American liberty. On the contrary. In many ways, the United States was a de facto Christian nation because Protestant Christians had significant control over law and governance and used it to enforce their morality. This reality also undermines a related and more implied myth of conservatives, that the United States was for the most part religiously homogeneous. If that were true, as Dr. Sehat points out, the force of law would not have been necessary. But the other critical point that Dr. Sehat makes concerns the kind of morality that this moral establishment enforced. The churches overwhelmingly supported slavery and the development of Jim Crow that followed it. They systematically engaged the legal system to deny religious freedom to all but Protestant Christians. They overwhelmingly opposed womens suffrage, and they overwhelmingly aligned themselves with and theologically rationalized the worst abuses of corporate capitalism during the mid 19th and early 20th Centuries. And though Dr. Sehat does not mention this, he might have added that they supported and engaged in the massacre and displacement of Native Americans. Both sides of this enduring struggle over the meaning and role of religion and the First Amendment tend to at least downplay, if not to ignore or outright deny this history of religious coercion in American politics. Dr. Sehat insists that the reality of this history must be faced if we are to move forward toward the promise of religious freedom for all Americans. Dr. Sehat expresses that promise as the capacity to adjudicate between the diverse constituencies and competing ethical claims of our religiously plural culture, and find a moral framework that is acceptable in law. What I take that to mean is that the measure of our commitment to religious freedom consists in the extent to which we protect the rights of minorities, including those who claim no religious convictions or affiliations, and that the role of religion should be, for the most part, persuasive, and not coercive. This is how I understand Dr. Sehat's reference to Michael Walzer's moral minimalism over the moral maximalism of our history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent! By Peter A. Butzin Provides a sweeping history of how Protestantism in America (primarily) shaped the Law, particularly in state legislatures and the U.S. Supreme Court. My own studies in American Religion and social history brought me to the same conclusion as the book's hypothesis, but David Sehat's book has provided the evidence that confirm my own suspicions. Particularly the latter chapters also provide a compelling overview of jurisprudence on the subject in the 20th Century. It also lays the groundwork for better understanding the battle between Evangelical conservatives and liberals who have embraced individual rights over religious-based moralism. It provides a thoughtful case that both sides have had it wrong by embracing different versions of history related to "the myth of American religious freedom.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Only reading this for a class but it was interesting. By Frederick David Sehat is an academic badass. It is an interesting read and his take on American religious "freedom" is pretty interesting.

In the battles over religion and politics in America, both liberals and conservatives often appeal to history. But in *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*, historian David Sehat provides an eye-opening history of religion in public life that overturns our most cherished myths. Originally, he shows, the First Amendment applied only to the federal government, which had limited authority. On the state level, a Protestant moral establishment ruled over Catholics, Jews, Mormons, agnostics, and others. Not until 1940 did the Supreme Court extend the First Amendment to the states. As the Court began to dismantle the connections between religion and government, religious conservatives mobilized to maintain their power and began the culture wars of the last fifty years. To trace the rise and fall of this

Protestant establishment, Sehat focuses on a series of dissenters-abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, progressive pundit Walter Lippmann, and many others. Shattering myths held by both the left and the right, this book forces us to rethink some of our most deeply held political beliefs.

From Publishers Weekly In this new and compelling examination of American religious history, Sehat argues that this country did not extend freedom of religion to all, but until recently was controlled by a Protestant Christian establishment that sought to impose its will in coercive and often exclusionary ways. An assistant professor of history at Georgia State University, Sehat shows how state and federal courts sided with the Protestant moral establishment in battles with Roman Catholics over public schools, with Mormons over polygamy, and with freethinkers over the right to be irreligious. This argument might surprise 21st-century Americans convinced their country has always been a beacon of religious liberty, but it is precisely this flaw in the national religious image that Sehat attempts to illuminate, if not always concisely. His argument is timely in light of the controversy over a proposed Islamic center near ground zero in New York City. It is also an important corrective to the ongoing culture wars between the religious right, which claims this country was birthed on a Christian foundation, and secularists, who insist that the First Amendment spells out a separation of church and state. (Jan.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. From the previous edition: "The Myth of American Religious Freedom is a clear, well-argued, carefully researched book that serves as a model of the ways in which excellent and thorough scholarship can also be relevant to contemporary American life.... Wonderful, important, and refreshingly iconoclastic." --Church History "Sehat has written a wonderful intellectual history of the United States addressing a topic of perpetual concern to Americans since the founding." --American Historical "This is a compelling history and is engagingly told... This excellent book advances an interesting twist on the traditional legal interpretations of the free exercise clause and makes a compelling case for a careful reexamination of our assumptions regarding its history.... More than any other book I have read over the last six months, I find myself continuously referencing this analysis." --Law and Politics Book "This is a smart and sophisticated book. It should be widely, and carefully, read." --Journal of Church and State "Sobering and persuasive." --The Christian Century "David Sehat boldly slices through all of American history." --The Journal of American History "[Sehat] makes his case convincingly...A knowledge of Sehat's argument would elevate the substance of contemporary political debates about the separation of church and state, about religious tests for political office, and about finding common moral ground." --Southern Humanities "A short review cannot do justice to David Sehat's complex book...a detailed history of federal and state policies affecting religion...persuasive." --The Journal of Southern History "Sehat provides food for thought...he unmask[s] and attacks the moral establishments across American history." --Kirkus "New and compelling... timely... an important corrective to the ongoing culture wars between the religious right, which claims this country was birthed on a Christian foundation, and secularists, who insist that the First Amendment spells out a separation of church and state." --Publishers Weekly "The Myth of American Religious Freedom is a clear, well-argued, carefully researched book that serves as a model of the ways in which excellent and thorough scholarship can also be relevant to contemporary American life... a wonderful, important, and refreshingly iconoclastic book..." --Matthew Avery Sutton, Washington State University "This vigorously argued, carefully documented book traces the coercive function of religiously derived moral norms throughout the history of American law and politics. Sehat gives little comfort to today's advocates of a greater role for religion in public life, but he also calls into question the historical foundation of most defenses of a sharp church-state separation. This smart, provocative book invites a wide and attentive readership." --David A. Hollinger, President, Organization of American Historians, 2010-2011 "David Sehat is a myth-demolishing historian in the mold of C. Vann Woodward and Edmund Morgan. Just as they destroyed myths about liberty, slavery, and segregation, Sehat now devastates the idea that the United States was born, reared, and raised in religious freedom. He shows that, instead, control and power have long dominated American religious history. This is a rich and sad saga that delves brilliantly into law, politics, and reform. Deeply researched and passionately argued, The Myth of American Religious Freedom transforms how we think about religion and the United States." --Edward J. Blum, author of *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* About the Author David Sehat is Associate Professor of History at Georgia State University. He is also the author of *The Jefferson Rule: How the Founding Fathers Became Infallible and Our Politics Inflexible*.