INTRODUCTION

"When the slanting rays of the sun play their last game of light and shade over the irregular pile of adobe rooms of the pueblo, Indian men, one hundred or more, come in long lines from their estufas. One group crosses the old bridge of squared logs down near the high yellow cottonwoods, hinting at the Midas wealth of Glorieta cañon just beyond. On they come to the beat of the drum and form in double lines in front of the church door. In their hands the dancers hold branches of green and yellow signifying the full season of growth as well as their thanks to the deity who made possible the harvest—the Sun, their visible God." Taos Pueblo, the northernmost of nineteen Pueblo Indian communities in New Mexico, celebrates its annual feast day every September in honor of patron San Geronimo. Artist and writer Blanche Grant, who wrote this admiring description of San Geronimo's Day in her 1925 book *Taos Today*, offered little hint of the intense controversy that had recently surrounded the Pueblo Indian dances. Instead she celebrated the ceremony as a powerful demonstration of human unity in religion. "The stranger who watches this age-old prayer without words," she wrote, "must be callous indeed if he does not join in thanksgiving, no matter what his conception of God may be. Hard lines of belief are swept away in a consciousness of a great unity, after all, in what one terms—religion." For Grant, Pueblo ceremonialism was not only legitimately religious but epitomized the "primitive" essence of religion.[1]

Like many of the artists and writers who had settled in Santa Fe and Taos after the turn of the century, Grant considered the Pueblo dances a picturesque blend of "primitive" religion and Catholic ritualism. This combination was evident in her description of the Catholic mass and procession held in celebration of San Geronimo's Day. "To the tolling of a bell a procession moves from the church to a high leafy outdoor shrine," she wrote, "where is placed an image of San Geronimo, the patron saint of the day with its white canopy folded near. . . . In a flash, one is back in the days of the Spaniard with his sword and the friar with his beads." Next came the annual relay race pitting the fastest runners from Taos's north and south sides—a ceremonial

as well as physical division—in competition to honor the saint. "Below in front of the ladder which leads to the shrine, drums sound again and aspen branches rustle gently while runners form a semi-circle quite in the manner of those days of the friars," she wrote. "Yucca is tied to the ankles and feathers stick in the hair—feathers for speed. . . . Back and forth go the relay racers until finally the north or the south pueblo has won. Then in two long lines the Indians face each other and slowly step their way to the beat of the drums toward the eastern gateway in the old crumbling wall where the lines separate and the men make for their respective kivas." She offered equally romantic views of many other important ceremonies observed throughout the year at Taos Pueblo, including the Christmas Eve procession and Matachines dance, the deer and buffalo dances held on New Year's Day and King's Day (the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6), and the series of summertime corn dances.[2]

In contrast, Grant's description of the pueblo's summer ceremony at Blue Lake, high above Taos in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, left a strikingly negative impression. This important ceremony was and continues to be closed to all but tribal members. In the early twentieth century, many neighboring whites assumed that such a secretive event must conceal something shocking, and they had long circulated rumors that it featured such outrages as "sex orgies," "cannibalism," and "the giving up of maids to sensual sacrifices." Even the photographer Edward Curtis, then a well-respected authority on all things Indian, suggested that the Taos Indians practiced human sacrifice at Blue Lake.[3] Grant's own allegations expressed primary concern for the rights of Indian women and girls, an issue that helped mobilize sentiment against Indian dances among many female reformers in the period. Claiming that "girls and childless women" were "forced to go to the mountain" for unspecified atrocities "imposed upon them by the older men," she concluded that this was "the one ceremony to which the so-called reformers have a right to object." Unlike many of those who believed Indian ceremonies immoral, Grant argued that even in this case "the white man" should not presume to interfere with Indian practices. Still, she was confident that the boys and girls of Taos's younger generation, who had more exposure than their predecessors to "the white man's world," would soon "demand justice" and "abolish the custom." These reservations echoed many reformers' concerns about the "secret" dances of the Pueblo Indians in general.[4]

Such allegations were completely unfounded. There is no evidence of

sexual or coercive features in the Blue Lake ceremony, and anthropologist John Bodine has refuted Grant's charges by pointing out among other things that "sexual continence is the unstated rule" during all important Pueblo religious events. For Taos Indians, the secrecy surrounding Blue Lake did not imply anything sinister but was necessary to protect the integrity of the ceremony performed there. Like many Native Americans, Pueblo people traditionally consider certain ceremonial knowledge too sacred and powerful to be shared beyond the specialized religious societies that rightfully possess it. For this reason Taos has never permitted outsiders to attend the Blue Lake ceremony, and only initiated tribal members know the full details of this event.[5] However, the people of Taos have never been reticent to discuss the general significance of the lake or of the ceremony performed there. Blue Lake is the source of the stream that runs through and sustains the life of the pueblo, and in Taos tradition the Mothers and Fathers—the *kachinas* (ancestral spirits) who bring rain and other blessings—are said to live under this lake in a subaqueous *kiva* (ceremonial chamber). "All life comes from the mountain," as an elderly Taos man told one visitor in 1924. The rites at Blue Lake conclude the process of initiating novices into Taos's various kiva societies, an intensive training that, depending on the society, takes six, twelve, or eighteen months. The ceremony is therefore essential for the transmission of tribal tradition to each successive generation. The suspicions against such ceremonies had more to do with reformers' own cultural preoccupations than with the Pueblo ceremonies themselves. In this case, rumors about what went on at Blue Lake may have helped to justify President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to strip the lake and its environs from Taos and add it to the National Forest Reserve—an action that the tribe continued to fight until Congress finally returned the area to them in 1970.[6]

By the time Grant wrote *Taos Today*, the merits and the future of the Taos and other Pueblo Indian ceremonies had become the focus of intense controversy. In the immediate sense, the Pueblo dance controversy of the mid-1920s is a story about reformers and government officials, most of whom had the best of intentions, who battled over federal Indian policy with often tragic results. And it is the story of the Pueblo Indians' struggle for tribal sovereignty, land rights, and the freedom to practice indigenous ceremonies —a struggle against deliberate exploitation, against the indifference of a

nation preoccupied with economic expansion, and most directly against government agencies and reformers convinced that Indians must abandon tribal and "pagan" traditions in order to succeed in the modern world.

This book takes a close look at the public controversy over the Pueblo Indian dances in order to illuminate a much larger story about the dilemmas Native Americans face in their quest for religious freedom. The controversy allows us to see how concepts of "religion" and "religious freedom" are defined and understood in American culture and the implications of these concepts for federal Indian policy and for Native American life.

The boundaries of what counts as "religion" are always contested and always changing. In the United States, that designation is generally desirable because it affords constitutional protection. In the dance controversy, Pueblo tribal leaders and allied reformers fought government restrictions on Indian ceremonies by insisting, against the preconceived notions of their opponents, that the Pueblo dances were authentically religious and must therefore be granted religious freedom. Despite mainstream America's tendency to associate dancing with sexuality and with secular entertainment, they made the case for the religious legitimacy of Indian ceremonies by identifying them with Christian practices of prayer and worship. The artists, writers, and anthropologists who supported the Pueblo Indians employed often patronizing concepts of "primitive religion" that sometimes contributed to the barriers facing the Indians' quest for tribal sovereignty. In the long run, though, their mutual success at identifying the ceremonies as "religion" helped end Christianity's monopoly on American conceptions of legitimate religion. If Indians already had their own religion, the government could not easily justify direct efforts to suppress its ceremonies.

The dance controversy, and the new views of religion it introduced, facilitated a major transition in the history of federal Indian policy. A virtual Christian establishment, composed of missionaries and reformers who considered Christian missions and the elimination of "paganism" integral to the goal of "civilizing" and "assimilating" the Indians, had long dominated decision making in Indian affairs. After the controversy, aided by their expanded definitions of "religion," cultural modernists would unseat the Christian establishment as the dominant voices in this arena—part of a much broader "secular revolution" waged by American intellectuals who sought to replace religious with secular authority in the major institutions of American public life.[7] The balance of power changed most definitively in 1933, when Presi-

dent Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed John Collier to shape his administration's "New Deal for the Indians." Collier had begun working to reform federal Indian policy in the 1920s, when he joined in the fight for Pueblo land rights and religious freedom. One of his first acts as commissioner of Indian affairs was to retract policies restricting Indian religious life, which he replaced with new directives giving indigenous religious leaders equal standing with Protestant and Catholic missionaries on the reservations and in Indian schools. Although his policies did not give Indians equal decision-making powers and were not always successful even on their own terms, they were at least an attempt to support the continuing practice of Native American religious and cultural traditions.[8]

At another level, this book examines the practical consequences within indigenous communities of adopting and adapting the concept of "religion." Understood as a set of beliefs, practices, and institutions that can be separated from other spheres of life and compared with other distinct religions around the world, "religion" is a product of European cultural and colonial history that has no direct translation in Native American languages or other non-European tongues around the world.[9] Pueblo Indians began to use the Spanish word *religión* to refer to the Catholicism that most of them adopted under Spanish rule in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, speaking of their indigenous ceremonial traditions simply as *costumbres* (customs). This terminology did not change after Mexican independence in 1821, when the Territory of New Mexico became part of the United States at the close of the Mexican-American War in 1848, or when U.S. government officials and Protestant missionaries began their work among the Pueblos in the late nineteenth century. The same was true throughout Latin America, where indigenous people today continue to use *costumbre* for indigenous traditions and to reserve *religión* for Christianity. As with the early twentieth-century Pueblos, contemporary conflicts over "religion" in Latin America are therefore framed as disputes between Catholics and Protestants (whose numbers are growing rapidly in much of the region), even when indigenous practices are the primary issue.[10]

This book demonstrates that many Pueblo leaders began to regularly apply "religion" to their indigenous ceremonies as a result of the dance controversy—a redefinition that proved advantageous in the fight against government suppression but hard to reconcile with older cultural norms. Pueblo Indians had long understood their tribal ceremonies as a kind of

community work, in the same category as maintaining the irrigation ditches and cleaning the public spaces—all of which provide mutual benefits and must therefore be shared in one way or another by all members of the tribe. This understanding of ceremonial participation clashed with Euro-American ideas of "religion" as a distinct sphere of life and with the Enlightenment ideal of a free individual conscience that had shaped the U.S. Constitution's provisions on religion. For this reason, Pueblo leaders who defended the ceremonies on religious freedom grounds opened the door for self-identified "progressives" among their people, some of whom had come to see these practices as inconsistent with tribal "progress" and with Christianity, to protest the tribe's expectation that they participate as a violation of their own individual religious liberties. The dance controversy ended with a compromise that promised religious freedom for both tribes and individuals: as long as Pueblo leaders agreed that they would not force anyone to dance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) promised not to interfere with their ceremonies. This resolution certainly did not destroy the traditional norms of ceremonial participation, which remain operative in Pueblo life today. At least in public debate, though, the redefinition of the ceremonies as "religion" subtly undermined the communal and holistic ideals of that tradition. My point is not to argue that this was a wholly positive or negative development—surely it had its pros and cons—but simply to point out that it resulted from a discursive and conceptual shift. Language shapes perception, and a tribal requirement that seemed matter-of-fact as long as the ceremonies were understood in terms of community work became a violation of individual conscience when they were redefined as "religion."[11]

Another limitation of the Native American adoption of "religion" is that, while it provided a measure of protection for tribal dances, Indians have rarely been able to use it successfully to defend other aspects of indigenous tradition. As we will see, Pueblo efforts to protect tribal systems of governance as part of their religion clashed with the dominant culture's ideal of a clear separation between the spheres of religion and politics. Even though BIA officials actively endorsed and often worked closely with Christian missionaries, they criticized the Pueblos' traditional integration of "religion" and "government" as a contradiction of constitutional provisions against "religious establishment." Similarly, despite the final success of Taos's quest for Blue Lake, Indian efforts to regain or at least protect sacred lands have most often failed whether they have focused on religious freedom

or on the historical violation of treaty guarantees. It has proved difficult to fit Indian ways of relating to the land within America's predominantly Christian assumptions about what counts as religion. Perhaps more important, collective land claims have often clashed with other (and, it seems, more treasured) mainstream American values such as private property and economic development. Separated and abstracted from other spheres of life, "religion" becomes the picturesque repository of tradition and sentiment, made irrelevant to what appear to be the more real-world concerns of land and government.

The Pueblo dance controversy began in reaction to two directives sent by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Burke to his agents on Indian reservations around the country. "Circular No. 1665: Indian Dancing," written in 1921 in response to missionary complaints about alleged "immoralities" in the dances of the Hopi Indians in Arizona and the Pueblos in New Mexico, instructed BIA agents to use "educational processes" or, if necessary, "punitive measures" to stop dances that they judged to be "degrading." Two years later, following a set of recommendations from Protestant missionaries in South Dakota, the commissioner issued "Supplement to Circular 1665" to advise agents that—while taking local circumstances into account—they should consider measures such as forbidding some ceremonies outright, restricting the rest to once a month during daytime hours, and banning Indians younger than fifty from participating in any dances at all. The ensuing controversy focused on the Pueblos largely because they had become favorite subjects for so many artists and anthropologists, who had only just become active in the politics of Indian affairs. These new reformers, along with Pueblo Indian leaders themselves, attacked Burke's policies as a violation of religious liberty. Arrayed against them were a coalition of Christian reformers and missionary leaders, who dismissed the religious freedom argument as a cloak for immoral "pagan rites" that merited prosecution rather than protection. Although most government officials accepted assimilationist principles, they found themselves caught between competing political pressures and tried to appease both sides. Commissioner Burke backed down from the dance circular and supported the religious freedom compromise not because his personal views had changed but because the Pueblos and their advocates were able to force his hand.[12]

An embattled missionary establishment fighting to maintain its influence in Indian affairs led the push to enforce the dance circular. In the 1880s

predominantly Protestant leaders, determined to "save" the Indians by "civilizing" them, forged a consensus program aimed at gradually assimilating Native Americans into mainstream American culture. Government officials and reformers alike believed Protestant missions vital to that goal, and by the turn of the century the Catholic Church—with a long history and strong missionary presence among many Indian tribes—had the political influence to insist that its missions be given equal standing in that effort. By 1920 this consensus had shattered. Critics on all sides pointed to the evident failures of the assimilationist program: despite missions, boarding schools, reservation day schools, and the various civilizing efforts of the typical BIA agency, the vast majority of Indians had simply refused to abandon their indigenous traditions. On one side, radical assimilationists accused the BIA and the reservation system of actually perpetuating tribal traditions and identities and argued that these must be abolished if the Indians were ever to assimilate. On the other, a growing number of policy makers influenced by scientific racism believed Indians incapable (either permanently or for many generations) of becoming truly civilized and insisted that assimilationist ambitions should be abandoned in favor of less expensive programs that would equip Indians for manual labor as part of America's (racialized) underclass. It was to refute these critics and defend the assimilationist program that Protestant and Catholic missionary leaders diagnosed a resurgence of "paganism" among power-hungry tribal leaders, encouraged by deluded "sentimentalists," who prevented educated young Indians from sticking with "civilized" ways.

Their primary opponents in the dance controversy were neither radical assimilationists nor scientific racists but a new group of reformers who were just emerging as an identifiable voice within the politics of Indian affairs. I identify this group as cultural modernists because so many of them were part of the varied modernist movements in early twentieth-century art, literature, and anthropology.[13] By the turn of the century artists and anthropologists seeking "primitives" untouched by "modern civilization" had discovered the Pueblo Indians, whose adobe towns and colorful ceremonial dances made them seem somehow more authentic than other Indians, apparently less affected by the centuries of Spanish and Anglo-American rule. Their defense of the Pueblo ceremonies as "religion" participated in the tendency among many intellectuals of the time to represent those labeled primitive as intrinsically communal, spiritually authentic, and holistic—in contrast to a

"modern civilization" condemned as individualistic, spiritually sterile, and fragmented. In this way, primitivism provided more or less of a challenge to late Victorian certainties about the steady march of progress and the superiority of Christianity and European culture. In the context of federal Indian policy, the modernist fight against Burke's dance circular inaugurated an anti-assimilationist campaign that became a serious threat to what had already become a fragile missionary establishment.[14]

For Native Americans, modernist celebrations of the primitive were a double-edged sword. Primitivism tends to identify those designated "primitive" as unchanging and ahistorical, and their traditions as essentially incompatible with modern life. Like colonial subjects in the rest of the world, Native Americans were expected to remain perpetual primitives, a sort of living demonstration of human history and a source of inspiration for modern artists. Modernist images of the Pueblos were strikingly similar to Orientalist formulations of the supposedly mysterious and mystical East, which as postcolonial critics have revealed were deeply implicated in the unjust power relations of the colonial order. Too often, modernists minimized the reality of historical change in Indian life and denied the Pueblos' abilities to manage their own accommodations to white America. Their celebration of Pueblo religion certainly helped to defend indigenous ceremonies against government suppression, but to the extent that they identified "religion" as part of humanity's past, such praise also served to marginalize traditional ways of life. In some ways, modernist ways of defining "religion" and the "primitive" contributed to the cultural barriers that would prevent Indians from defending land and sovereignty on religious freedom grounds. At the same time, through their close relationships with Indian people, individual modernist reformers could sometimes transcend the limitations of their primitivism to embrace a more comprehensive support for Indian self-determination.[15]

As we have already seen, Pueblo Indians were themselves divided on questions of tradition and assimilation. Self-identified "progressives," a small minority in most Pueblo communities, were typically well educated and considered themselves the agents of modernization in their communities. Although they supported much of the assimilationist program, few progressives wanted to abandon Indian tribal identities or traditions, and many actively participated in tribal dances. They allied with assimilationist reformers because they hoped to gain leverage against conservative tribal

leaders, and because they found a practical gospel of progress more compelling than the modernists' romanticized celebration of Indian culture. Arrayed against the progressives were Pueblo leaders who fought Burke's dance policies and identified themselves as the defenders of Pueblo tradition. Their "traditionalist" or "conservative" position should not be understood as a statement of unchanging tradition—surely a contradiction in terms—but as a newly articulated defense of indigenous ways of life in response to new circumstances. Assimilationist programs, economic pressures that forced tribal members away from home to find employment, and increasing contact with Anglo and Hispano neighbors added up to unprecedented threats against Pueblo life. Far from rejecting all aspects of Euro-American culture, Pueblo traditionalists cautiously affirmed the advantages of such things as U.S. government–supported education and health care for the future of their tribes. Their appeal to American standards of religious freedom represented another kind of adaptation, one step in an ongoing process of cultural change over centuries of encounter under Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. rule.

There are real dangers in overemphasizing changes in Native tradition. Although all living cultures change to meet contemporary needs, academic concepts of "invented tradition" can leave the impression that the culture under analysis is somehow inauthentic. Such work can appear to discount the validity of indigenous traditions and thereby render tribal rights vulnerable to attack. For example, opponents of indigenous land rights in Australia and the United States have used scholarship on invented traditions to argue that the group in question has no legitimate claim to tribal identity and thus no right to the land.[16] Rather than isolating certain traditions as "invented," we need to stress that all traditions are adapted and adaptable. This idea of always-adapting traditions fits very well with historian Peter Nabokov's suggestion, part of a larger scholarly move to privilege indigenous epistemologies, that American Indian ways of doing history assume the need for contemporary relevance and include multiple points of view.[17] In the Pueblo case, any shifts that resulted from the traditionalist deployment of the category of religion are best understood as a necessary adaptation to contemporary conditions, an adaptation that helped enable the ongoing development of Pueblo ways of life. Attempts to deny such changes would not only fly against observable historical realities but also reinforce primitivist images of Indians as permanently separate from modernity and historical change.[18]

This book joins recent debates in religious studies and related fields about

the history of "religion" as a cultural concept, the political implications of this concept, and its usefulness for scholars as an analytical tool. In recent years, some critics have questioned the academic use of the term "religion" by arguing that the bias of its European origins is so strong as to make it unusable as a cross-cultural category of comparison. Early Christians in the Roman Empire adopted the Latin term *religio*, originally meaning the faithful practice of one's ancestral rites, and redefined it to signify the worship of "one true God." In so doing, they added the monotheistic implication of universal truth and, by defining other groups as superstitious "pagans," succeeded in gaining authority in Roman society. Over the centuries, as Christian leaders struggled to define the boundaries of the faith, they increasingly conceived of religion primarily in terms of personal faith or belief. That tendency only accelerated with the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment, which emphasized rational thought along with the freedom of the individual. Emerging out of Europe's religious wars, this discourse reflected the intense anti-Catholicism of both Protestant and antireligious revolutionaries. Influential philosophers and historians of religion idealized Protestant doctrine as pure and rational religion, excoriating what they saw as Catholicism's corrupt and meaningless ritualism as a remnant of "paganism." As I have already noted, the U.S. Constitution's provisions on religion reflected the Enlightenment framework of the founding fathers, who instilled in that document their view of religion as a matter of individual conscience and belief.[19]

Not surprisingly, European assumptions about "religion" have been an uneasy fit with many of the traditions regularly described as such. In fact, it was only quite recently that many of the so-called world religions came to be identified in terms of religion at all. To take just one example, nineteenth-century European scholars and British colonialists seeking to understand and control the people of the Indian subcontinent identified "Hinduism" as the single religion of all Indians who were not Christians, Muslims, or Buddhists. Yet these Hindus, a term that originally referred simply to all who lived in the Indus River Valley, practiced a set of diverse and intersecting religious traditions. The academic study of this newly discovered religion of Hinduism focused heavily on philosophical doctrines and sacred texts such as the *Rig Vedas*, despite the fact that many Hindus were barely familiar with these texts. By all accounts, most people in the subcontinent defined themselves in terms of caste and local identities and did not think of themselves

as members of any defined religion, let alone one called Hinduism and shared by all Indians. Even today, despite significant movements toward a unified Hinduism by Indians themselves, the variety of religious expression in India and its diaspora belies the concept of a single, clearly defined religion. It would be a revealing exercise to compare this development of Hinduism with the history of ideas about Native American religions, where for a variety of reasons the emphasis has been on ritual practice and the diversity of tribal traditions. These no doubt represent Native American traditions more accurately than would any construct of a single belief-based religion. Yet it seems to me that Hinduism's status as a world religion in university textbooks and courses, and the exclusion of Native American and other so-called primitive or tribal religions from that category, rest in part on the historical construction of the former as doctrinally unified and the latter as tribally diverse.[20]

Another frequent objection to the category of "religion" is that it provided ideological support for the centuries of European colonialism. As increasing exploration and trade around the world brought a new awareness of the vast differences among the world's peoples, European thinkers increasingly used "religion" as an analytical concept that made it possible to compare and evaluate the systems of belief and practice that they observed in every human society. Not surprisingly, the comparative assumptions implicit in their theories of religion seem inevitably to have supported the conclusion that Christianity—either Protestant or Catholic depending on the writer—was superior to all other traditions. Ever since Christopher Columbus famously asserted in 1492 that the Arawak Indians "do not hold any creed nor are they idolaters," Europeans typically considered indigenous traditions either inferior religion, false religion, or no religion at all. All of these positions reflected implicitly Christian assumptions about what counted as "religion" and served to justify the conquest and exploitation of so-called pagan or heathen peoples in the Americas and around the world.[21]

Other scholars argue that the concept of "religion," even if it can be defined broadly enough to shed its Christian assumptions and its colonialist past, is intrinsically biased toward the institutions and presuppositions of Western modernity. The common definition of religion as that part of every society having to do with "symbolic meanings" has been criticized as one that makes religion a wholly private affair and so serves the interests of the modern (Western) secular state by divorcing anything considered religious

from political power.[22] At an even more basic level, identifying certain aspects of a culture as "religion" seems to conceptually isolate the newly defined religion from politics, economics, and other spheres of life. If religion is understood to be "either the special repository of traditional values or alternatively a private realm of individual, nonpolitical, otherworldly commitment," as Timothy Fitzgerald puts it, then non-Western ways of life are marginalized and modern secular institutions (themselves the historical constructs of Western culture) appear to be the only rational possibility. The Pueblos' experience is a case in point, because their adoption of the category of religion certainly brought with it pressure to privatize and depoliticize their ceremonial traditions. Faced with such complications, a few critics have concluded that the term is so analytically imprecise and carries such ideological baggage that it should be abandoned as a category of scholarly analysis.[23]

However, "religion" is also a first-order term given meaning by religious practitioners and by their observers and critics in the wider culture, and I believe that efforts to abandon it in scholarly discourse would further diminish the academy's relevance to that larger culture. The redefinition of religion is an ongoing process, taking place in multiple arenas including the courts, legal codes, popular literature and entertainment, the news media, world's fairs, museums, and political disputes such as the Pueblo dance controversy. These are the sites of intersecting discourses, continually recreating contemporary ideas about what counts as good or bad religion, and what counts as religion at all. Rather than drawing its own boundaries around what counts as religion, this book focuses on its evolution and implications as understood and used by the people I study—joining a growing body of literature offering insights into the history of religion as a cultural concept.[24]

Still, I am convinced that "religion" also remains valid as a second-order analytical concept, useful for constructing comparisons across times and places. Many other categories—consider words like "culture," "art," "tradition," and "politics"—have similar convoluted and problematic histories, and eliminating any or all of them would diminish our analytical toolbox without solving the problems of bias or imprecision in language.[25] Hoping to overcome the historical bias of the term religion, religious studies scholars have recently redefined it using concepts such as intersection, connection, and boundary crossing. Like many that precede them, these definitions tend

to create a relatively broad field for what counts as religion, and some will not like them for that reason. I am convinced that such definitional disputes, although frustrating at times, ultimately improve our critical and comparative insights and so are beneficial for the field. Most important, the recognition that religion is both a first- and second-order category, and that its cultural referents are constantly changing, gives scholars the humility to acknowledge that any such definition must be contingent, constructed for the purpose of analysis, and cannot pretend to discover any unchanging essence of a cross-culturally identifiable thing called religion.[26]

It is also crucial to recognize here that Europeans and Euro-Americans do not have a monopoly on defining religion, and that the political implications of such redefinitions are neither predetermined nor limited to Western dominance. Pueblo Indians did not simply adopt religion as a static concept; rather, they actively redefined it and made use of it for their own ends. Their identification of their ceremonial traditions in terms of religion had complex consequences but nevertheless proved successful in defending them against immediate suppression. It was therefore not simply an imposition of Western models but a step in the ongoing development of traditional ways of life. Much the same is true around the world. When British scholars first identified "Hinduism" as a religion, they did so in dialogue with Indian elites who had their own reasons for encouraging this development. The nascent nationalist movement immediately embraced the development of a unified religious identity as a way to further its own goal of uniting India against colonial control, and today—sometimes at the expense of Muslims and other religious minorities—Hinduism remains a rallying point for Indian nationalism and has helped preserve ethnic and cultural identities for diasporic communities around the world. In very different ways, Turkey, Iran, and Japan have all supported nation-building efforts by intentionally redefining religion and its role in public life.[27] Conservative evangelical Protestants in the United States, along with radical Islamicists in parts of Asia and the Middle East, are reacting against the modern separation of religion from public life in order to advocate a far more expansive view of religion as the all-encompassing allegiance. That some of these revolts against "modern" concepts of religion are associated with terrorist violence only underscores the importance of understanding the cultural processes that reinvent the category of religion. In short, scholars do not have the power to eliminate the concept of religion from general usage or to control the mean-

ings associated with it. These complex political realities make research on its cultural and intellectual history doubly important.[28]

My attention to shifting and conflicting concepts of religion also contributes to current debates about secularization and the nature of the secular. As I use it, the concept of "secularization" refers not to a decline in religious belief or practice or commitment but to an increasing privatization of religion—the implicit goal of Enlightenment theorists who defined religion as a matter of individual conscience—and to the resulting decline in its public or institutional authority. Historians and sociologists in recent years have overthrown their predecessors' assumption that religion would inevitably disappear or even become less influential as a consequence of modernity, but most continue to find the concept of secularization useful when defined in more limited and historically contingent ways. In many respects, the theory of secularization was an attempt at a self-fulfilling prophecy by nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectuals, making their efforts to diminish religion's influence seem natural and inevitable.[29] The cultural modernists of the dance controversy should be understood as part of this secularizing cadre of intellectuals, working intentionally and directly to replace religious with scientific and secular authority in American life. Redefining religion—in this case, expanding the concept of religion to include Indian dances—was one of the ways in which these intellectuals challenged the dominance of Christianity in American public life.

The new and apparently more "secular" principles governing Indian affairs were by no means value-neutral. A growing body of scholarship demonstrates the cultural particularity of supposedly universal "secularism." Talal Asad has shown that the secular is necessarily defined in opposition to the religious and that both spheres will therefore be configured quite differently in different times and places. In the United States, the "secular" carries with it strikingly Protestant assumptions and norms.[30] The Pueblo experience in the dance controversy suggested the ways in which the new "secular" Indian policy would be governed by Enlightenment ideals of the separation of church and state and the primacy of individual conscience—ideals that emerged out of distinctively Protestant theological debates. Although they have proved inspiring to nationalist and liberation movements around the world, these "secular" ideas about religion continue to reflect their Protestant origins and so have their limits for anyone seeking to articulate alternative visions of religion. Because they do not value communal and land-based

traditions, for example, such concepts of religion have added to the ongoing barriers facing Native Americans who appeal on religious freedom grounds for the repatriation of lands, artifacts, and remains defined as sacred.[31]

This book is organized for the most part in chronological order. Chapter 1 introduces Pueblo Indian history and ceremonial traditions in the context of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. rule, examines the development of a Protestant establishment in Indian affairs, and shows how the Catholic challenge to that establishment reinforced the exclusion of indigenous ceremonial traditions from American concepts of religion. The second chapter adds cultural modernists to the scene, highlighting their attitudes toward "religion" and "primitive religion" and locating them among the secularizing intellectuals of their day; the third chapter then brings the modernists into dialogue with Pueblo Indians struggling to defend land rights and tribal sovereignty and shows how these issues shaped the politics of Indian affairs in the period. Chapter 4 describes the development of the public controversy over Indian dances, placing it in the context of larger cultural disputes over the meanings of morality and religion. The fifth chapter describes the religious freedom compromise that ended the controversy and its consequences for Pueblo ceremonial life. Finally, chapter 6 reflects on the implications of the category of "religion" for the larger history of Native American religious freedom struggles into the twenty-first century.