

Sport and Religion in America: From the Pilgrims to Swaggert

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The historical link between sport and religion in America is as old as the settling of the continent by the Spanish, French, English and other nationalities. Sport, like all social institutions, must conform itself to the religious tenets that govern and direct a culture and society.

The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of a complex web of relations that have existed in the past five hundred years between these two powerful social institutions; their interaction, conflict, and reliance upon each other. Furthermore, it will explore, though briefly, the diversity of religious attitudes which divided American society. In this context, the attitude toward the body, gender, and leisure will also be touched upon.

The topic is timely. Like all social institutions sport and religion are constantly evolving, changing, and not only being transformed by society, but also transforming society itself. A historical study of this perpetual interaction between sport and religion, and society as a whole is a fascinating prospect. It might present us with some distinguishable trends which govern societal institutions in general and how sport function within society in particular.