

Religious Literacy Quiz

Religious diversity is woven throughout the fabric of American history. Our nation was pluralistic from the beginning, with a variety of religious communities present at the nation's founding and beyond. Test your knowledge to see how well you know American religious history!

- 1) Which of the following traditions embraces "Ahimsa", or non-violence, as an ethical principle?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Hinduism
 - c. Jainism
 - d. All of the above
 - i. Answer: d., All of the above
 - ii. Explanation: All three traditions embrace "Ahimsa", a Sanskrit word meaning non-violence, as a precept. Adherents seek to avoid doing any harm to human life through word, thought, or deed.

- 2) Which of the following religious traditions believes in a Heavenly Mother?
 - a. Hindus
 - b. Anabaptists
 - c. Latter-day Saints
 - d. Jains
 - i. Answer: c, Latter-day Saints
 - ii. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly referred to as Mormons) believes in a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father. Prophet Joseph Smith taught about Heavenly Parents who create, love, and eternally care for human souls. In a time when Christian theology generally regarded God as male, Smith's revelation of a Heavenly Mother challenged gender norms within Christianity.

- 3) The California Supreme Court upheld the right of immigrants to practice which of the following faiths in 1859?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Animism

- c. Catholicism
 - d. Shintoism
 - i. Answer: a, Buddhism
 - ii. Chinese immigrants brought their Buddhist faith to America during the California Gold Rush. By 1853, the first Buddhist temple had been established in San Francisco. Amid discrimination, exclusion, and anti-immigrant sentiments, the California Supreme Court nevertheless upheld the immigrants' right to practice their Buddhist faith in *Eldridge v. See Yup Company*.
- 4) Which religious practice was created by Indigenous peoples in America in response to colonial expansion and demands for assimilation?
- a. Round Dance
 - b. Pow wows
 - c. Stomp Dance
 - d. Ghost Dance
 - i. Answer: d, Ghost Dance
 - ii. The Ghost Dance was a ceremony that indigenous peoples performed to reunite the spirits of the living with the dead. Some indigenous leaders believed that dance would call spirits of the dead to fight on their behalf, helping to slow American westward expansion and preserve the tribes. The dance originated with a spiritual leader called Wovoka in the Northern Paiute tribe around 1890 and was adopted by other tribes who made it their own throughout the western United States. The ceremony helped forge cooperation between tribes and is credited with Lakota resistance to religious and cultural assimilation under the Dawes Act.
- 5) Where is the oldest mosque in North America?
- a. Washington, DC
 - b. Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 - c. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 - d. Dearborn, Michigan
 - i. Answer: b, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
 - ii. The first purpose-built mosque was constructed in Cedar Rapids, IA in 1934. A large Muslim community had immigrated to the area

from what is now Syria in the 1800s, and built the mosque after outgrowing their prayer spaces above shops and in each other's homes. The Mother Mosque of America is still open today, along with two other mosques serving the Islamic community in Cedar Rapids. It is also home to the National Muslim Cemetery, where Muslim servicemen who fought in World War II are interred.

6) Where is the oldest gurdwara in North America?

- a. Scottsdale, Arizona
- b. Stockton, California
- c. Rochester, New York
- d. Seattle, Washington

- i. Answer: b, Stockton, California.
- ii. America's first gurdwara opened in 1911 in northern California. While the gurdwara was primarily a house of worship for Sikhs, the community's leadership decided to open the doors to Hindus and Muslims as well. Both communities were too small to build their own houses of worship, and the Stockton gurdwara became a religious and community center for Indian immigrants from all three religions for decades. The gurdwara remains a meeting space for the community today.

7) When did the first Jews settle in North America?

- a. 1654
- b. 1726
- c. 1492
- d. 1791

- i. Answer: a, 1654
- ii. The first organized Jewish migration to what became the United States began in 1654. A group of Sephardic Jews who had fled the Portuguese Inquisition arrived in New Amsterdam (now New York) in the autumn of that year. They quickly secured rights to own property, trade, and only pay their fair share of taxes. This was much more progressive than how religious minorities were treated in Europe at the time.

Interestingly, the first Jewish person to set foot in North America arrived in 1492 as a refugee of the Spanish inquisition. Christopher Columbus brought Yosef ben Ha Levy HaIvri on his voyage because he did not know where he was going, and expected that he might encounter the lost tribes of Israel or another ancient language. Ha Levy Halvri spoke both Hebrew and Arabic, and was brought as a translator.

- 8) What American style of music has its roots in the Islamic call to prayer and other Islamic styles of music?
- Jazz
 - Bluegrass
 - The Blues
 - Ragtime
- Answer: c, The Blues
 - It is thought that upwards of 30% of enslaved Africans held captive in the American south were Muslims. Many preserved their religious traditions such as praying in Arabic and abstaining from pork and alcohol whenever possible despite their enslavement. The oldest recorded Blues music bears a striking resemblance to the Islamic call to prayer, and many musicologists now believe that The Blues has its roots in the music, instruments, and techniques of enslaved African Muslims. While many enslaved people converted to Christianity because of force or convenience, the Islamic influence on Black American culture lives on through The Blues.
- 9) Which U.S. President, while addressing a Jewish community and affirming America's commitment to interfaith cooperation, insisted that "the Government of the United States...gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance"?
- William J. Clinton
 - George Washington
 - John F. Kennedy
 - Ronald W. Reagan
- Answer: b, George Washington
 - In 1790, President Washington travelled to Rhode Island, where he met with leaders of several religious groups, including a fledgling

Jewish congregation. Moses Seixas, one of the officials of the congregation, presented an impassioned letter to the President praising the government's commitment to religious and civil freedom. Washington, moved by the congregation's letter, responded with his now famous "Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, Rhode Island," which articulates America's early commitments to pluralism.

- 10) Who was the first U.S. President to host an iftar, the sundown meal when Muslims break their daily fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, at the White House?
- Barack Obama
 - George W. Bush
 - George H. W. Bush
 - Thomas Jefferson
 - Answer: d, Thomas Jefferson
 - At sundown on December 9, 1805, President Jefferson hosted the first iftar at the White House when Tunisia's Muslim envoy to the United States visited the country during Ramadan. President George W. Bush made the White House iftar an annual celebration during his eight years in office, a practice his successors have continued.
- 11) In what year was the first Humanist Manifesto written?
- 1933
 - 1867
 - 1981
 - 1954
 - Answer: a, 1933.
 - In the early 20th century, a group of philosophers, theologians, Unitarians, liberal Christians, and Jews wrote and signed the first Humanist Manifesto. In it, they articulated an ethical framework separate from a deity or specific religion. The manifesto opposed "acquisitive and profit-motivated society" and penned a vision for an egalitarian world community.

12) Holi is the Hindu festival of colors. Which place holds the world record for the largest Holi festival?

- a. Texas
- b. Uttar Pradesh
- c. Utah
- d. Rajasthan

i. Answer: c, Utah

- ii. While the spring festival originated in India and Nepal, the largest Holi event is held yearly by the Sri Sri Radha Krishna temple in Spanish Fork, Utah. It draws tens of thousands of people each year. Traditionally, the Holi festival allows people to celebrate spring together regardless of religion, caste, class, gender, or age. Fittingly, it is estimated that around 50% of the festival's attendees are Latter-day Saints, commonly known as Mormons.

13) The Parliament of World Religions was formed to establish dialogue between all world faiths. In which year did it first convene?

- a. 2002
- b. 1993
- c. 1948
- d. 1893

i. Answer: d, 1893

- ii. The parliament of World Religions met for the first time in 1893 in Chicago. The Parliament marked the first time that representatives from the Jain and Baha'i faiths came to the United States.

14) The first English translation of a Buddhist scripture was published in an American magazine in 1844. Who published it?

- a. Ralph Waldo Emerson
- b. Henry David Thoreau
- c. Nathaniel Hawthorne
- d. Louisa May Alcott

i. Answer: b, Henry David Thoreau

- ii. Thoreau published a translated excerpt of the *Lotus Sutra* in *The Dial* magazine. The transcendentalist was inspired by Buddhist

texts, and Buddhist themes like meditation and mindfulness are present in his book *Walden* about his life alone in the woods.

- 15) Who was the first American to be canonized as a Saint by the Catholic Church?
- a. St. Frances Cabrini, a nun serving New York's Italian poor
 - b. St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, founder of the Catholic School system
 - c. St. Katherine Drexel, founder of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, serving Black and Indigenous Americans
 - d. St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a member of the Mohawk tribe said to be an intercessor on behalf of native peoples
 - i. Answer: a, St. Frances Cabrini.
 - ii. Mother Cabrini was sent in 1889 to work among poor Italian immigrants in New York's slums. She worked for 28 years to set up schools, hospitals, and orphanages for the working poor across the country. When a contractor tried to swindle the sisters as they converted a hotel into a hospital, she is said to have tucked in her habit and climbed the scaffolding, directing and performing the work herself. She was canonized (became a saint) in 1946 and was the first American to receive the honor.

Sources/Further Reading

- 1) [Ahimsa | Nonviolence, Pacifism, Compassion | Britannica](#)
- 2) [Mother in Heaven](#)
- 3) [Asians and Asian Exclusion | The Pluralism Project](#)
- 4) [Ghost Dance | Definition, Significance, Wounded Knee, & Facts | Britannica](#)
- 5) [Oldest Mosque in North America | Cedar Rapids Iowa | Mother Mosque of America, The Oldest Built Mosque in America | Cedar Rapids Tourism](#)
- 6) [Stockton is Home to Nation's First Gurdwara - Celebrate California, Model of Interfaith: The History of Stockton Gurdwara | SikhNet](#)
- 7) [Jews arrive in the New World - American Jewish Archives, How Columbus brought America its first Jew](#)
- 8) [Muslim Roots, U.S. Blues - Muslim Heritage Muslim Heritage](#)
- 9) [From George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport ...](#)
- 10) [Tunisian Envoy | Thomas Jefferson's Monticello](#)



- 11) [Humanist Manifesto I - American Humanist Association](#)
- 12) [Does Utah really host the world's largest Holi festival? – Deseret News](#)
- 13) [1893 Chicago - Parliament of the World's Religions](#)
- 14) [The Rain of Law - Tricycle: The Buddhist Review](#)
- 15) [Mother Frances Cabrini: Story of the First American Saint | TIME](#)