

# Conscientious Objectors in World War I

**Class taught by Jay Beaman**

Jay is a regular participant at PMC. He has a PhD in Sociology and is now retired after many years working with local universities (Warner Pacific, Lewis & Clark, and Concordia). Jay has written or edited three books exploring the intersection of pacifism and the early Pentecostal movement, and he continues to do research into the conscientious objectors of World War I. In this class, Jay shared some of this ongoing research.

In addition to the information on the following pages, two resources shared by Jay that give insight into the CO movement around WW I are:

[The Conscientious Objector in America](#) by Norman Thomas (1923).

[A Theology for the Social Gospel](#) by Walter Rauschenbusch (1917).

Sunday 17 Sep 2023; Yet Another Conversation about WWI Conscientious Objection

A Tale of Two Anti-War activists from WW1;

Krehbiel, H P; Correspondence 1917-1931; Title page.pdf

Heinrich Peter, Krehbiel (1862-1940) - Biograph.pdf

Jane Addams Heads Alleged Pacifists; 25 Jan 1919, 6 - Rutland Daily Herald at Newspapers.com 1.pdf

Jane Addams Heads Alleged Pacifists; 25 Jan 1919, 6 - Rutland Daily Herald at Newspapers.com 2.pdf

Krehbiel, Edward Benjamin; Syllabus of Lectures on International Conciliation (Stanford U).pdf

Krehbiel, Edward; obit; 16 Jun 1950, 2 - The Standard-Star at Newspapers.com.pdf

Stanford Split on War Issue; 06 Mar 1917, 6 - The San Francisco Examiner at Newspapers.com.pdf

William Penn\_s Holy Experiment in Civil Government; Benjamin Franklin Trueblood with notes.pdf

## Social Gospel Pacifism

1. American pacifism divided fairly early between
  - a. Generic Pacifism (my term) of the Peace Societies (early 1800s) including some Quakers
  - b. Nonresistance and conscientious objection (primarily Anabaptists, including many Quakers but not all)
2. After this division
  - a. Generic Pacifism created peace societies and promoted
    - i. National Arbitration
    - ii. Disarmament
    - iii. Diplomacy
    - iv. Internationalism (and free trade)
    - v. An ideology of Christian Pacifism or generic pacifism based upon the teaching of Jesus applied to societies and nation states
    - vi. Unstable and intermittent carve-outs for Conscientious Objectors within pacifism
  - b. Nonresistant groups formed counter-cultures, colonies, or subcultures; understood to be one voice among many, with a separatist identity, almost by definition sectarian
3. The WW1 Religious Pacifist context
  - a. Generic Pacifism had largely become identified with a more secularized version of Christianity sometimes combined with socialism, and in some circles understood as socialism (but generally nonviolent, and pacifist, and internationalist);
    - i. The Social Gospel; Walter Rauschenbush
      1. German Baptist; Rochester Theological Seminary
      2. Somewhat German Pietistic
      3. Very Educated, with some bent towards German Higher Criticism in biblical study
      4. Aware and affirming of new social science including Karl Marx and affirmation of findings on social class, unions, poverty, ghettoization, racial injustice, and generally pacifist and internationalist
      5. Critical of Religious Divisions, and protestant promotions of denominational divisions which make it impossible to agree on programs for social change
        - a. Forthright in downplaying differences in Protestantism
        - b. Inadvertantly; created WASP normative society; WASP hegemony
        - c. Thus was against new group formation, the new groups by definition were reformist sects, each considering themselves the true group
        - d. Created conditions whereby the poor, immigrants, racial / ethnic minorities would be religiously dispossessed and have to form new groups to reach the masses with their renewalist messages
        - e. Irony;

- i. the social gospel was forward looking and progressive, but easily dismissed as elitist and secular, not spiritual
  - 1. By definition secular; promoting social justice for religious and unreligious alike from government, not just churches, but also churches
  - 2. Criticized religious leadership (their own) and were considered unbelieving and eroding faith
  - 3. Promoted German Higher Criticism and new learning like Evolution
  - 4. Elitist; mostly wealthy, educated, powerful, even Capitalist (biting the hand that feeds them), and taking over main universities and colleges and largely excluding those who disagreed as sectarians and thus not democratic (not of the masses)
  - 5. A social Gospel could say to a christian conscientious objector, "you are absolutely right this war is evil, misguided, mechanized slaughter, but we have to do it and then we can pursue peace, please do your bit and save your conscience for later when we are arguing with the Catholics."

ii. while the social gospel was considered anathema to fundamentalists who became anti-social gospel; all these years later they champion early social gospel leaders and their arguments. Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps; What Would Jesus Do*, became a best seller among Evangelicals, even though it was a novel created by a Social Gospel preacher. Evangelicals also champion social gospel advocate arguments from WW1 promoting generic pacifism but when it comes to war, arguing against conscientious objection.

b. Nonresistance or Conscientious Objection occupied Sectarian Status

- i. The Sect by definition promotes difference and is created out of difference and thrives in Capitalist Free Market Democracy, as Branding (build a new mouse trap)... Max Weber; Capitalism ----> sect development (market share divisions and brand promotion)
- ii. Religious Freedom provides the social location, and reason for being
- iii. Generic pacifism is seen as secular, compromised beyond any value, associated with the religion of Babylon, and true christians must come out (a sexual term meaning stop sleeping with the whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelations)...

- iv. During and after the Civil War the term “Come Outers” became identified as start your own group to change society, and it was used by Generic Pacifists who failed to prevent the Civil War while trying to abolish slavery... Politics is hopelessly fallen, Come out (form new social, political, and religious groups to purify American politics and society)...
- v. Anabaptists were a small, Isolated, Agricultural, sectarian (separatist, backward looking, renewalist, less formally educated, less powerful) group
  - 1. Westward movement became an occasion to divide into new sects separate from each other, to renew institutionalized, unchanging, cultural Mennonites and Amish and Brethren and Quakers
  - 2. Believer’s Church became a social technology for forming groups of reformist, renewalist, true believers. Focus was on mode of baptism, initiation, separation, group boundaries, keeping the group pure, holy, biblical (and just as Anabaptists left the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, new Mennonite groups would form too to renew by leaving or coming out from Apostate Mennonite churches)
  - 3. Quakers would divide (not neatly), partly with westward movement; each group claiming they came from the true Quaker origins in England, some separatist Quakers making more boundary distinctions over dress codes, appearances, ways of being in society.
    - a. Quakers did not have the same boundary by baptism in water, but focused on an inward light and baptism in the spirit, much more open to new revelation, prophecy, even surprisingly charismatic leaders, but also sectarian spirit to some degree
    - b. Westward movement probably also contributed to occasion for renewal and division

#### 4. American Society and WWI

##### a. Pacifists Included

##### i. Generic Pacifists Including;

- 1. Peace society leaders and members;
  - a. making bold pronouncements on peace and internationalism and the futility of war
  - b. Leaders claiming they represented large swaths of American society and christianity, but with no actual power to gain compliance from working people (laity)
  - c. Realism;
    - i. Just as in American Democracy we elect representatives to lead us, so too in peace societies and churches
    - ii. The main use if pacifism is in preventing war through diplomacy, negotiation, internationalism, free trade, etc
    - iii. Failing Prevention; since that means the democratic will is to go to war (since representative leaders have so determined)

1. Encourage members to support the war including doing full military service and killing and overwhelmingly defeat the enemy
2. But work after the war for a just peace, negotiation, no war indemnity and debts, disarmament, no standing armies, etc...
3. Failing convincing conscientious objectors to go to war, try and treat them humanely but this may include punishment
4. Certainly don't allow free speech that damages the war effort; like yelling fire in a crowded theater
5. Disagreement as to the right of individual conscience to say no to war

ii. Conscientious Objector sects considered Idealists arguing Conscience

a. Many (mostly) pacifist sects, some old some new; Norman Thomas argued that over 90% of conscientious objectors were from pacifist sects

B. Socialists, anarchists, IWW, might be considered secularized sects promoting conscience as the idealists (contrast with social gospel)

C. Many conscientious objectors would agree and disagree with generic pacifism largely on method

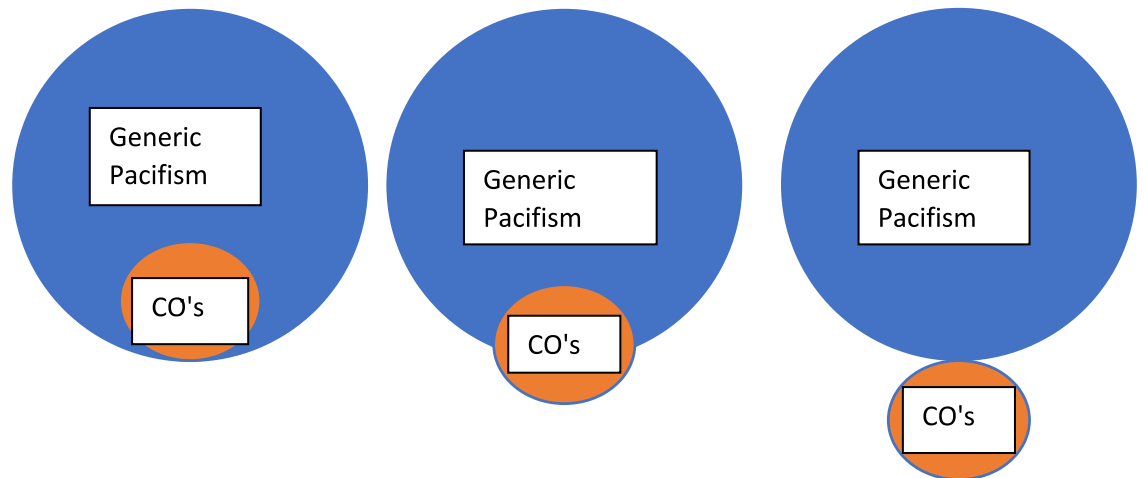
a. Agree with large pronouncements about war and arbitration and disarmament

b. Require conscientious objection to military service

c. Remain divided on noncombatancy versus absolutist stance or even registration

d. Some would argue that conscientious objector groups belong within (generic) pacifism, others that nonresistance is distinct enough to require sectarian separation; Hence arguments over what is pacifism and nonresistance

e. Social-historical Ambiguity, or ambiguous historical space; becomes liminal territory where people can move freely between groups because boundaries are unclear



The historical confusion creates Historical Ambiguity and liminal space.

This is why for example there may have been as many Quakers in WW1 who went to war as those who did not.....

Why Quakers were immediately drawn to a real world compromise with WW1 of AFSU or AFRU (be full civic-minded citizens while protesting killing)

Why some Mennonites lost their peace witness at WW1, because they saw there were two legitimate ways to do peace witness

Why many Quakers and Mennonites left their denomination for another either because they saw no difference, or they wanted to go with another group that hadn't been accused of being social gospel

Why many pacifists from social gospel groups went to war as soldiers believing they were doing their duty as christians and still hated war, doesn't everyone?

Why today from the perspective of many christians in the mainstream churches it is equally bad and disenfranchising to call someone a socialist, a pacifist, or a socialist pacifist.

Why some non-resistants still feel all attempts to compromise with the world are wrong. (e.g. you give them an inch and they take a mile, camel's nose in tent)...

Why many leaders during and after WW1 who promoted pacifism in their groups could appear to use such a fluid term, sometimes meaning generic pacifism and sometimes meaning nonresistance to war and sometimes meaning personal nonresistance.

WW1 Religious Conscientious Objectors by Group

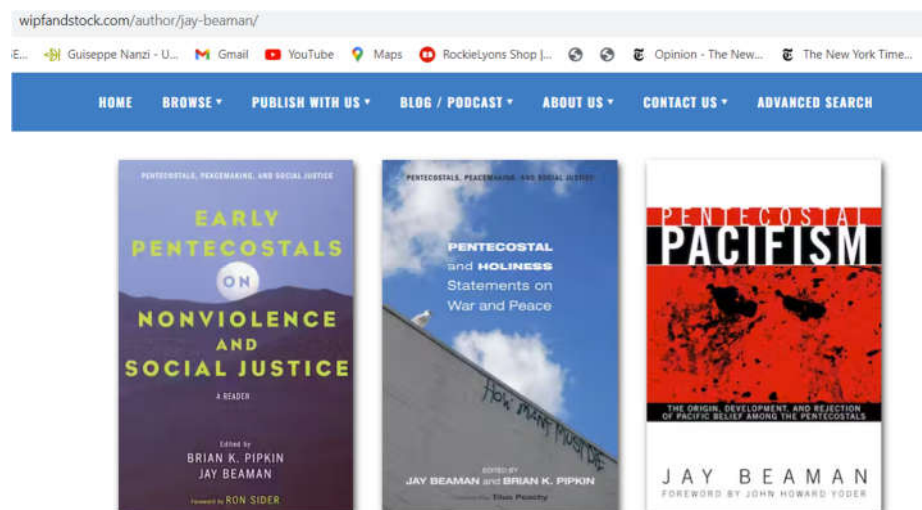
Norman Thomas; 1923; *The Conscientious Objector in America*

gion, especially to Christianity. The overwhelming majority of American conscientious objectors were pacifists, opposed to all wars. Most of them were members of Christian sects. They based their objection to war on the teachings of the New Testament and supported it by the fact that the early Christian church did not permit its members to be soldiers. They said that war in which Christians fought Christians mocked

[ 10 ]

This was the testimony of an avowed Social Gospel minister...

I began my scholarly journey documenting pacifism among Pentecostals in WW1.





Very Quickly, Pentecostal Scholars were intrigued, amazed, and offended.

One younger Pentecostal, Paul Alexander, created a nonprofit to promote pacifism and social justice among Pentecostals. He taught at the Assemblies of God College in Waxahatchee, Texas, then at Azusa Pacific College, then at Palmer Theological Center. I received positive feedback from Peter Brock, perhaps the foremost historian of Christian Pacifism, at University of Toronto. In the meantime, I did a Ph.D., in sociology at Iowa State, while pastoring a small Baptist church in Iowa, and then while a sociologist at Tabor College. I published in family studies and taught at George Fox in Newberg.

During this time, Pentecostals and Holiness scholars were promoting an argument that I call the “You Can’t Get There From Here Argument.” I call it that from a Saturday Night Live skit. Glen Close is asking directions of somebody in Massachusetts, and they say, “You Can’t Get There From Here.” Pentecostals seemed to argue that you can’t get to the present day where Pentecostals are largely not pacifists or conscientious objectors to war, and you can’t get there from here...

I decided to reconceptualize my research to cast a wider net by looking for actual conscientious objectors in WW1 and see if Pentecostals represented anything significant among WW1 pacifists, and if sectarian groups in general did so.

I began gathering draft cards from Ancestry.com to see if I could reconstruct any semblance of a realistic sample of WW1 conscientious objectors. That was over 20 years ago, and perhaps for the last ten years, that is mostly what I have done.

**Denom3.1 Denom3.1 Religion as to Institutional Character**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	147	.7	.7	.7
Church-like generally non-pacifist	1228	6.0	6.0	6.8
Feminist	1	.0	.0	6.8
New Religions	116	.6	.6	7.3
Sect-like generally non-pacifist	164	.8	.8	8.2
Sect-like generally pacifist	16294	80.2	80.2	88.3
secular	1311	6.5	6.5	94.8
unknown	1058	5.2	5.2	100.0
Total	20319	100.0	100.0	

**Denom\_combined2 Denom\_combined2 Denominational Groups**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	147	.7	.7	.7
Abrahamic Sect	159	.8	.8	1.5
Adventist	1044	5.1	5.1	6.6
Amana	72	.4	.4	7.0
Anabaptist	5790	28.5	28.5	35.5
Baptist	178	.9	.9	36.4
Brethren	2101	10.3	10.3	46.7
Campbellite	706	3.5	3.5	50.2
Catholic	110	.5	.5	50.7
Church of England	21	.1	.1	50.8
Congregationalist	85	.4	.4	51.2
Conscience; ethical	60	.3	.3	51.5
conscientious objector	377	1.9	1.9	53.4
Episcopal	1	.0	.0	53.4
Evangelical	34	.2	.2	53.6
Feminist	1	.0	.0	53.6
Holiness Pentecostal: Holiness	1079	5.3	5.3	58.9
Holiness Pentecostal: Pentecostal	1312	6.5	6.5	65.3
humanist	33	.2	.2	65.5
IBSA	2133	10.5	10.5	76.0
Jewish	59	.3	.3	76.3
LDS	12	.1	.1	76.4
Lutheran	213	1.0	1.0	77.4
Methodist	206	1.0	1.0	78.4
Molokan-Doukhobor	250	1.2	1.2	79.6
New Religions & Eastern Religion	116	.6	.6	80.2
Orthodox	4	.0	.0	80.2
Plymouth Brethren	46	.2	.2	80.5
Quaker	1074	5.3	5.3	85.7
Reformed	158	.8	.8	86.5
religious (small groups)	55	.3	.3	86.8
religious (unidentified group)	464	2.3	2.3	89.1
religious generally non- pacifist	1	.0	.0	89.1
Social Gospel	191	.9	.9	90.0
Social Gospel assumed	104	.5	.5	90.5
socialist	756	3.7	3.7	94.3
Unitarian / Universalist	24	.1	.1	94.4
unknown	1143	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	20319	100.0	100.0	

What do the pacifist sects have in common in 1917?

1. Premillennialist (generally)
2. Backward-looking, renewalists, revivalists, primitivists, (Rodney Stark says this is definitive for sect group); special application of the millennial dreams of Puritans, an Errand in the Wilderness, Manifest Destiny
3. Often separatists, communalists, colony-makers, community builders...US expansionism, come-outers, sometimes utopian
4. Ethical rigorists... Holiness, purity, separation, elect, sometimes Manichean

In 1917-1918 They were a very small minority of American population.

Today, they are perhaps 1/3 of American Population, sometimes referred to as the Religious Right, the Evangelical Right, etc...

And, many are mainstream American religion, believe in American Exceptionalism, etc...

However, the Social Gospel churches, still large in American Society, have lost numbers... and influence with the fortunes of WASPs... and rather than championing peace causes... also champion American Exceptionalism... but try and maintain multiculturalism...

## 11 Regions Underlying the 50 States

How rival colonizers spread across the continent and set patterns that influence modern politics and culture.

### Midlands

Culturally pluralistic, founded by English Quakers. Ethnic and religious purity were never priorities; community-oriented and distrustful of government intervention.

### Left Coast

New Englanders (by ship) and farmers, prospectors and fur traders from Appalachian Midwest (by wagon). Yankee utopianism meets individual self-expression and exploration.

### Far West

Settlement largely controlled by corporations or government via deployment of railroads, dams, irrigation, mines; exploited as an internal colony, to the lasting resentment of its people.

### Yankeedom

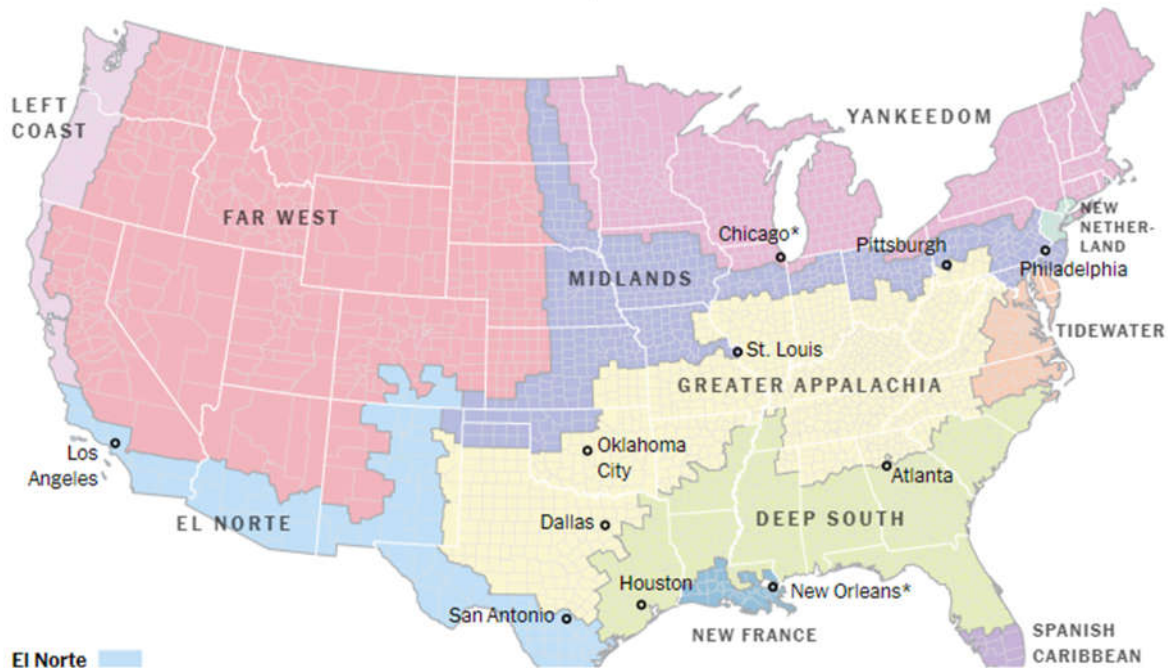
Puritan legacy; perfect earthly society with social engineering, individual denial for common good; assimilate outsiders; vigorous government to thwart would-be tyrants.

### New Netherland

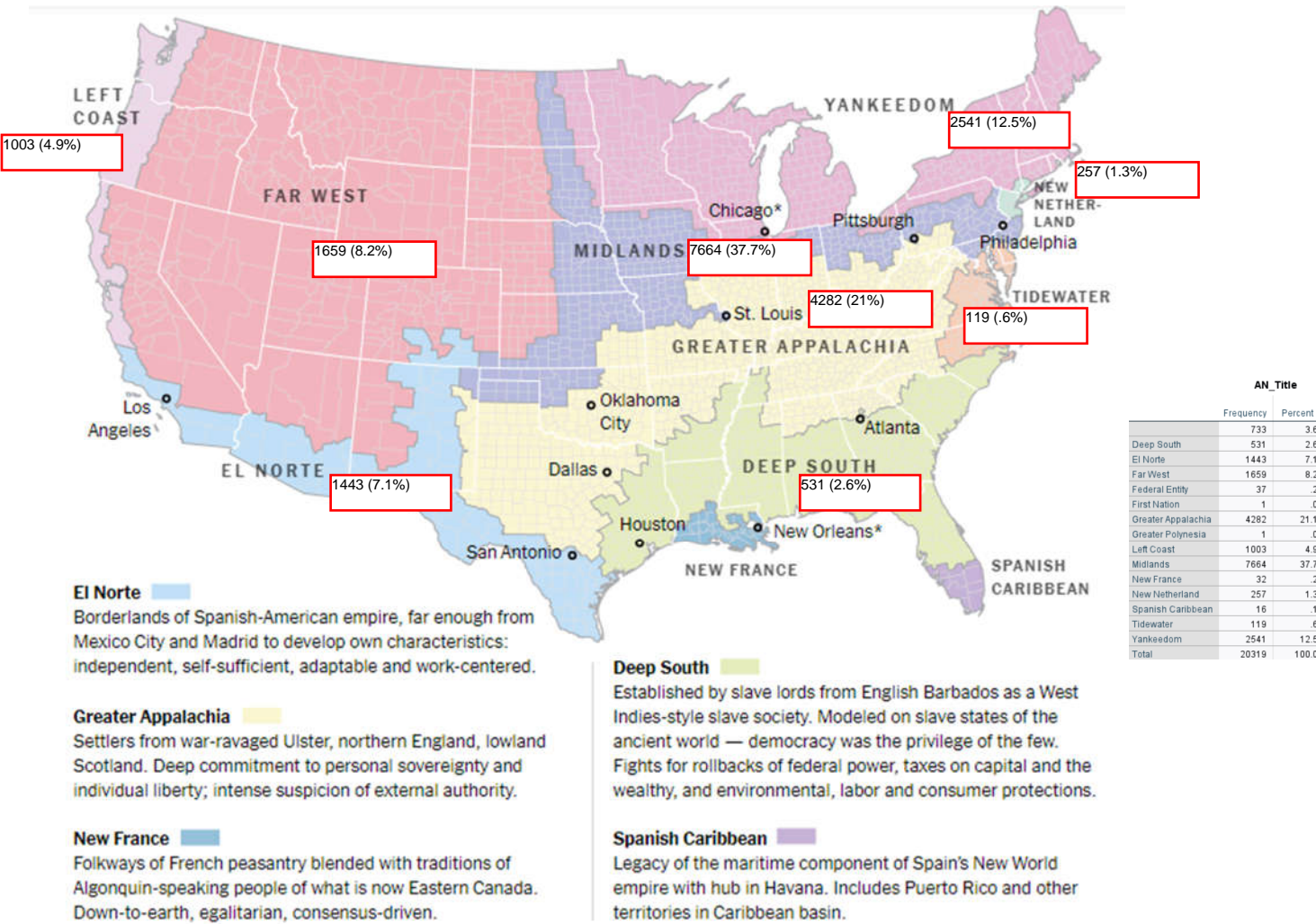
Dutch-founded; retains traits of 17th-century Amsterdam: a global trading culture; materialistic; multicultural; committed to tolerance and freedom of inquiry and conscience.

### Tidewater

17th-century gentry recreated semi-feudal manorial society of English countryside. Conservative; respect for authority and tradition, not equality or political participation.



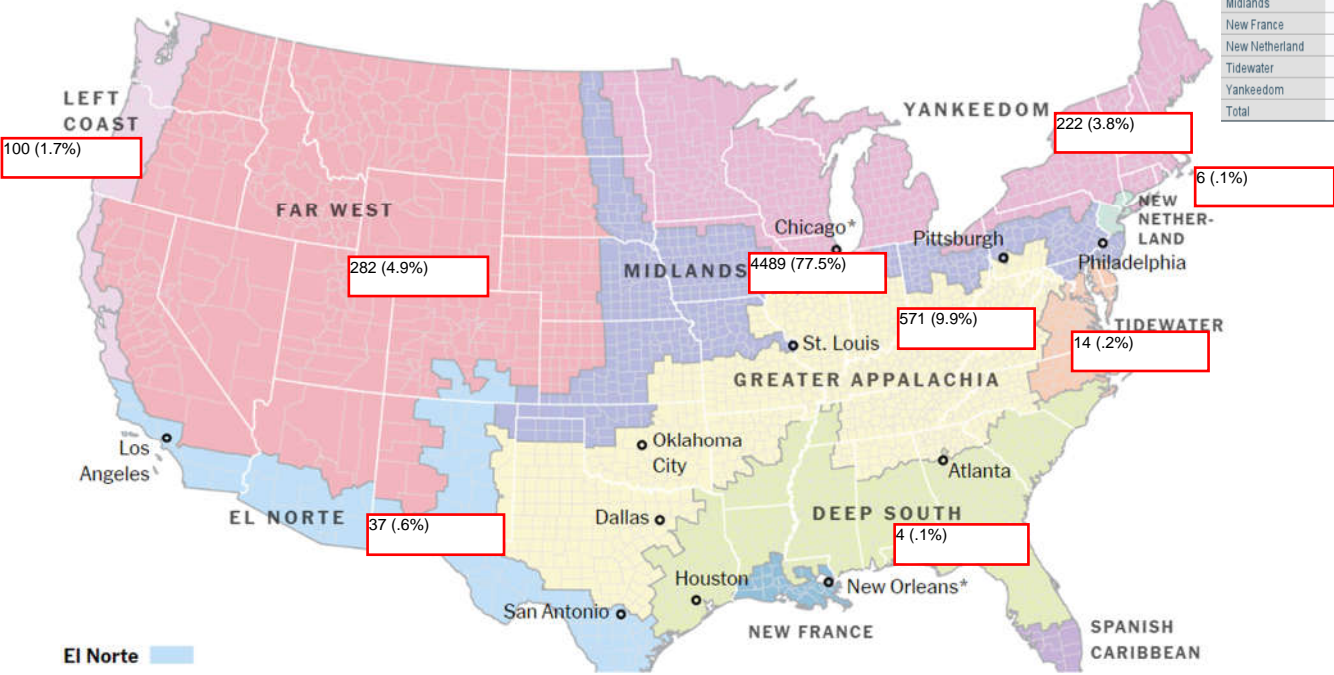




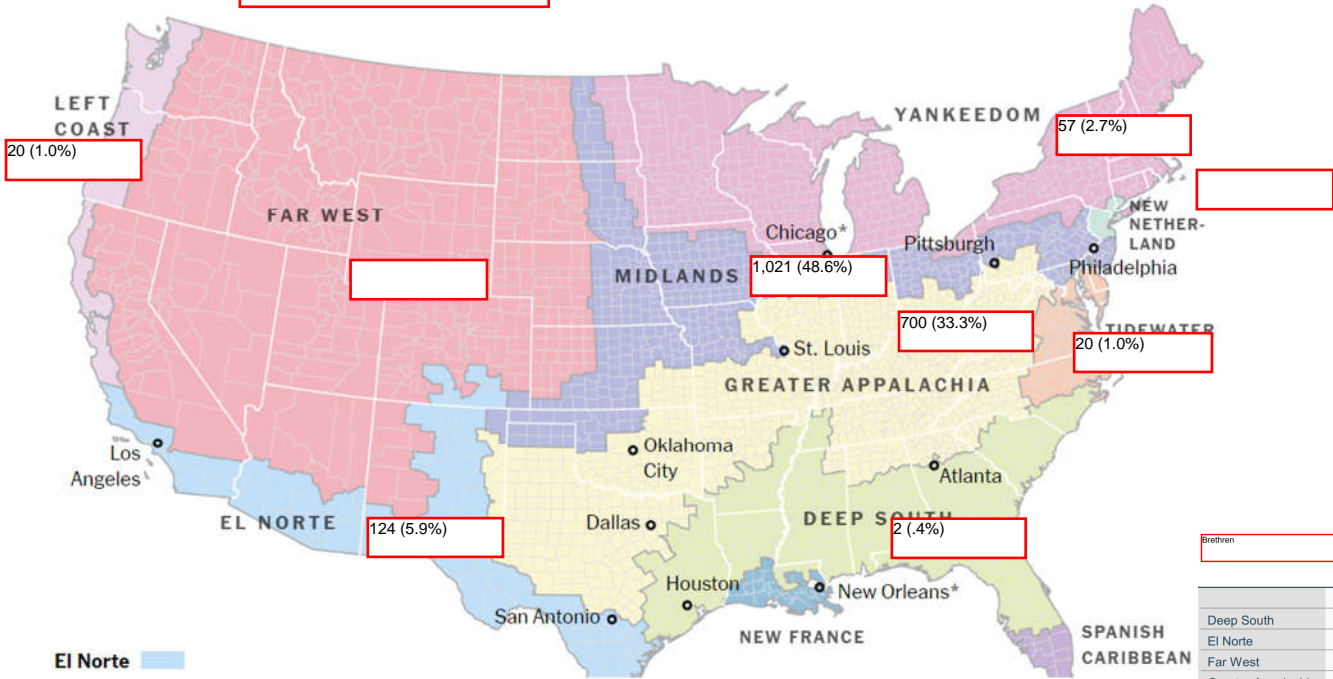
\*Two counties are shared between two cultures: Cook County, Ill. (Yankeedom/Midlands) and Orleans Parish, La. (New France/Deep South). Alaska is divided among Left Coast, Far West and First Nation, a vast region of Arctic and sub-Arctic North America where indigenous peoples remained in effective control. Hawaii is part of Greater Polynesia. By The New York Times | Source: Colin Woodard

Colin Woodard's 11 Nations America:  
US Portion:

ANABAPTIST (5,790)



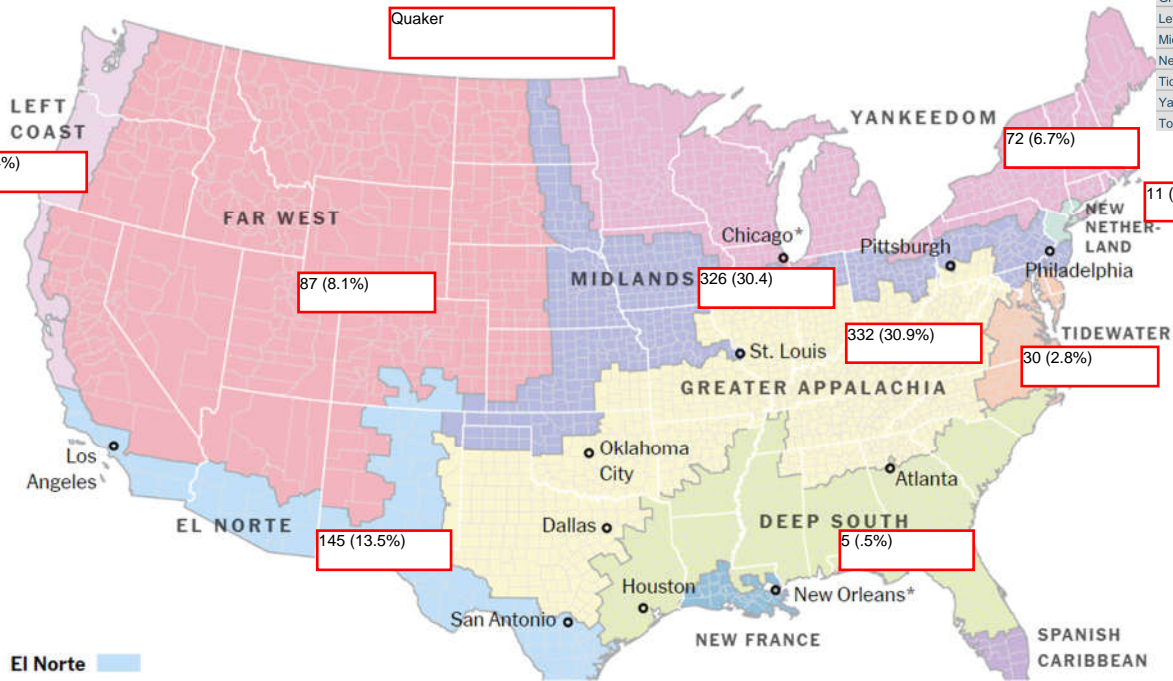
Brethren (2,101)



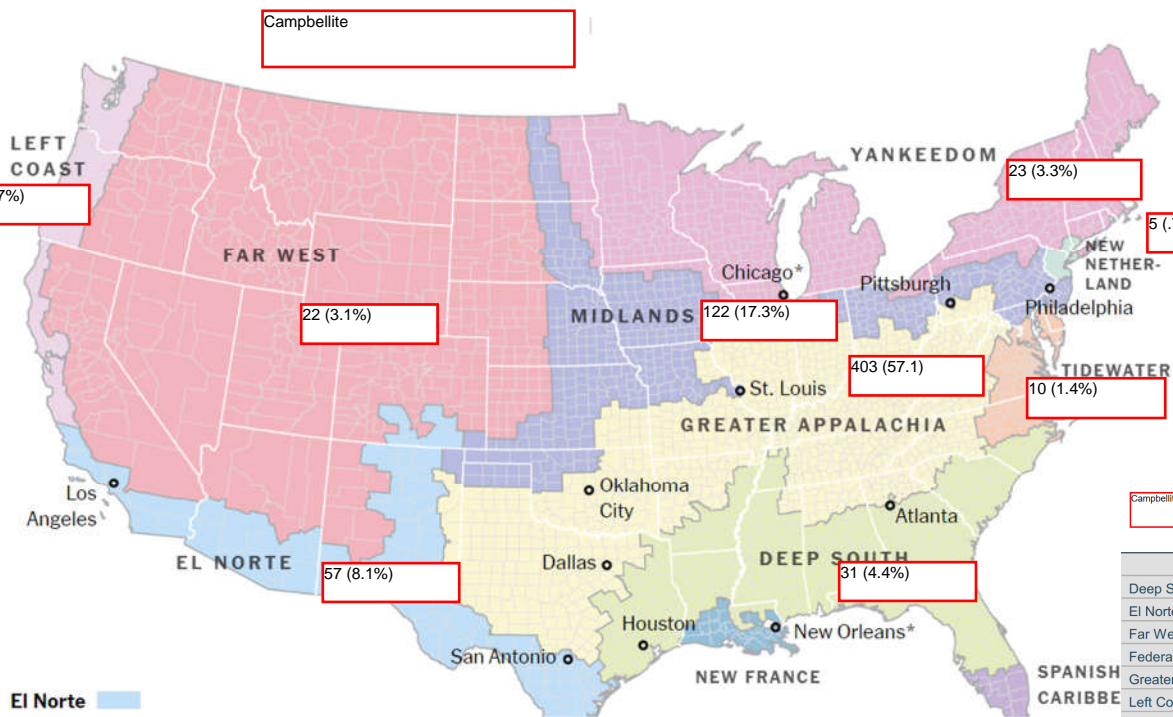
Brethren		AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent	
	9	.4	
Deep South	2	.1	
El Norte	124	5.9	
Far West	148	7.0	
Greater Appalachia	700	33.3	
Left Coast	20	1.0	
Midlands	1021	48.6	
Tidewater	20	1.0	
Yankeedom	57	2.7	
Total	2101	100.0	



Colin Woodard's 11 Nations America:  
US Portion:



Quaker	AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent
	7	.7
Deep South	5	.5
El Norte	145	13.5
Far West	87	8.1
Federal Entity	1	.1
Greater Appalachia	332	30.9
Left Coast	58	5.4
Midlands	326	30.4
New Netherland	11	1.0
Tidewater	30	2.8
Yankeedom	72	6.7
Total	1074	100.0



Campbellite	AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent
	4	.6
Deep South	31	4.4
El Norte	57	8.1
Far West	22	3.1
Federal Entity	2	.3
Greater Appalachia	403	57.1
Left Coast	26	3.7
Midlands	122	17.3
New Netherland	5	.7
Spanish Caribbean	1	.1
Tidewater	10	1.4
Yankeedom	23	3.3
Total	706	100.0

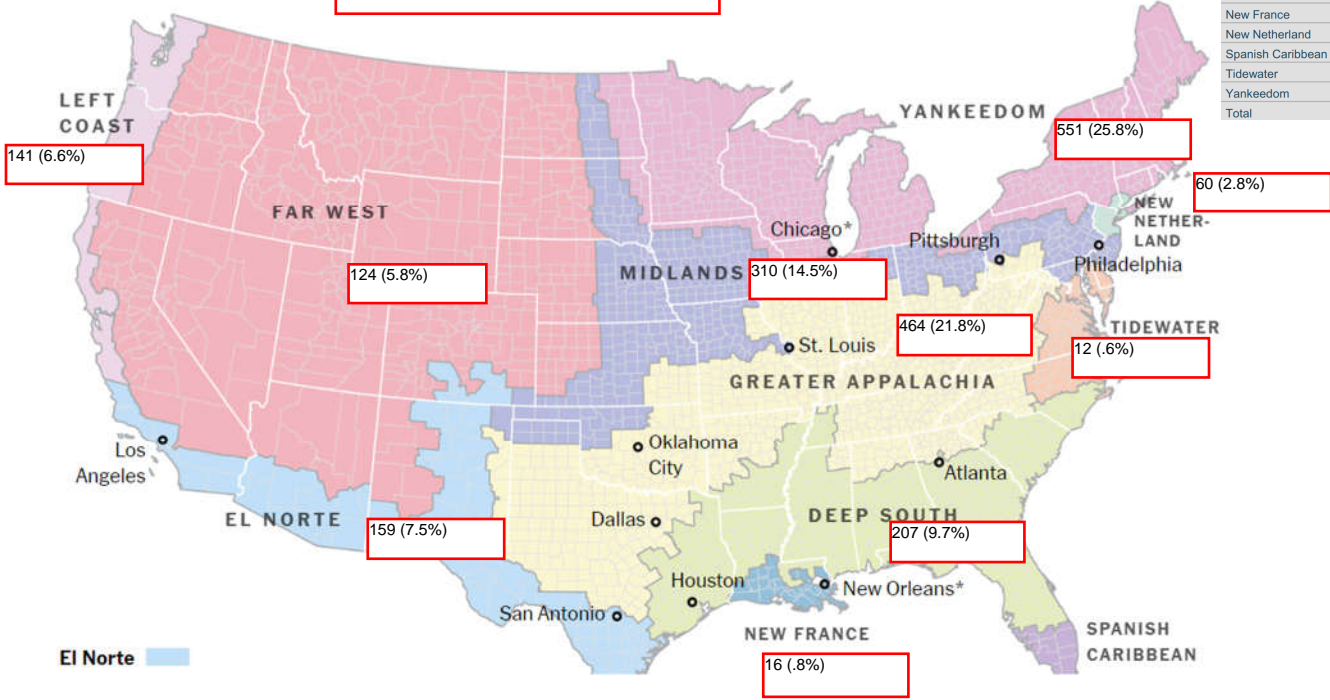


Colin Woodard's 11 Nations America:

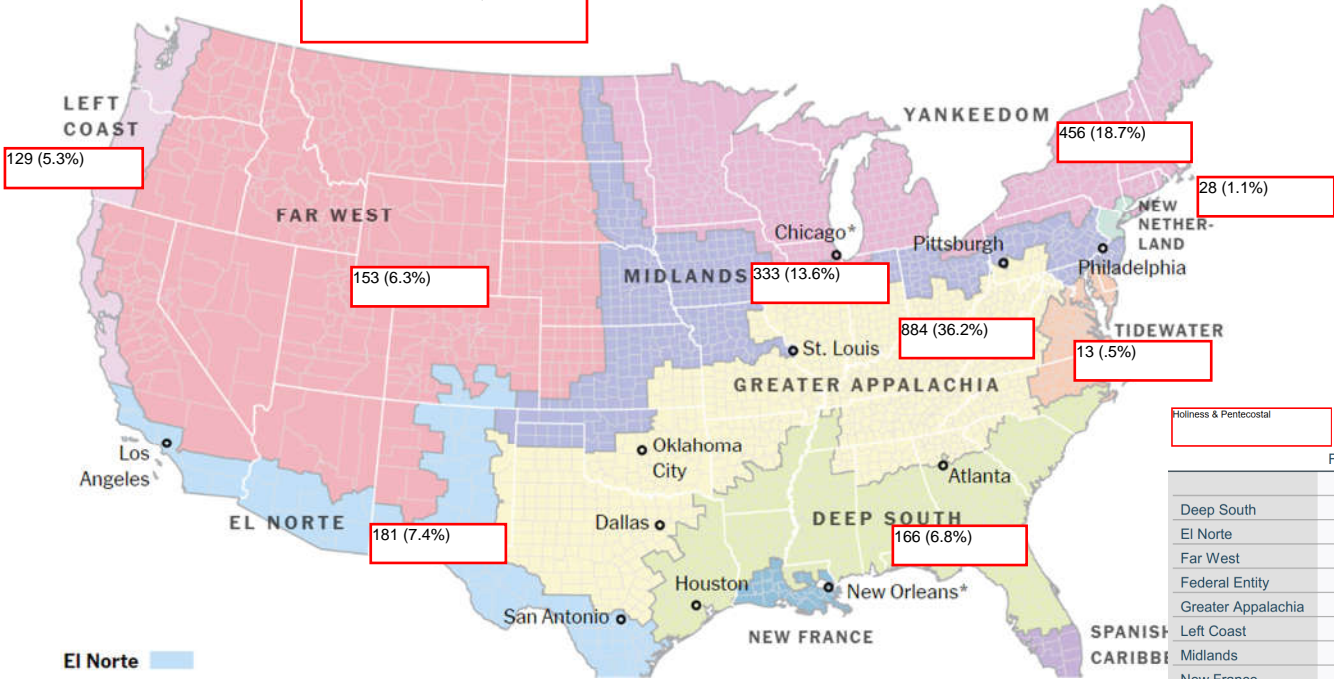
US Portion:

IBSA: International Bible Students Association  
(Jehovah's Witness/ Watchtower) 2,133

IBSA	AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent
	69	3.2
Deep South	207	9.7
El Norte	159	7.5
Far West	124	5.8
Federal Entity	16	.8
Greater Appalachia	464	21.8
Left Coast	141	6.6
Midlands	310	14.5
New France	16	.8
New Netherland	60	2.8
Spanish Caribbean	4	.2
Tidewater	12	.6
Yankeedom	551	25.8
Total	2133	100.0



Holiness & Pentecostal 2,442

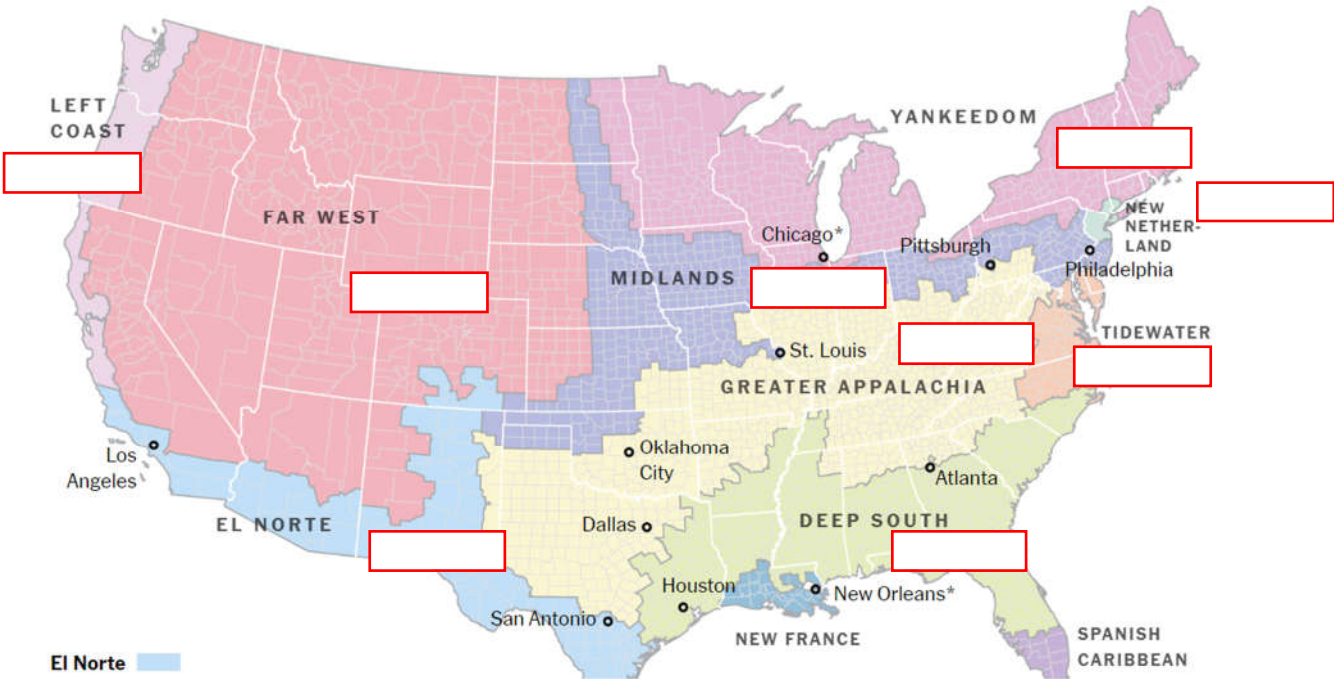
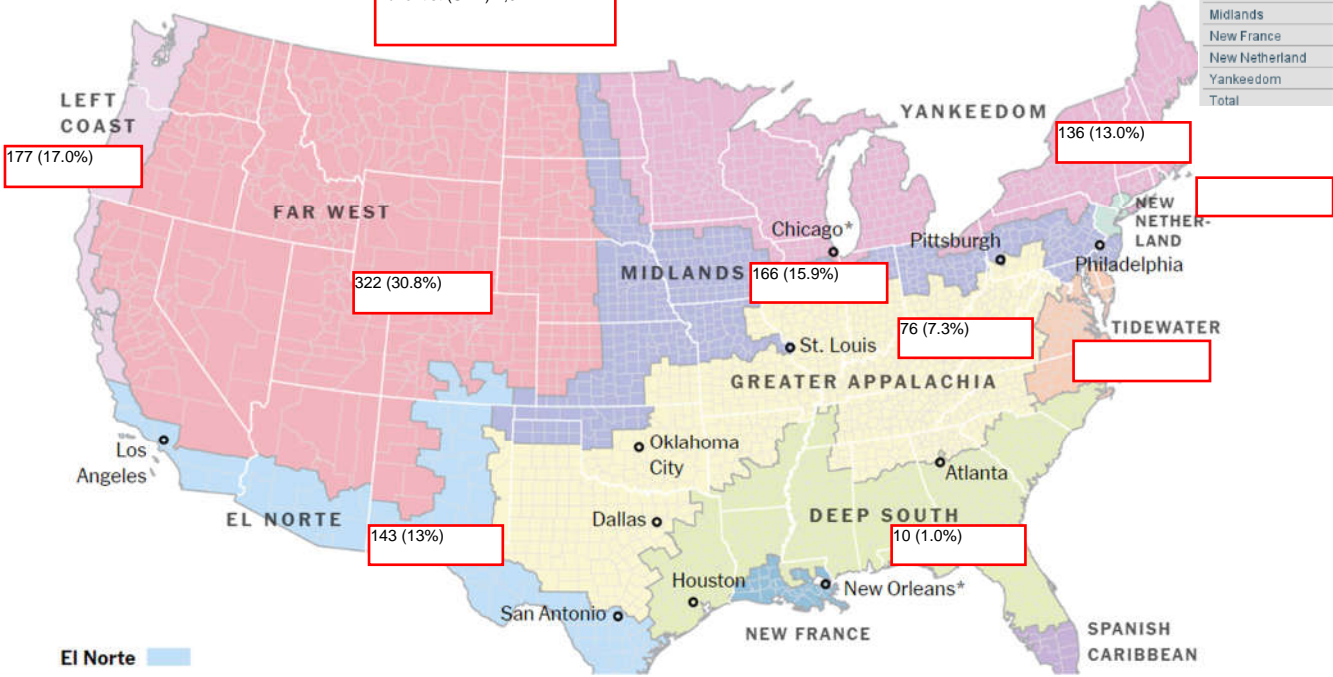


Holiness & Pentecostal	AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent
	87	3.6
Deep South	166	6.8
El Norte	181	7.4
Far West	153	6.3
Federal Entity	2	.1
Greater Appalachia	884	36.2
Left Coast	129	5.3
Midlands	333	13.6
New France	4	.2
New Netherland	28	1.1
Spanish Caribbean	6	.2
Tidewater	13	.5
Yankeedom	456	18.7
Total	2442	100.0

Colin Woodard's 11 Nations America:  
US Portion:

Adventist	AN_Title	
	Frequency	Percent
	10	1.0
Deep South	10	1.0
El Norte	143	13.7
Far West	322	30.8
Federal Entity	1	.1
Greater Appalachia	76	7.3
Left Coast	177	17.0
Midlands	166	15.9
New France	2	.2
New Netherland	1	.1
Yankeeedom	136	13.0
Total	1044	100.0

Adventist (SDA) 1,044





Colin Woodard's 11 Nations America:

US Portion:

