The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church (The Civilization of the American Indian Series)

Thomas C. Maroukis
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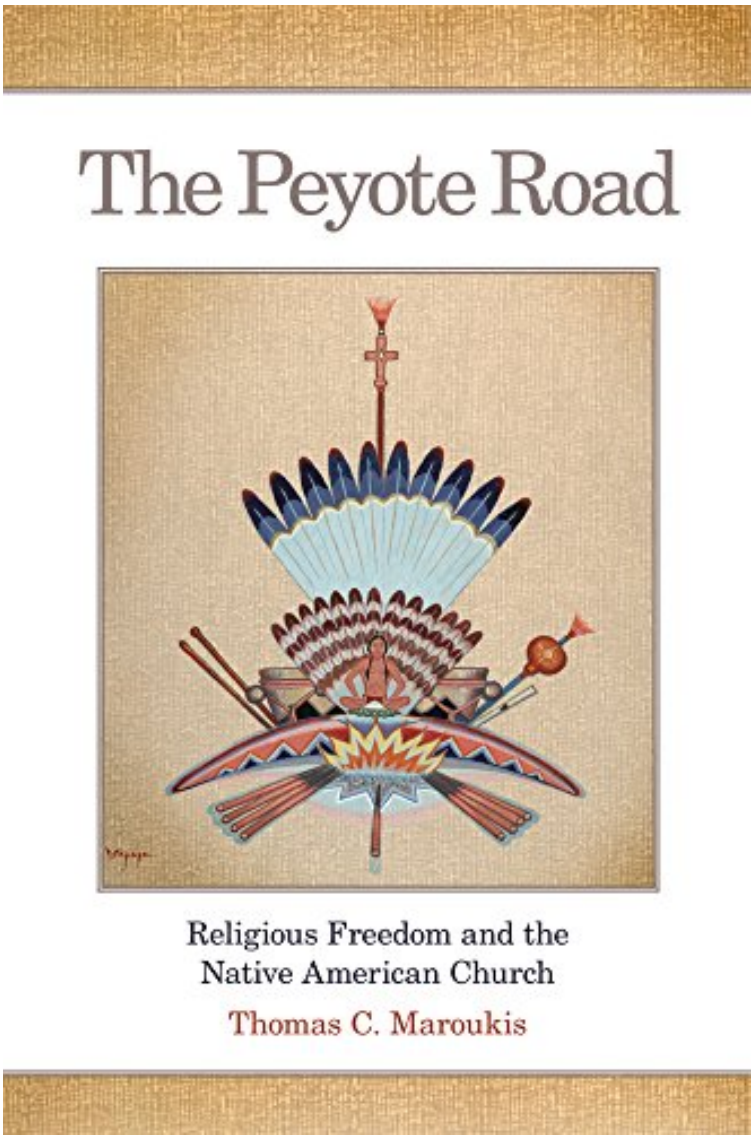

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Thomas C. Maroukis : The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church (The Civilization of the American Indian Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church (The Civilization of the American Indian Series):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Written by my Professor!By Meghan HagerLoved this book! My professor used this for his Native American History class as he is the author. It was very well written and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in learning more about the Peyote Road!13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, if perhaps a bit hypocritical and provincial in outlookBy SyndicalimanThomas Maroukis' "The Peyote Road" offers a well-researched, well-organized, and well-rounded account of the formation and spread of the Peyote religion in North America. The book is likely to have something useful for any researcher interested in the subject, regardless of the discipline from which one is approaching it. For historians, the book traces the origins of the Peyote religion and the Native American Church. For anthropologists and ethnographers, the book illustrates in superb detail the Peyote rituals (detailing with sophistication and evident mastery of the subject their diversity, such as in the distinction between the half-moon and cross fire varieties, while also portraying their essential (and quite remarkable) commonalities across Native American groups throughout North America), as well as the art and music associated with the religion. For political scientists, the book deftly covers the many pieces of legislation and the many judicial cases that have contributed to the making and remaking of policy towards the Peyote religion since its inception.And for those interested in America's relationship with psychedelic spirituality, the book (perhaps unwillingly) offers an illuminating, if perhaps sometimes hypocritical and provincial look at how mainstream American society has reacted towards such spirituality in the case of the Native American Peyote religion, and at how Native American groups were able to outmaneuver the (by now all-too familiar) plethora of attacks on such spirituality and achieve the exceptional and seemingly impossible in terms of getting their practices more or less culturally, as well as legally, legitimated. I say that this book offers these insights unwillingly because it is evident that the author's intention is clearly to not draw such parallels, and in fact to refute such parallels whenever possible, quite evidently for the political reason of wanting to distance the Native American Peyote religion from the use of psychedelics by other (much more culturally-maligned) groups in the U.S. However, in doing so, the author can't help but stumble into a certain amount of hypocrisy. To give just a few examples:*The author clearly shows how the early opponents of Peyote tried to vilify it as a dangerous "intoxicant" after having never even seen the sacrament in action, participated with it themselves, or gathered any credible data whatsoever. The author then shows how this was clearly refuted with the testimony of pharmacologists and ethnographers such as Richard Evans Schultes. However, the author, in a somewhat provincial fashion, uses such authorities insofar as they are/were useful to the agenda of legitimizing Native American Peyote religion, and then discards these authorities, as it were, after having performed their services, refusing to even allude to their investigations of other psychedelic ethnobotanical substances and thereby tie the author's own investigation of the Native American Peyote religion into a larger context of America's relationship with psychedelic drugs, which is (or should be) unavoidable for any such account that wants to touch upon themes of "religious freedom" for the use of sacred substances in the American context.*The author, apparently with his willingness to believe governmental sources and/or popular culture remaining undinted by his previous refutation of the scare around Peyote in the early 20th century (or perhaps cynically wanting to distance the Peyote religion from the discourse around other (culturally-maligned) psychedelic drugs), goes on to allude to LSD, psilocybin, and other psychedelics as being self-evidently more dangerous. The author even at one point says that mescaline (the principal active component of peyote buttons) is in another class entirely from substances such as LSD and psilocybin, which I think is horribly misleading. All three are consider "classical psychedelics," and I doubt that the author is meaning to distinguish between tryptamines and phenethylamines and sing praises for the latter. Even assuming so, LSD is easily as much of a phenethylamine as it is a tryptamine (in reality it is not quite either), and in any case I doubt that the author would readily endorse 2C-B or other drugs of the phenethylamine class, so I am really not sure what distinction the author was trying to make, other than a prejudicial one that Peyote is GOOD and the others are BAD.*Confusingly, the author seems to not notice any inconsistency in demonstrating that concerns about Peyote's health risks are ill-founded, while then remaining sympathetic to joint federal/Indian efforts to limit its use to members of federally-recognized tribes. Either the author really does secretly believe that Peyote is dangerous, or the author believes that Peyote is (conveniently) only dangerous when used outside of the Native American Church, or the author is cynically sacrificing principles in order to legitimate the sweetheart deal that the Native American Church has with respect to Peyote. Perhaps, on this account, the author is simply the one reporting (albeit obviously sympathetically), and it is really the Native American Church that must be faulted for its provincial, and dare I say it, selfish approach to psychedelics. It is either the author's view, or the Church's view (or both) that the way forward for Native American religious freedom is not a principled effort to inform and persuade mainstream culture about the safety and legitimacy of psychedelic drugs and psychedelic spirituality in general, but rather, to obtain Native American religious freedom at the expense of others.*The author alludes to the idea that Peyote is not hallucinogenic and does not tend to produce visions for Native Americans who are using it in their ceremonies. The first notion is certainly misleading. It would be more precise to say that whether Peyote produces hallucinations depends on intentions, setting, and dosage. I am, of course, willing, though, to believe that Native users of Peyote take it with a set of intentions, setting, and dosage that does not lead to "visions" and that is conducive for other aspects of the experience to be predominant. Likewise, the author betrays a defensive attitude towards studies of mescaline that reported hysterical laughter in some of their participants. The author reacts dubiously

towards this claim and notes that nobody has ever reported hysterical laughter at a Native American Peyote ritual. It is in such circumstances that the author's provincialism in the subject of Native American Peyote religion handicaps him, in terms of not being familiar with (or choosing to ignore) broader themes of psychedelic spirituality such as "set and setting." Such a weapon could indeed be used as a powerful argument, if the author were audacious enough to explicitly argue that only the Native American Church's ritual settings provide a set and setting conducive to positive outcomes with the substance (which, thankfully, I don't think he gets around to implying, although such an audacious argument would be in keeping with the tone of the rest of the book).*Likewise, the author asserts that Peyote buttons are quite a weak substance, having only 1% to 3% mescaline in them by weight. I find this to be misleading, as that might sound like a low number, but in general a plant is quite strong if it has that much pure psychedelic compound in it by weight. For example, in comparison the most common cubensis type of psilocybin mushroom has generally 0.2% to 1% active chemical by weight. That said, the dosage range for mescaline is about 200-300 mg, whereas it is 20-30 mg for psilocybin, so that the amount of raw plant matter that one must ingest for a similar strength psychedelic experience is perhaps only a little bit higher in the case of Peyote buttons.*The author does not address exactly how many Peyote buttons participants usually ingest. Nor does the author address the issue of nausea, which is quite widely reported among informal users of the raw plant. Either participants usually use quite a small amount of Peyote, or the author conveniently passed over that potentially alarming fact of nausea (potentially alarming to a queasy mainstream audience on the lookout for the physiological "horrors" of these drugs, of course).*I found the author's treatment of the judicial cases from 2006 and 2009 involving ayahuasca use by the UDV and Santo Daime in the U.S. to be unsatisfactory. The author's analysis of these cases was done purely in terms of how they ostensibly threatened Native American efforts to keep their Peyote practices legal, and the author's treatment of the issue seemed to betray a certain unfamiliarity with the topic. (For example, the author mentions "hoasca," and then introduces ayahuasca a few pages later as if we are talking about a brand new thing. Likewise, the author describes the former as a "hallucinogenic tea," which I think is being subtly uncharitable towards a sacrament that is used by ian indigenous with as much reverence as Peyote is used by Native Americans. These little things might seem like nitpicking, but when added up, they contribute to the provincial and hypocritical tone of the book).*The author does not adequately explain the emergence of the notion that Native American Peyote use is legally protected because of the "special relationship" between Native Americans and the federal government. It is quite apparent towards the end of the book that this notion comes to have much more importance than the notion that Peyote use is protected simply because it is used in a bona-fide religious manner. (In fact, the most recent 1994 law, as the author points out, does not even mention the Native American Church, but rather, entitles members of "federally-recognized tribes" to use Peyote for religious reasons). This seems to be an important development, insofar as it promises to maintain for Native Americans a monopoly on religious exemption from drug laws pertaining to Peyote, and yet the author introduces this concept as if it is common sense (while at least noting these implications of this shift in justification towards the end).*The author argues that the production of "visions" was not an important factor in the spread of the Peyote religion by Native American tribes, noting that there is little correlation between tribes with visionary traditions and tribes that preferentially adopted the Peyote religion. All other things being equal, I would not see much reason to question this argument too heavily, but in light of the author's apparent desire to distance the Peyote religion from anything vaguely "hallucinogenic" (for understandable political reasons), I would advise readers to consider this argument a bit more critically than otherwise.Considering that this just about concludes my serious criticism of the book, I must admit that I find it to be very good overall. Some points of interest from the book that I would like to briefly mention include:*The idea that Native efforts to add Christian elements and/or legal rhetoric to their Peyote practices did not significantly add to the protection or legitimation of their practices in the eyes of the government or mainstream culture. I find this idea highly applicable to the broader psychedelic movement, as it implies that there is no particular political incentive to translate elements of one's psychedelic spirituality into Christian terms unless one is naturally disposed to do so. In other words, even if John Allegro had, for example, proven that Jesus Christ was actually a mushroom, it would have done little for the legitimation of psychedelic spirituality in the U.S.*The book's demonstration of the fact that early opponents of the Peyote religion opposed it quite brazenly based on the fact that it interfered with assimilation of Native Americans--that is, they opposed it on religious/cultural grounds, and not on the grounds that the substance itself was harmful (although excuses for banning the substance that cited that alleged fact were not long in coming).There are many good things to be said about this book, and considering that it is the most up-to-date book on the subject, I commend it as required reading for anyone interested in Peyote religion, and as recommended reading for anyone interested in America's relationship with psychedelic spirituality, as long as one is willing to spend the extra effort to read "against the grain" of this text a bit.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This was written by my advisor who is a cool dude. It is an absolutely great read and ...By Ioannis PavlouThis was written by my advisor who is a cool dude. It is an absolutely great read and very informative.

Despite challenges by the federal government to restrict the use of peyote, the Native American Church, which uses the hallucinogenic cactus as a religious sacrament, has become the largest indigenous denomination among American

Indians today. The Peyote Road examines the history of the NAC, including its legal struggles to defend the controversial use of peyote.Thomas C. Maroukis has conducted extensive interviews with NAC members and leaders to craft an authoritative account of the churchs history, diverse religious practices, and significant people. His book integrates a narrative history of the Peyote faith with analysis of its religious beliefs and practicesas well as its art and musicand an emphasis on the views of NAC members.Deftly blending oral histories and legal research, Maroukis traces the religions history from its Mesoamerican roots to the legal incorporation of the NAC; its expansion to the northern plains, Great Basin, and Southwest; and challenges to Peyotism by state and federal governments, including the Supreme Court decision in Oregon v. Smith. He also introduces readers to the inner workings of the NAC with descriptions of its organizational structure and the Cross Fire and Half Moon services.The Peyote Road updates Omer Stewarts classic 1987 study of the Peyote religion by taking into consideration recent events and scholarship. In particular, Maroukis discusses not only the churchs current legal issues but also the diminishing Peyote supply and controversies surrounding the definition of membership.Today approximately 300,000 American Indians are members of the Native American Church. The Peyote Road marks a significant case study of First Amendment rights and deepens our understanding of the struggles of NAC members to practice their faith.

"Surveys Peyotism's beliefs and practices . . . and its legal and political aspects. Maroukis is a keen observer of contemporary Peyotism."--"The Journal of American History"About the AuthorThomas C. Maroukis is Professor Emeritus of History at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio. He is the author of Peyote and the Yankton Sioux: The Life and Times of Sam Necklace.