



Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century

John Corrigan

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The "Businessmen's Revival" was a religious revival that unfolded in the wake of the 1857 market crash among white, middle-class Protestants. Delving into the religious history of Boston in the 1850s, John Corrigan gives an imaginative and wide-ranging interpretive study of the revival's significance. He uses it as a focal point for addressing a spectacular range of phenomena in American culture: the ecclesiastical and business history of Boston; gender roles and family life; the history of the theater and public spectacle; education; boyculture; and, especially, ideas about emotion during this period.

This vividly written narrative recovers the emotional experiences of individuals from a wide array of little-used sources including diaries, correspondence, public records, and other materials. From these sources, Corrigan discovers that for these Protestants, the expression of emotion was a matter of transactions. They saw emotion as a commodity, and conceptualized relations between people, and between individuals and God, as transactions of emotion governed by contract. Religion became a business relation with God, with prayer as its legal tender. Entering this relationship, they were conducting the "business of the heart." This innovative study shows that the revival--with its commodification of emotional experience--became an occasion for white Protestants to underscore differences between themselves and others. The display of emotion was a primary indicator of membership in the Protestant majority, as much as language, skin color, or dress style. As Corrigan unravels the significance of these culturally constructed standards for emotional life, his book makes an important contribution to recent efforts to explore the links between religion and emotion, and is an important new chapter in the history of religion.

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