

Sermons, Systems and Strategies: The Geographic Strategies of the Methodist Episcopal Church in its Expansion into New York State, 1788 - 1810

Michael G. Nickerson

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Institutions develop geographic strategies in order to diffuse their ideas and organizations. These strategies may be either or both explicit and implicit and involve the generation of organizational structures, the examination of problems and possibilities and the deployment of resources. American Protestant religious institutions expand territorially and numerically by establishing new congregations. Founding methods, operational relationships between judicatories and existing congregations, and deployment processes of six denominations (Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Methodist) in upstate New York before 1810 are explored, with special emphasis on the Methodist Episcopal Church which showed the most successful expansion during that period. A series of maps and charts have been assembled to indicate the diffusion patterns of these six religious institutions. The various time periods examined, 1788 and before, 1789-1793, 1794-1798, 1799-1803, 1804-1810, correspond with significant growth and realignments of Methodist districts. The results of this study show that geographic strategies have directly affected the success and failure of denominational expansion.



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