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Race-Ethnicity in American Politics

March 3, 2016

Key Words:

Discrimination, Integration, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Conformity, Racial Background

Description:

This issue brief seeks to uncover the relationship between bi/multiracial people and minority religions by portraying the ongoing discrimination and segregation within religious practices. It also displays the subjective experience of those who are bi/multiracial and part of a minority religion and conveys the challenges they face.

Key Points:

- The United States prides itself on its diverse population and the fundamental right to freedom of religion, yet, discrimination and segregation based on racial backgrounds takes place within religions.
- Religions within the United States are predominately separated by race.
- While Christianity is not itself a minority religion, the denominations of Christianity along with Islam and Judaism are considered to be minority religions.
- Judaism and Islam are considered to be two of the leading minority religions in the United States that are subject to discrimination by those not affiliated with the religion.
- Integration of races in minority religions would break racial stereotypes associated with religion.

Issue Brief

Bi/MultiRacial & Minority Religions

Although the United States is a nation that prides itself on diversity and religious freedom, ones religious practices and race play a huge factor in American segregation. Due to the correlation between racial background and religion in the United States, many bi/multiracial Americans share comparable issues in the fact that they have a hard time assimilating to religions which are dominated by one racial background even if that racial background is a minority. Thus, through the lens of minority religions one can see

how racial backgrounds play a significant factor in an individual's choice of religious association.

The three most popular religions in America are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. According to the Religious Landscape Study the majority of Americans identify as some denomination under Christianity at 70.6% while other religions combined, excluding those who do not identify with any religion, comes out to 5.9%. Within that 5.9% there are Jews at 1.9% and Muslims at .9%. According to Religion facts, 58% of the total 84% Latinos identify as Catholic, and 78% of the total 85% of Blacks are Protestants. There is a seemingly noticeable amount of the total Latino and Black population that identify with Catholicism and Protestant respectively. This data suggests that religious preference is largely based on racial background because people of a common racial background, although not entirely, often identify with the same religious preference. It is unclear whether these groups of people chose their religion based on actual belief or if their racial identity plays a factor in their decision. It can be very hard for people to go against their racial identities out of fear of backlash by their own people and out of fear of not being accepted by the group that they are actively choosing to identify with. Nonetheless, there is an evident divide between racial background and religion in the United States today.

Although there is technically no national religion in America, the founding principles of America align with principles associated with Christianity, so it is no surprise that Christianity is the most dominant religion in the United States. However, Judaism and Islam are a different story. Even though Judaism and Christianity share many commonalities in their history, Judaism is considered to be a minority religion

adopted to the United States. Most Jews in the United States fall under the racial category of white. However, those who do not fall under the white category are some sort of bi/multiracial identity. While Judaism is already a minority religion in America which subjects it to more discrimination than that of Christianity and most of its minority denominations, those who are bi/multiracial within Judaism are even more prone to racial and religious discrimination. The complexities of Judaism can be seen because, “Jews have been preoccupied with finding proper terms to describe their Jewishness... Whether Jews described themselves as a nation, a race, or merely a religious group depend on the opportunities and pressures presented by their participation in the wider world” (Goldstein 29). Because Judaism is a minority religion that has a very narrow racial makeup, Jews have had a difficult time assimilating and trying to find their place within the intricacies of the United States and thus have been subject to discrimination. At the same time, Judaism has such a small racial make up because many Jews see themselves as a race and not a religion and so Judaism may seem uninviting to those who do not identify with its racial background.

In recent years, the spread of Islam in the United States is occurring at a rapid pace, and consequently is becoming very racially diverse. According to Teaching Tolerance, whose goal is to advocate for acceptance of all and any religion, “Approximately one third of the [Muslim] community is African-American, one third is of South Asian descent, one quarter is of Arab descent, and the rest are from all over the world, including a growing Latino Muslim population” (Teaching Tolerance). Even though the racial demographics of Islam are very diverse, Islam is still prone to racism, possibly even more than that of Judaism. Muslim American’s make up such a small percentage

(.9%) of the total population and because of the negative connotation associated with Islam, it is prone to religious segregation. Even though American Muslims are an “integral part of American society” and Islam has a growing diverse population, it is the religion that is associated with many racial slurs and stereotypes (Teaching Tolerance). Despite its racial diversity, Islam is widely associated with people who come from the middle east due to events such as 9/11/2001. Terrorist attacks such as 9/11 have created a stigma to the Islamic culture, specifically those who look middle eastern, that is not representative of what the religion stands for. Muslims and the religion of Islam in general are crucified in the sense that they are isolated from society and branded based on their religious preference and not the content of their character.

Although religion does not and should not have to be specific to any one racial background, people have conformed to society’s norms and thus strengthened the correlation between racial background and religion. However, if bi/multiracial people who associate themselves or see themselves as part of a minority religion were accepted by the people of that religion, social norms and stereotypes would be counteracted and the diversification would help spread and strengthen minority religions in the United States. If religion was viewed in terms of its ideology rather than its racial demographics there would be no religious boundaries. People would be able to worship whatever religion they truly identify with rather than the religion that they racially identify with.

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