

The (Not So Great) Color Wall of the United States

Race and Religion in Contemporary Times

1. How much racial separation is there in American religion?
2. Why does racial separation in religion exist?
3. Does racial separation in religious life matter, and if so, how?
4. What do we know about multiracial congregations?
5. How can they help us understand religion and race?

A few years ago, Bishop Fred Caldwell, pastor of the Greenwood Acres Full Gospel Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, a large African-American congregation, offered a unique proposal. He offered to *pay* non-Blacks to attend his church. So adamant was he that his church should not be segregated that Bishop Caldwell announced that for at least one month he would pay non-Blacks \$5 per hour to attend the multiple-hour Sunday morning service and \$10 an hour to attend the church's Thursday night service. And he would pay this money out of his own pocket. Bishop Caldwell told the Associated Press, "This idea is born of God. God wants a rainbow in his church." He said that the inspiration came to him during a sermon. "Our churches are too segregated, and the Lord never intended for that to happen," Caldwell told *USA Today*. "It's time for something radical. . . . I just want the kingdom of God to look like it's supposed to" (Boston 2003, Maxwell 2003).

Pay people to attend worship services? When we asked people what they thought of Bishop Caldwell's offer, we certainly got responses! To many people, paying people to worship was outrageous. Others thought the idea was brilliant and a good way to draw attention to racial segregation in houses of worship across the nation. Still others thought that the Bishop should not focus on the race of the people who attended his church, but

merely minister to whoever attended. They found his "religious affirmative action" deeply troubling. Discussion spread beyond the Bishop's simple offer to whether the racial makeup of congregations matters. Does it? And are religious places of worship really racially segregated? Let's look at this in more depth.

HOW SEGREGATED ARE RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS?

For a long time, when people studied race relations and inequality, they did not consider religion. But since well over 100 million Americans attend religious services each week, and since 90% of Americans say they have a religious faith and believe in a higher being, it seems like we ought to consider the role of religion in race relations.

Although many people have noted that our society is most segregated when people meet to worship, when we first tried to find out exactly how segregated it is, the only answer we heard was "very." So my colleagues and I (Emerson) set out to find a more precise answer.

To do so, we decided to study segregation in two ways. First, we defined homogeneous congregations as ones in which 80% or more of the congregation is of the same race and mixed-race congregations as those in which no one racial group makes up 80% or more of the congregation. We used this cut-off of 80% because research that was done with other organizations—such as businesses—found that until a group composes 20% or more of an organization, it lacks the critical mass to make any significant changes in the organization (Kanter 1977, Pettigrew and Martin 1987).

Armed with these definitions, we used data from a national random sample of congregations. We found that *over 90%* of congregations are racially homogenous. You have to look hard to find a racially mixed congregation in the United States. (See Figure 10.1.)

But where you look is important. As Figure 10.2 shows, the faith tradition matters. Protestants are the least likely to have racially mixed congregations—just over 5%. Catholic congregations are nearly three times more likely to be racially mixed than are Protestant congregations. Because of the small size, we had to combine all the congregations of all other religious traditions—such as Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, and Jewish synagogues—into one category. When we do that, we find that over a quarter of

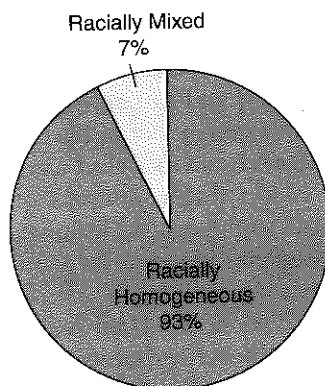


FIGURE 10.1 Racial composition of U.S. congregations.
Source: National Congregations Study.

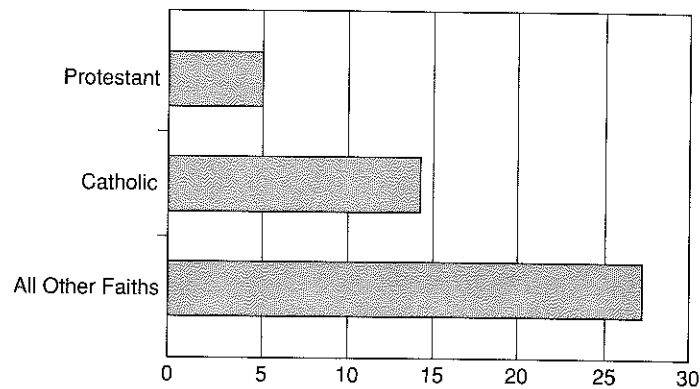


FIGURE 10.2 Percentage of congregations that are racially mixed, by faith tradition.
Source: National Congregations Survey.

them are racially mixed. Why this variation? We found that the larger the religious tradition—that is, the larger the number of people who are involved in that faith and the number of congregations they have to choose from—the more segregated it is. To put it most bluntly, the more choices people have of places to worship, the more they choose to be with people who are racially similar to themselves.

We have a more sophisticated way to study congregational segregation. Instead of just studying whether a congregation is racially mixed, we can examine how diverse congregations are by asking *What is the probability that any two randomly selected people in the congregation will be of different races?* In other words, if you were to walk into a congregation, write the name of each person in attendance on a little slip of paper, put those slips of paper into your hat, mix them up, and then, with your eyes closed, draw out two people's names, how often will they be people of different racial groups (according to social definitions of race)? Fifty percent of the time, perhaps, or maybe 30 percent of the time?

Rather than using a hat and slips of paper, we used a statistical formula and a computer. We found that the average (median) diversity of a congregation in the United States is *only* .02. That means that the probability that any two randomly selected people in a congregation will be of different races is only 2%.

To put that number in context, we did the same calculations for the nation's neighborhoods and schools, both of which are themselves highly segregated. We found that the probability that two randomly selected people from a U.S. neighborhood would be of different races was .20 (20%). In U.S. schools, the probability is .40 (40%). Thus, religious congregations are *10 times less diverse* than the neighborhoods in which they reside and *20 times less diverse* than the nation's public schools. When Martin Luther King, Jr. said that religious congregations are the most segregated institutions in the United States, he wasn't kidding. Forget the color line. When it comes to religion in the United States, we have a color wall. Just as China has its Great Wall, so does the United States (Emerson 2006).

SO WHAT IF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS ARE SEGREGATED?

Most of us know intuitively that houses of worship are segregated. We now know just how segregated. But the next logical question is, "So what?" Does it make any difference for race relations and inequality? It does, dramatically so.

Religion has a great deal of potential for mitigating racial division and inequality. Most religions teach people to love and respect one another and to support the equality of all people. They usually teach that racial prejudice and discrimination are wrong. They often proclaim the need to embrace all people. They speak of the need for fairness and justice. They often teach that selfishness and self-serving behaviors are counter to the will of the divine. In the United States, religious faith motivated the fight against slavery. It played an essential role in the Civil Rights movement. It directs people to value openness and diversity. It motivates believers to take action to reduce racial separation and injustice, for example, by voting in ways that will overcome racial inequality, by volunteering for groups that work against racial hate and discrimination, by forming organizations that are intent on reducing inequality and strengthening justice, or by donating money to such organizations.

Stories about the positive actions of religious people and organizations to combat racial division and inequality abound. But despite all those efforts, congregations themselves remain segregated. That segregation creates a powerful countervailing influence that limits, and sometimes even undoes, much of the good work we have just described.

Keep in mind that there is a difference between macro and micro effects. In a way, religion plays a contradictory role by strengthening microlevel ties among people but weakening macrolevel ties. Shared religious belief and practice strengthens microlevel bonds among individuals in the group and reduces diversity within groups. But while religion strengthens the group internally, it simultaneously heightens the group's isolation from other groups. It creates a social distance between members of the religious group and outsiders. This in turn reduces opportunities for members of a given religious group to form macrolevel bonds with outside individuals or groups. Forming those macro bonds is essential if we are to racially integrate society as whole. Though many religious groups vocally support racial integration and equality, they do not *practice* it.

Why does this matter? The racial segregation of religious groups inhibits movement between groups. It also increases the importance of group boundaries and social differences. When congregations are racially segregated, there is less opportunity for intergroup mobility (through intermarriage, for example) and more importance is placed on racial boundaries, separate racial identities, and other differences between groups. So, though many in the religious community call for and work toward an end to racial division, the very organization of religion into segregated congregations undercuts their efforts.

Racial segregation of religious groups affects how we see ourselves and others. The separate groups that are produced by the segregation of congregations end up representing categories as each group seeks to define its own identity and finds that it defines itself not only by religious and other views, by also, perhaps without direct intention, by race. According to scholars David Hamilton and Tina Trier (1986, 188), categorization has important implications:

The social categories we develop are more than convenient groupings of individuals that simplify the actual diversities among the people we observe and encounter. They are also categories that can bias the way we process information, organize and store it in memory, and make judgments about members of those social categories.

We all consistently engage in social comparison (Am I smart? Who is good looking? Who has money?), and research links this categorization process to at least seven biases

(Hewstone, Jaspers, and Lalljee 1992; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Howard and Ro 1980; Linville, Salovey, and Fischer 1986; Tajfel 1978; Taylor 1981; Wilder 1981):

1. Our brains exaggerate the similarities of in-group members to one another and differences from out-group members. We see ourselves as more like other group members than may be true and very much unlike those who are outside our group.
2. Because people recognize the out-group by its perceived differences, out-group members are identified by those differences, overly homogenizing them. That is, we often overlook the diversity that exists outside our own group, instead assuming that all of "them" are alike.
3. Even when they perform exactly the same actions, in-group members are evaluated more positively and out-group members are evaluated more negatively. For example, if members of both groups build houses that look exactly the same, we tend to evaluate the house built by our in-group member as superior to the one built by the out-group member. In-group favoritism causes us to see the members of our group as better organized, more skilled, more cooperative, and simply more gifted at all tasks.
4. We attribute positive behavior of in-group members to internal traits such as intelligence and excuse negative behavior as a result of external causes such as a poor home life. We do exactly the opposite for out-group members, attributing positive behavior to effects outside the person's control and blaming negative behavior on personal characteristics.
5. Cognitive psychologists find that we have better memories for negative out-group behaviors than for negative in-group behaviors. For instance, we tend to remember when someone belonging to an out-group sings badly, but we forget when members of our own group do so.
6. Because our brains tend to overly homogenize out-groups, a negative behavior by an out-group member is likely to be perceived as a characteristic of the entire out-group. We make the leap from "James of Group X shoplifted" to "Group X shoplifts." We are less likely to do that if James is a member of our own group.
7. Once people have preconceived stereotypes of an out-group, they tend to recall only information that confirms their stereotypes and to dismiss contradictory evidence as an exception. We might have a relative, for example, who maintained that African Americans were lazy, shiftless liars, even though one of the closest friends of this relative was African American. The relative's explanation? Her friend was not like other African Americans; she was the exception.

Religion contributes to racial division and inequality because it creates the very condition—racial segregation in an important social setting—that feeds the practice of racial categorization and the errors in perception that follow from it.

Racial segregation of religious groups also affects with whom—and how—we interact by creating another sort of bias, the ethical paradox of group loyalty. The paradox is that even if a group of people is composed of loving, unselfish individuals, the group transmutes individual unselfishness into group selfishness with respect to the outside world.

What does that mean in English? Imagine two groups. Each member is a deeply committed religious person, full of love and concern for others, and each has developed a friendship or two with people of other groups. For historical reasons, one group has more social goods—income, wealth, education, and power—than the other group.

Although they are both composed entirely of unselfish individuals, the two groups will continue to be divided and unequal. How can this be?

This question was explored by Reinhold Niebuhr way back in 1932 in his book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. He wrote that direct contact with members of other groups is limited—it's always less than the amount of contact one has with members of one's own group. People thus know the members of their own group and their needs more deeply, fully, and personally than they know the members and needs of the other groups. Therefore, they attend to the needs of their own group first, precisely because they are moral and loving. How can they turn their backs on the needs of their own group in favor of another group? At the individual level, selfishness is usually considered negative, but at the group level, when it results in ranking the needs of in-group members over those of out-group members, it is considered moral and just. Indeed, at the group level, it is not selfishness, but morality, service, sacrifice, and loyalty.

We find evidence of this phenomenon every day. Consider families. Although people are considered to be selfish if they always look out for their own individual needs first, it is considered wrong and immoral for them not to consider the needs of their own families first, ahead of other families. Parents would be considered immoral if they did not put food on the table for their own children first, before caring for outsiders. Only if they had extra money would it be reasonable for them to consider helping other children.

So the members of the over 300,000 congregations in the United States are busy creating their group identities and forming moral persons. Those moral persons, acting ethically, help their own families and the members of their own congregations first, making sure those needs are met before looking elsewhere to see which other people might need help. Because of racial segregation in congregations, this practice means that we largely help people of our own race. Whites help whites, African Americans help African Americans, Asians help Asians, Latinos help Latinos, and so on.

The problem with this pattern is that it maintains the inequality among groups. Members of groups who have the most resources share them with others who belong to their own group. Members of groups who have the least are busy trying to meet the needs of others in their group, which, because the group as a whole has less, are typically bigger needs that members are trying to meet with less. It is a nasty cycle, even though the people involved are doing their best.

We also have another problem, according to Niebuhr. Because the members of a group cannot understand and appreciate the needs of another group as completely and deeply as they do the needs of their own group, it is practically impossible for love, compassion, and persuasion to overcome group divisions and inequalities. For this reason, relations between groups are mainly political rather than ethical or moral. (Wow, reflect on this statement—it's a doozy.) As Niebuhr (1932, *xxii-xxiii*) says, relations between groups "will always be determined by the proportion of power that each group possesses at least as much as by any rational and moral appraisal of the comparative needs and claims of each group."

The facts that we have just considered have important implications for the perpetuation of racial inequality and stratification. The logic is straightforward. (1) In the United States there is racial inequality in access to valued resources (e.g., white Americans have about 10 times the average wealth of Black and Latino Americans). (2) Access to valued resources—such as jobs, prestige, wealth, and power—is gained in significant part

through social ties (Hechter 1987). (3) For reasons such as social categorization, comparison, and the paradox of in-group loyalty, people have positive bias for their in-group and negative bias for out-groups. These three facts suggest that—other factors being equal—any social structure or process that both increases the saliency of group boundaries and reduces interracial ties necessarily reproduces racial inequality. Because the organization of religion in the United States heightens the salience of racial boundaries and reduces interracial ties, it necessarily reproduces racial inequality (Emerson and Smith 2000).

CAN WE FIND A SOLUTION?

So is that it? Can religion really only entrench and amplify the racial divisions and inequalities that already exist? That would be a pretty disappointing conclusion. But that is not the final word. Consider for a moment: How could religion change so that it could actually move toward reducing racial division and inequality?

If all the evidence against positive effects of religion is built on the foundation of segregated congregations, what if congregations were not segregated? Could positive changes for racial division and inequality result?

My colleagues and I spent a number of years trying to figure this out. We did so by studying multiracial congregations (the 7% of congregations from Figure 10.1). For comparative purposes, we also studied racially homogenous congregations. We conducted telephone interviews, mail surveys, and face-to-face interviews, and we spent lots of time in congregations across the country. Emerson even spent nearly six years in one congregation as it transformed from an all-white congregation to one that no longer had a majority racial group and that included members from well over 40 nations.

Social Ties

The first difference we noticed between racially mixed and segregated congregations was just how many more friendships across race there were among the people in racially mixed congregations. An African-American woman from Chicago who was a member of a multiracial congregation called Crosstown said,

I grew up in a predominantly black church and neighborhood. Crosstown has taught me about other races of people. [The diversity at Crosstown] helped me to develop relationships with people outside my race where I felt they were my friend and we share Christ in our life and that they have the same struggles as I do. . . . I've gotten to know other people on that more personal level.

To test more systematically whether these interracial friendships occur in racially mixed congregations, we conducted a national survey that included several questions about the racial composition of people's friends and acquaintances. We classified respondents into three groups: those who were attending racially homogenous congregations, those who were attending racially mixed congregations, and those who were not attending any congregation. One of our questions asked people to think of their circle of friends, the people with whom they like to spend time with whom they keep in regular contact (friends from their congregation, neighborhood, work, childhood, etc.). Were all, most, about half, some, or none of the people in their circle of friends the same race as they were?

What did we find? Of the respondents who were attending racially homogenous congregations, 83% said that most or all of their friends were the same race as they were. Of the respondents who were not attending any congregation, 70% said that most or all of their friends were the same race as they were. Here we see a general pattern: Religion often serves to intensify general patterns in larger society. If society is segregated, religion can intensify that segregation through a variety of ways, but certainly by providing yet another plane of segregation—its congregations.

What about people attending racially mixed congregations? We found a dramatic difference in their replies. Whereas 83% of people from homogenous congregations and 70% of people who did not attend a congregation said that most or all of their friends were the same race as they were, only 36% of people who were attending racially mixed congregation said that most or all of their friends were the same race as them. And we found that those 36% who did say that most of their friends were their own race were relatively recent arrivals to their racially mixed congregations.

This same pattern recurred for every question that we asked about people's relationships with other people. People who were not attending congregations were more likely to be interracial married, to have a best friend of a different race, and to have diverse social networks than are those who attended racially homogenous congregations. But both groups' level of racial diversity in relationships paled greatly compared with that of people in racially mixed congregations.

As mechanisms for punching holes in the color wall, racially mixed congregations seem to be promising. But we shouldn't get ahead of ourselves. For all we know at this point, the folks attending these types of congregations formed their friendships before they joined their mixed congregation. For that matter, perhaps they ended up in such congregations precisely because they had racially diverse friendships in the first place.

So we again set out to find the answer. We went around the country and interviewed about 150 people who were attending racially mixed congregations and, for comparison, about 50 people who were attending racially homogenous congregations. We discovered that people who attend mixed congregations are somewhat more likely to have attended a racially mixed school or lived in a racially mixed neighborhood at one time in their lives. But over 80% of the people in racially mixed congregations said that most of the racial diversity in their friendships came *because of* their involvement in their congregation. Indeed, when we did a fancy statistical analysis called logistic regression, we found that by far the most important factor among people who have racially diverse relationships is whether they attend racially mixed congregations. One Salvadoran immigrant who was living in Los Angeles and attending a racially mixed congregation said that that perhaps 10% of the people she knew before she started attending her church were of different races, but now, "since I have been at this church the majority of my friends are of different races."

This pattern happens for a couple of reasons. First, of course, people make friends with others in their congregation, and if the congregation is racially mixed, the friendships are likely to reflect that diversity. But the effect of these types of congregations goes further. Once they started forming interracial friendships with other members of their congregation, people often met other people in their new friends' networks. For example, Chanel, an African-American woman who attends a racially mixed congregation in the South, met Rosita, a Latina woman who attends the same congregation,

through a women's group at the church. They soon became friends. Rosita began to invite Chanel over to her place for birthday parties or other gatherings. Chanel met and got to know an extended network of other Latinas through Rosita. Chanel also invited Rosita to her place for family gatherings, where Rosita met and became friends with an extended network of other African Americans. Their children too became fast friends, and they often got together so that their children could play together. We found that this sort of pattern made people more confident and comfortable getting to know still others of different racial groups. As one man from the Northeast who attends a racially mixed congregation said, "Being in this church has really opened me up to people of all different backgrounds. Now when I meet people of different races at work, I don't just say hello and move on. I am comfortable to get to know them. I've made new friends at work this way."

Attitudes

Families and friends were attending a celebration service as the culmination of a weekend of youth events at a Baptist church in the Deep South. Sixteen-year-old Chase—white and, due to an accident, in a wheelchair for life—was one of the youths in attendance that weekend. He had not attended any congregation prior to this event, but he had been invited to this youth weekend by a white classmate who belonged to the church. That Sunday, moved by what he had experienced over the past few days, Chase shared with the congregation the fact that he had found a purpose in this congregation: He had made friends with youths of many different races who didn't seem to treat him differently just because he was in a wheelchair. Having talked it over with his parents the day before, he announced, through tears, that he had found a home and that he wanted to become a member of the congregation.

Also in attendance that day were his parents and his older brother, Tre. Tre was a long-time devout skinhead. His head was shaved nearly clean, he had swastika tattoos all around his upper arms, he had a skinhead symbol tattooed on his chest, and he had a noose tattooed on the full length of his left thigh. He didn't like nonwhites at all: "They're whiners, they steal jobs that belong to us, they're lazy, steal, and they have the government always givin' 'em stuff." He was particularly upset at this church that he had come to in support of his brother, Chase. The senior pastor was African American, and the associate pastor was Latino. In fact, in his view the entire congregation was a sickening mix of the different races—black, Latino, Asian, and worst of all, whites. What are whites doing here with these people? he thought. He felt ill at the sight. Why hadn't his brother told him what this congregation was like? And now there was his brother, up at the front, saying that he wanted to become part of this God-forsaken place, even enjoying the support of his parents. UNBELIEVABLE! he thought. He felt angry and claustrophobic. He just wanted to get out of the place. But as he described it to us, then something happened to him.

Seein' the people all come up to hug my brother, seein' his happy face, seein' all these different people singin' together, feelin' the power in that, it was somethin' I ain't never seen or felt before. Not sure how to describe it, just that it felt real, like it was the way things was supposed to be. I felt like some real bad stuff broke inside of me that day. These people weren't all bad people. They were carin' for my brother.

Two weeks later, through tears of his own, Tre joined the church as well and asked the African-American pastor to come with him later that week to get his white supremacy tattoos removed.

Few stories about change in racial attitudes are as dramatic as this one. But researchers have found that there is a pattern of change in the direction of more positive racial attitudes among people who attend these mixed congregations. This change has been found in all racial groups, but especially among whites (Yancey 2001). They are the ones who most often had significant changes in their views, and they are the ones who differ the most from their peers of the same race who are in homogenous congregations. These changes in attitudes seemed to come about due to their newly formed friendships, the lessons they heard in sermons and teachings, and the experience of working with people of different races on common tasks.

These differences between people who attend racially mixed and racially homogenous congregations are found across religious traditions.

Not all multiracial congregations are free of strife, of course. One multiracial mosque in the Midwest had to deal with a serious problem. Members of the congregation included people from nations who thought that you must *always* remove your shoes when you enter the mosque, and people from others nations who thought that you must *never* insult Allah by removing your shoes when you enter the mosque. Pretty easy to see we've got a conflict here. Folks took the shoe issue very seriously, because it was tied to what they saw as the proper way to worship. And because the shoe issue was related to nationality, ethnicity, and race, the problem quickly became destructive. People in one group took such offense at the other group's behavior that the mosque leaders decided to put up a screen to divide the shoe removers from the shoe wearers, even though this also divided people by ethnicity and race. But they did not intend to keep the screen there permanently. After the screen was installed, the imam began to teach that Allah calls all Muslims to be together, regardless of race, ethnicity, and worship approach. He urged them therefore to find a way to unite in their mosque. They would all have to remove their shoes, all wear their shoes, or—the solution he proposed—all accept that whatever other people in the congregation do, they do out of reverence for Allah, not because they are from an inferior ethnicity or culture. Over time, the worshippers came to accept this view, and the screen was eventually removed, even though some people continued to remove their shoes and some continued to wear their shoes. Friendships across cultures formed, and the attitudes that people held about the different groups attending their mosque became more favorable.

Raised Status

This example is related to yet another difference that we have found between mixed congregations and homogenous ones. The congregation that Emerson spent years studying made a commitment to go on mission and service trips to each of the nations from which members of the congregation hailed. The appointed leaders of each trip were the people from that particular country. The senior pastor of the congregation told us that this system worked wonders to broaden the views of his congregants. A Guatemalan cleaning lady who can barely speak English may be easy to marginalize in the U.S. context, but when she was the leader on the trip to Guatemala, she became the person who was fluent in the language, who knew the lay of the land, who had the social connections, who knew

what to eat and what to avoid. She came to be seen—this pastor and his congregants told us—in a substantially new light. She was important, she had skills they did not have, and they were dependent on her. As a result of evening discussions while they were on these trips, the congregants came to conclude that social context, not a person's essence, shapes other people's views of that person's worth and skills. Within multiracial congregations, we found, the status of racially different individuals is often raised in the eyes of their fellow worshippers.

As you will recall, segregated congregations contribute to maintaining socioeconomic inequality. But we found that there was a different pattern in many mixed-race congregations. Because of the social ties that existed between people and their more inclusive attitudes toward others of different races, the average educational level, income, and occupational status of people in these congregations—especially for people belonging to traditionally marginalized groups—were higher than those of their counterparts who did not attend such congregations.

Again, we wondered, was this the case before they came to the congregation? We found that a great deal happened in these congregations that elevated the socioeconomic status of people after they joined. They made connections, found childcare, and often received funding that allowed them to get further schooling. People were hired for jobs that, if they had not been members, they might never have known about or have had a chance of obtaining, and they were hired because of their connections to others in the congregation who were well placed in the labor market. Multiracial congregations also seem to help people accrue resources that improve their access to good health care, neighborhoods, schools, and other social goods. Mixed-race congregations, then, seem to actually reduce the racial divide in inequality.

Bridge Organizations and Sixth Americans

Mixed-race congregations are bridge organizations. That is, they gather and facilitate social ties that cross racial boundaries, creating a "natural" setting where people of different racial groups meet and form relationships while they pursue a common purpose. (If you have ever studied contact theory, you'll know that these types of congregations easily meet the conditions that are necessary for forming friendships and reducing prejudice.) The average person in a mixed-race congregation is so different from the average American outside these congregations that Emerson calls them Sixth Americans, a reference to David Hollinger's description of the five melting pots in the United States. People in the United States come from hundreds if not thousands of ethnic backgrounds, but Hollinger (1995) writes that in this country, they are expected to meld into one of five racial melting pots: Indian/Native American, African American/Black, White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino/a, or Asian/Asian American.

But although people in mixed-race congregations often appear to belong phenotypically to one of these five melting pots, they seem to operate outside their particular melting pot in most of their social relations. Sixth Americans live in multiple melting pots simultaneously. To be sure, they are minorities among Americans, living in a world of primary relationships and associations that are racially diverse. Like other Americans, the Sixth American may work in a racially diverse setting, see racially different others at the grocery store, or perhaps have a friend of a different race. But unlike other Americans, the Sixth American's "world of racial diversity" does not stop here. It is not a racially

homogenous world with some diversity sprinkled in, but a racially diverse world with some homogeneity sprinkled in. In his book *People of the Dream*, Emerson argues that these Sixth Americans are a different kind of American altogether. And the congregations where they gather to worship, serve, and support one another—despite the failures we described in Chapter 6—may be harbingers of the future (Emerson 2006).

BUT CAN WE CREATE AND MAINTAIN MULTIRACIAL CONGREGATIONS?

Religion in the United States is divided by a vast, thick, massive color wall. That color wall has had, and continues to have, severe implications for racial division and racial stratification. We have ignored the impact of religion on race for too long. By studying the small percentage of congregations that are racially mixed, we have found that, although there are some risks—such as cultural misunderstandings and the potential for greater racial strife due to conflicts—the overall trend is a reduction in racial division and inequality. These findings further highlight the deleterious effects that segregated congregations have on American race relations.

But it is easy to say that we ought to have more multiracial congregations. The fact is, there are plenty of barriers to creating them even if we all wanted to do so. One problem is the racial homogeneity of some areas in the United States. One of the authors lives and teaches in Bozeman, Montana, where over 90% of the residents are white. It is difficult in such a place to have racially mixed congregations. But most people in the United States live in more racially diverse communities. About 85% of Americans live in metropolitan areas, most of which are racially diverse, and they are becoming more diverse over time.

Another barrier to change is that it is difficult to alter congregations that already have a reputation as a single-race congregation. Remember Bishop Caldwell's offer to pay non-Blacks to attend services at his nearly all-Black congregation? With lightning speed, his offer became known not only all around Shreveport, but around the whole world. Newspapers, radio shows, television shows, and websites reported the story in different nations. Many, many people knew about his offer. What do you think happened? Here is what Bishop Caldwell told a newspaper reporter a year after his initial offer, as reported in an online blog (Rhoades 2004):

"A year later, things are right back where they were. They [non-Blacks] came, they saw, they left and they didn't return."

"And they came from as far away as London and Dallas-Fort Worth," he reminisced. "We had a great time. A lot of white people came, and they went back to their white holes. Because I'll say it again: 11 A.M. on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America."

Bishop Caldwell withstood criticism from some, including a few members of his own church, that his cash offer was just a publicity stunt. The story made headlines around the world, and he's still getting calls about it.

"It was never about the \$5. It was about the need to come together," he said. "But after Aug. 31, it went back to where it was."

"And God," he said, ratcheting up his voice like he does in the pulpit, "is angry with us."

Asked if differing styles of worship were keeping the churches segregated Bishop Caldwell said folks who use that excuse are “hypocrites.”

“First of all, Madonna doesn’t care who’s in her audience, [and] neither does Usher,” he said, referring to two pop culture icons whose music has crossover appeal. “We use ‘style’ as an excuse when it comes to what people don’t want to do.”

Changing the organization of American religion is not easy; apparently, even paying people doesn’t work. But several scholars are now studying how multiracial congregations form, how to minimize costs and accentuate positives in the process of creating a multiracial congregation, and how people come to be in these congregations. If you are interested, we invite you to study books and other articles on this topic. As of this writing, the work of several scholars [see Suggested Readings at the end of this chapter for some specific books] are cutting-edge texts. But much of this work is limited to the Christian context, so future work must explore multiracial principles for other faiths and to discover the more general principles that are true across religions. Humans create their own social structures, so change is possible when humans decide that their current system will no longer do. Will enough people decide to make a change and put enough holes in the color wall to eventually collapse it? Time will tell.

SUGGESTED READING

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