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Michael O. Emerson: People of the Dream

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CHAPTER ONE ■ Dreams

Michael O. Emerson and Edward J. Blum

THIS BOOK is an in-depth study of contemporary multiracial religious congregations. Its goal is to both understand religious life in the United States, and learn something about the future of race relations in the United States. “Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week.” This quip, or some version of it, is said so often that it seems many people have become numb to it. I have never been able to verify who first said it. Some say Martin Luther King; others attribute it to people much before his time. The saying’s meaning—that people are most racially segregated during the time of their religious gathering—is taken as such common knowledge that people usually do not give it much thought.

Despite a world in which racial separation in religious congregations is the norm, some congregations are racially mixed. I thought it would be fascinating to study these congregations, which are rare enough that for many people they are exotic. It seemed to me that by understanding such multiracial gatherings of religious people, we could understand much larger issues at the core of living in this complex and ever-changing place called the United States. This nation, like others, is growing increasingly diverse, both racially and ethnically. Much debate swirls around topics related to this growing diversity, such as the appropriate model for race relations and cultural continuity, and how new immigrant groups will fare relative to racial and ethnic groups already in the United States. Part of this debate is about the role of religious congregations for immigrant groups and group survival. Will they worship in ethnic congregations or in other types of congregations? How about their children? What will this mean for race relations?

Religious congregations are a specific type of organization—a private, volunteer organization—and together these organizations constitute a specific type of institution—what we may call a *mediating institution* between the small private worlds of individuals and families and the large public worlds, such as politics, the educational sys-

Edward J. Blum, a historian of race and religion in the United States, coauthored this chapter.

tem, and the economy. For these reasons and for reasons discussed in the next section, studying multiracial congregations provides an opportunity to better understand larger issues of race, religion, and American identity through organizations and institutions.

We have so many questions that need answering. How do racially mixed congregations come to be? How common are they? Who attends these congregations? How did their members get there? What are their experiences like? What contributions to and detractions from improved race relations and equality, if any, do these congregations make? Do these congregations tell us anything about the changing nature of race and ethnicity, or about religion?

In the chapters to come, based on extensive research, I seek answers to all of these questions. I find that multiracial congregations are atypical, more racially diverse than their neighborhoods, places of racial change, and filled with people who seem to flow across racial categories and divisions. They are filled with a different sort of American. As I explain later in the book, I call them “Sixth Americans,” and they may be harbingers of what is to come in U.S. race relations. I also find that multiracial congregations entail risks—such as the misuse of power to squelch cultural practices and, in some cases, to maintain inequality—and payoffs—such as providing supportive places for cultures to be practiced and taught to a variety of people and, in some cases, to reduce inequality. Whether one thinks multiracial congregations are a “good thing” rests in part on how one evaluates these risks and payoffs.

WHY CONGREGATIONS?

If we want to fully understand race relations in the United States, we must understand the role of religion.¹ If we want to understand religion in the United States, we must understand its core organizational form—the religious congregation. I use the term “religious congregation” to mean any regular gathering of people for religious purposes who come together to worship, have an official name, have a formal structure that conveys a purpose and identity, are open to all ages, and have no restraints on how long people may stay. A gathering of college students on campus every Friday night for worship is not a congregation, then, because, among other reasons, it is only open to students of the college, and its members must leave when they graduate. Congregations are typically associated with a place where the

¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith* (2000).

congregating occurs, but this place — a mosque, temple, church building, synagogue, or any other place of worship — can change as the congregation's size or resources change. There are over 300,000 congregations in the United States, making them the most common and widespread institution in the nation.² They are more common than all McDonald's, Wendy's, Subways, Burger Kings, and Pizza Huts, combined. (In an interesting twist on this fact, when a McDonald's closed a couple of blocks from my home, a Pentecostal congregation bought it. Now instead of serving one-minute hamburgers, the still-McDonald's-looking building serves up fervent three-hour worship services.)

The majority of Americans will regularly participate in or visit a congregation in any given year. In a fifteen-nation study, the United States scored highest in religious membership (55 percent), and had membership rates twenty or more percentage points higher than every other nation in the study except Northern Ireland.³ To varying degrees, more than one hundred million Americans are involved in religious congregations.

Congregations are the places where Americans most often go to seek the meaning of life, to worship, to find direction, and to receive social support. Major life events happen within these groups. Religious congregations are where very many newborns are officially recognized and welcomed into the human community, where Americans most often get married, and where people most often gather to say goodbye to deceased loved ones and friends.

But the role of congregations goes far beyond these essential functions. Clergy and congregations are the number one place Americans turn to when they have serious problems, more than the government or human and health service professionals.⁴ Professor Ram Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work found in his extensive study of congregations that they serve as one of the most critical safety nets for the nation's poor, with three-quarters of congregations having some mechanism for assisting people in economic need.⁵ In fact, in this same study, Cnaan and his colleagues found that congregations provide service in more than 200 areas, including recreational and educational programs, summer day camps for children and youth, scholarships for students, visitation of the elderly

² Cnaan et al., *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* (2002).

³ Curtiss, Grabb, and Baer, "Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries" (1992).

⁴ Cnaan et al. 2002; Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka, *Mental Health in America* (1981).

⁵ Cnaan et al. 2002.

and sick, counseling services, housing construction and repair, neighborhood redevelopment, clothing closets, food pantries, international relief, supporting neighborhood associations, credit unions, community bazaars and fairs, health clinics, and language training.⁶ Furthermore, in the United States more volunteering occurs in and through religious congregations than anywhere else.⁷

In one of the most important works in the study of religious congregations, scholar R. Stephen Warner convincingly argued that congregations are the center of religious life in the United States, and that even religions that are not traditionally congregationally based, such as Buddhism, become so as they adapt to U.S. life.⁸ The last phrase — “as they adapt to U.S. life” — is key to this book. Religious congregations have always occupied a central role in immigrant adaptation and support, the production of culture (music, for example), social network formation, and the production of norms and worldviews. In an impressive study of what congregations do, sociologist Nancy Ammerman shows that most congregations are linked into seven main national networks — Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant, African American Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, Jewish, Sectarian, and Other.⁹ These traditions exist as almost independent worlds, producing their own educational materials, musical styles and songs, conferences, scripture translations, and worldviews. As Robert Wuthnow argued, in addition to race, these traditions, rather than denominations per se, structure the main religious dividing lines.¹⁰

Religious congregations are vital to understanding U.S. life and certainly U.S. race relations. If we want to understand the future of race relations, one place we must look is inside the multiracial congregations. For while the role of racially segregated congregations in race relations has been made transparent, no large-scale study of racially mixed congregations has until now been undertaken. One

⁶ See chapter 4 of Cnaan et al. 2002. Also see Chaves 2004; Cnaan 1997; Grettenberger and Hovmand 1997; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993; Silverman 2000. In his impressive national study of congregations, Chaves (2004, chapter 3) shows that while congregations are involved in social service and in a significant number of areas, the average congregation’s social service work typically is limited to short-term, emergency aid of food, shelter, and clothing. When congregations are more extensively involved, it is usually in partnership with secular and government agencies.

⁷ Nancy Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith* (2005); Robert Wuthnow, *Learning to Care* (1995); Wuthnow and Evans (eds.), *The Quiet Hand of God* (2002).

⁸ R. Stephen Warner. “The Place of the Congregation in American Religious Configuration” (1994).

⁹ Ammerman 2005, chapter 1.

¹⁰ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988).

can find books that study a single multiracial congregation, comparative studies that look at three or six or even thirty or more multiracial congregations, practical how-to books, and theological books about multiracial congregations.¹¹ These are important works to be sure, but all of these studies rely on personal observation and reflection, or on nonrandom samples of a few congregations, or on qualitative data only, or are not systematically analyzed from a social scientific perspective. This study differs in that it uses both quantitative and qualitative data from a random sample of congregations—both multiracial and uniraical—and a random sample of people in congregations, plus in-depth study and interviews. Using these methods and data allow us to outline the contours of multiracial congregations, place them in the context of all religious congregations, and understand, at least minimally, their role in race relations and racial (in)equality. Yet, before embarking on a contemporary study of multiracial congregations, we first must understand the historical context. Have multiracial congregations existed in the past?

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In 2003, Bishop Fred A. Caldwell, pastor of Shreveport, Louisiana's Greenwood Acres Full Gospel Baptist Church, a large African American congregation, put forth a unique proposal. He was offering to *pay* non-blacks to attend his church. Adamant that his church should not be segregated, Bishop Caldwell said that for at least one month he would pay non-blacks five dollars per hour to attend the multiple-hour Sunday morning service, and ten dollars 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 the inspiration came to him during a sermon. "The most segregated hour in America is Sunday morning at 11 o'clock. The Lord is tired of it, and I'm certainly tired of it. This is not right."¹²

This story was first reported in the local Shreveport newspaper, but was soon picked up by papers across the country. The day the story

¹¹ For example, see Ammerman and Farnsley 1997; Anderson 2004; Becker 1998; Christensen, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Davis 1980; Fong 1996; Foster 1997; Foster and Brelsford 1996; Gratton 1989; Jenkins 2003; Kujawa-Holbrook 2002; Law 1993, 2000, 2002; Marti 2005; Ortiz 1996; Parker 2005; Peart 2000; Pocock and Henriques 2002; Rhodes 1998.

¹² From the online article, "At Long Last, Going to Church Finally Pays," by John Boston (2003).

appeared in *USA Today*, ten people sent me on-line links to the article, many with an e-mail subject heading like, “You’ve got to see this!” The story was soon the talk on radio airwaves and television outlets, both locally and nationally. Internet chat rooms were talking about it, and people were debating it at the proverbial water cooler.

Pay people to attend worship services? To many, paying people to worship seemed outrageous. Others thought the idea was brilliant, highlighting the racial segregation in houses of worship across the nation. Still others thought 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 this simple offer to pay people to attend one church, and turned to whether the racial makeup of congregations matters. Shortly after this story hit the national news, I was a guest on a two-hour radio call-in show in Baltimore. The show’s hosts opened by discussing Bishop Caldwell’s offer to pay non-blacks to come to his church, and featured the more general topic of congregational segregation and multiracial congregations. The issue touched a hot button among the listeners. The hosts kept commenting that their lines were lit up, jammed full. I could hear and feel that the callers were passionate about this topic.

When the first “post-pay-to-attend-offer” Sunday service was held, reporters were eager to see the results. The headlines told the story: “Few Take Pastor Up on Offer,” said one headline. A year after the offer, though, some effect could be seen. According to a report in one magazine, about two dozen whites were attending the congregation, and five whites had become members.¹³

Bishop Caldwell’s quest to create a multiracial congregation amid the strong norm of church segregation is part of a long history in American religious practice and life. Caldwell was accurate in identifying Sunday morning as a time when people of different races rarely joined together. But worship time has never been completely segregated. From the seventeenth century, when scores of British colonists first trekked into North America, to the beginning of the twenty-first century, some whites and blacks have worshiped alongside one another.¹⁴ Historically, racially mixed churches have often been marked by profound racial discrimination, as black men and women either were forced by their white masters to attend church

¹³ Olson, Ted. 2004.

¹⁴ Throughout this book, “whites” and “blacks” mean non-Hispanic whites and blacks. Hispanics/Latinos can be of any racial group, according to the present U.S. government definition, but in this work they are treated as a separate racial group.

with them during slavery or were separated from whites in balconies or back rows. Even after the abolition of slavery and the legalization of racial segregation, however, some whites and blacks continued to challenge racism and prejudice by joining together in churches and religious organizations.

When the first wave of British settlers and African servants arrived in the New World, there was little church interaction between them. Very few of the British colonists attended church services regularly, while even fewer of the Africans were Christians. The vast majority of imported Africans either maintained their traditional tribal faiths or maintained the Muslim beliefs to which they had previously converted in Africa. Because of prior missionary activity, a few were Catholics.¹⁵ The first Great Awakening during the middle of the eighteenth century, however, drastically altered this pattern by bringing blacks and whites together in a religious context. Evangelical preachers such as John Wesley and George Whitefield highlighted the individual's relationship to God, proclaiming that each individual is tainted with sin and each has the opportunity to experience new birth in Christ. Whitefield, who led massive revivals along the Eastern seaboard and became a national celebrity, maintained that since whites and blacks were equally mired in sin, they were both "naturally capable of the same improvement." John Wesley assured one elderly slave that in heaven, she would "want nothing, and have whatever you can desire. No one will beat or hurt you there. You will never be sick. You will never be sorry any more, nor afraid of anything." To these evangelicals, one's place in the kingdom of man bore no relation to one's place in the kingdom of God—rich or poor, white or black, master or slave, all would be equal in Heaven.¹⁶

The egalitarian implications of evangelical teachings were not lost on many slaves. John Wesley and George Whitefield marveled at the numbers of African Americans who flocked to hear them preach. Poet Phillis Wheatley, a New England slave who had converted to Protestant Christianity, acknowledged the ways in which African Americans heard a racially radical message in Whitefield's teachings. In a poem to honor the evangelist, she imagined Whitefield as specifically calling to African descendents:

¹⁵ Jon Butler, *Awash in the Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (1990); Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (1998); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (1997).

¹⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (1978); Frey and Wood 1998, chapter 4.

Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you,
 Impartial Saviour is his title due:
 Wash'd in the fountain of redeeming blood,
 You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God.

To Wheatley and other African Americans, evangelical Protestantism taught that an “Impartial Saviour” represented a God who called all of his followers to be “sons, and kings, and priests.”¹⁷

The number of African American members of Protestant denominations rose impressively in the wake of the revivals. (The number of black Catholics was minute during this time.) In 1786, there were slightly fewer than 2,000 African American members of Methodist churches, equaling about 10 percent of the total Methodist membership. More than 12,000 African Americans had enlisted in Methodist churches by 1797, comprising about 25 percent of the denomination’s total membership. A similar pattern existed in the Baptist churches. By 1793, blacks made up about one quarter of Baptist congregations.¹⁸

After the American colonists won their independence from Great Britain, the revolutionary ideology that all men were created equal, coupled with a reduced need for slaves, led the northern states to gradually abolish slavery in their states. This helped create a substantial group of free African Americans, many of whom continued to attend churches with whites. In the South, whites, slaves, and a small number of free blacks also participated in religious communities together. In both regions, however, some whites chafed at worshiping alongside African Americans. In Philadelphia in the 1790s, for instance, free African Americans who worshipped at St. George’s Methodist Church found themselves mistreated by white leaders. Richard Allen, a free black Methodist minister, vividly remembered the encounter where whites forcefully sought to move the black congregants:

[T]he elder said, “Let us pray.” And we had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H—— M——, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off his knees, and saying “You must get up—you must not kneel here.” Mr. Jones said, “Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.” With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L—— S—— to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and

¹⁷ Phillis Wheatley, “Elegiac Poem, on the Death of That Celebrated Divine, and Eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the Reverend and Learned George Whitefield (1770).

¹⁸ Raboteau 1978, p. 131.

we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.

Led by Allen and Absalom Jones, these African Americans proceeded to establish their own independent churches and to create two new denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.¹⁹

Although these all-black denominations grew in size and strength during the early nineteenth century, and although whites often forced African Americans who remained in mixed congregations to occupy separate areas, many blacks and whites continued to worship together. In the South, not only were multiracial churches places where blacks and whites interacted, but they also provided judicial systems where all members could bring suits for inappropriate behavior against one another. There were clear hierarchies among congregational members, though, and African Americans did not have as many rights as whites. Whites and blacks who worshiped together also seemed to hear quite different messages. Southern white clergy generally stressed obedience and faithfulness during sermons and Sunday school lessons for their African American congregants. Many southern blacks, however, found biblical tales of liberation far more compelling. One black maid clearly understood Christianity as a faith of freedom when she told her mistress, “*God never made us to be slaves for white people.*”²⁰

Still, racism saturated interracial religious interaction in both the South and the North. As a slave in Maryland, Frederick Douglass attended church services and revivals with his white masters and overseers, and he participated in household devotions as well. Douglass found that the whites who displayed their Christianity most in public were the same individuals who sought to thwart African American expressions of faith. It was Douglass’s “Christian master” who repeatedly stopped him from teaching a Sunday school class for other slaves. Yet even when Douglass fled to Boston, he could not escape racial prejudice in the churches. What he encountered in interracial northern congregations appalled him. In one church that he attended, the black members were only allowed to take communion after the white congregants had taken the sacrament and had been dismissed. “[T]he result was most humiliating,” Douglass recalled. He left this church never to return. “I went *out*, and have never been in that church since, although I honestly went there with a view to

¹⁹ Rt. Rev. Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (1983), p. 25.

²⁰ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (1977), p. 221.

joining that body. I found it impossible to respect the religious profession of any who were under the dominion of this wicked prejudice, and I could not, therefore, feel that in joining them, I was joining a Christian church, at all.”²¹

Had Douglass attended Catholic Mass, he would have found similar practices. It was not uncommon for free persons of color to have to wait to make their devotions until whites had completed theirs and for slaves to have to wait until free persons of color finished before making their devotions.²²

Black congregations in the North and secret religious meetings held by southern slaves became important settings in which African Americans worshiped freely and crafted their own interpretations of Christianity. After observing racial discrimination in several other mixed churches, Douglass decided to join, in his words, “a small body of colored Methodists, known as the Zion Methodists. Favored with the affection and confidence of the members of this humble communion, I was soon made a class-leader and a local preacher among them. Many seasons of peace and joy I experienced among them, the remembrance of which is still precious.” Apart or hidden from whites, African Americans enjoyed spiritual communion with less fear of white violence and oppression. They could also proclaim openly their faith in a God who would liberate them. “We wish you to consider, that God himself was the first pleader of the cause of slaves,” Richard Allen preached. “God, who knows the hearts of all men, and the propensity of a slave to hate his oppressor, hath strictly forbidden it to his chosen people.”²³

With the end of slavery in the United States following the Civil War, roughly four million Southern blacks celebrated their newfound freedom. For many of them, freedom from their masters also meant freedom from worshiping with whites. Given the context of inequality, the vast majority of former slaves were not interested in integrated congregations, and more than one-half of blacks who had worshipped with white Southerners had left mixed churches by the end of 1866. This great “exodus” and the establishment of African American congregations throughout the South provided freed men and women much-needed social and religious autonomy from southern whites. These congregations served as locations for unified social and political activities where African Americans debated public issues, formed

²¹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1868 [1855]), 353–54.

²² Curtiss DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as a Response to the Problem of Race* (2003), chapter 3.

²³ Douglass 1968 [1855], 353–54; Allen 1983, p. 70.

consensus, and elected representatives. As historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham maintains, “the church itself became the domain for the expression, celebration, and pursuit of a black collective will and identity.” Black ministers focused on political issues of particular relevance to African Americans, while church magazines devoted themselves to “the interests of the Negro Race in general.”²⁴

Although separating themselves from white congregations, most blacks did not seek to bar whites from joining the newly formed African American churches. The black church was a segregated institution, but not a *segregating* one.²⁵ Following the Civil War, some whites participated in predominately African American congregations. When over 3,000 white men and women from the Northern states traveled to the war-ravaged lands of Dixie as missionaries to the freedpeople, they worked alongside African Americans in a variety of venues: they established schools together, they labored on farms together, and they attended worship services together. For a number of white missionaries, moments of interracial religious community moved them emotionally and spiritually. One New England white woman wrote that she was struck when a freed person “prayed for black and white, for rich and poor, for bond and free.” Another female missionary was equally touched when a local elder “prayed that ‘the little white sisters who came to give learning to the children might be blessed.’” A missionary in Mississippi probably summed up the impact of interracial worship most poignantly when she recalled, “As I walked home in the beautiful moonlight, I could but think that perhaps God was as well pleased with that lowly group in the humble cabin, as with many a gilded throng in splendid cathedrals.”²⁶

During the decades following the Civil War, racial segregation became entrenched in state and local laws throughout the South. Jim Crow statutes dictated that whites and blacks should be separated in almost every public arena. Most African Americans lost their voting privileges; they were forced to attend poorly funded schools; and they were barred from restrooms, restaurants, libraries, hospitals, and railroad cars that were reserved for whites. The late nineteenth century also witnessed increasing segregation in congregations. The evange-

²⁴ Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (1991); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (1993); J. R. Oldfield, ed., *Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South* (1995), p. 37.

²⁵ Liston Pope, “Caste in the Church: I. The Protestant Experience” (1947a), p. 60.

²⁶ Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (2005), chapter 2.

list Dwight Moody, founder of the Moody Bible Institute, did not segregate his revivals in northern cities, but in the 1880s and 1890s he accepted racial separation in the South. In response, African American ministers roundly criticized him for religiously energizing Jim Crow. As one African Methodist Episcopal Church leader put it, “His conduct toward the Negroes during his Southern tour has been shameless, and I would not have him preach in a barroom, let alone a church. In Charleston he refused to give the Negro churches representation at his evangelical meetings.” Moody, this minister fumed, had “placed caste above Christianity.” At the same time, southern white evangelicals such as Methodist preacher Sam Jones openly bragged about bullying African American voters and endorsed the Ku Klux Klan.²⁷

The loss of political rights led many African Americans to prize their own religious congregations even more dearly. Black churches became “havens in a heartless world” where African American culture was celebrated, not castigated. They were places where men and women of color celebrated themselves as children of God in defiance of an American society that treated them as pariahs. For these reasons—and because they were one of the few organizations that African Americans could control for themselves—black churches became central locations of political and social activity. In his pioneering work of urban sociology, *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois described the black church as “a centre of social life and intercourse.” It “acts as newspaper and intelligence bureau, is the centre of amusements—indeed, is the world in which the Negro moves and acts. So far-reaching are these functions of the church that its organization is almost political.” Along with Du Bois, two other African American leaders, Mary Church Terrell and Kelly Miller, further honored the black church as “the most powerful agency in the moral development and social reform of 9,000,000 Americans of Negro Blood.”²⁸

In addition to supporting their own congregations, many African Americans questioned the depth of religious belief and community among whites. Ida B. Wells, who vocally opposed racial violence in the late nineteenth century to the extent that she could not return to her home in Memphis, clearly believed that African Americans were true Christians and that whites were not. As she told one reporter,

²⁷ See Blum 2005, chapters 4 and 6.

²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1996 [1899]), p. 201; W.E.B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903* (2003 [1903]), p. 208.

she was “prouder to belong to the dark race that is the most practically Christian known to history, than to the white race that in its dealings with us has for centuries shown every quality that is savage, treacherous, and unchristian.” Other African Americans also responded to white supremacy by challenging the genuineness of whites’ Christianity. After the lynching of one black man in 1906, an African Methodist Episcopal Church minister denounced whites in the United States as “the demon of the world’s races, a monster incarnate. . . . The white is a heathen, a fiend, a monstrosity before God.”²⁹

Still, the deterioration in race relations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not lead to a complete congregational separation of blacks and whites. In the early twentieth century, the Pentecostal movement and its focus on a life-changing baptism of the Holy Spirit brought more whites and blacks together in integrated revival meetings and church services. As historian Grant Wacker has observed of the early Pentecostals, “Whites and blacks routinely came together for worship and fellowship, and often seemed genuinely fond of one another.”³⁰ Some other churches, moreover, appeared to treat their African American members with a great deal of respect. Du Bois, who in 1895 would become the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University and who led one of the most outstanding academic careers in twentieth-century America, attended a primarily white Congregational church with his family in North Barrington, Massachusetts. Later in life, Du Bois recalled that this church and especially his Sunday school classes were places untainted by racism. “[T]here were celebrations in Sunday School, and I was always there,” he reminisced. “I felt absolutely no discrimination, and I do not think there was any, or any thought of it.” Despite his appreciation for the black church, and even after Du Bois had spent more than fifty years battling racial and economic discrimination to the point that he embraced Communism and rejected the United States, he attended an interracial church in Brooklyn. Du Bois felt so close to his pastor, the white Episcopal priest William Howard Melish, that when nearing his death Du Bois arranged for Melish to obtain a special passport to conduct the funeral service in Ghana.³¹

²⁹ Edward J. Blum, “‘O God of a Godless Land’: Northern African American Challenges to White Christian Nationhood, 1865–1906,” in Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole, eds., *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction* (forthcoming).

³⁰ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (2001), p. 227.

³¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My*

Throughout the early twentieth century, the vast majority of white and black Catholics and Protestants attended racially separated churches, further proving to African Americans that white Christians were not their brothers and sisters in the faith. Most white Christian leaders remained silent on issues of racial discrimination, prejudice, and violence. One study of race relations in the church found that white Protestant denominational leaders made only six pronouncements against segregation between 1908 and 1929.³² During this same time period, more than 1,000 African Americans were lynched.³³ American Indians, Mexicans, Chinese, and others likewise experienced extreme individual and institutional discrimination, limiting their life chances.

Even yet, religious voices of opposition to racism and church separation were never completely silenced. In the late 1930s, members of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen denounced segregation as anti-Christian and supported federal legislation against lynching.³⁴ Black leaders, including Du Bois, also continued to attack church segregation. “I can conceive of no more pitiable paradox than that of a young white Christian in the South to-day who really believes in the ethics of Jesus Christ,” Du Bois lamented in 1907. “What can he think when he hangs upon his church doors that sign that I have often seen, ‘All are welcome.’ He knows that half the population of his city would not dare to go inside that church. Or if there was any fellowship between Christians, white and black, it would be after the manner explained by a white Mississippi clergyman in all seriousness: ‘The whites and Negroes understand each other here perfectly, sir, perfectly; if they come to my church they may take a seat in the gallery. If I go to theirs, they invite me to the front pew or the platform.’”³⁵

During the 1940s, a host of voices arose from the Christian communities assailing racial discrimination in society and in the churches. The horrors of World War II — particularly the Holocaust —

Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century (1968), p. 89; Edward J. Blum, “The Soul of W.E.B. Du Bois,” *Philosophia Africana* (August 2004).

³² Frank S. Loescher, *The Protestant Church and the Negro: A Pattern of Segregation* (1948), p. 28.

³³ On lynching, see Edward L. Ayers, *Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (1992), pp. 156–59 and 495–97, nn. 69, 70; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (2003); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (1993).

³⁴ Tracy Elaine K’Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (1997), p. 19.

³⁵ Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development* (1907), pp. 176–77.

spurred greater religious interest in racial violence and discrimination within the United States. The number of public religious pronouncements increased dramatically. For example, from 1940 to 1944 the leadership of white Protestant denominations made more than seventy pronouncements condemning Jim Crow. In 1946, the Federal Council of Churches renounced the “pattern of segregation in race relations as unnecessary and undesirable, and a violation of the gospel of love and human brotherhood.” It went even further, calling for both “a non-segregated Church and a non-segregated society.”³⁶ In a powerful appeal to white Christians to oppose segregation in their churches, the director of the United Church Press Fred D. Wentzel wrote in 1948, “*Segregation in the church makes difficult, if not impossible, the practice of Christian fellowship.* Good will on the part of the white Christian, and an honest desire for friendship and cooperation, are not enough.” Wentzel contended that white Christians must divest their interest in white supremacy and join hands with African American Christians in the struggle for racial equality.³⁷ Catholic bishops also began responding to segregation with public pronouncements. For instance, Joseph Rummel, archbishop of New Orleans, declared that segregation was “sinful and wrong,” and backed up his statement by sending black priests to say Mass in his white Louisiana parishes.³⁸ Sociologist Frank S. Loescher echoed Wentzel’s call in his own study of race in Protestant churches. American Christians, he wrote, “need to have the goals of brotherhood and justice proclaimed by their churches. But they also need to be shown how to achieve the goal of integration. When the church states certain ends to be good, it has a moral obligation to try to find the means. Social research is one method of finding the means of building ‘a non-segregated Church and non-segregated society.’”³⁹

Along with these pronouncements came several movements among Christians for interracial fellowship. A handful of churches were formed throughout the nation in the 1930s and 1940s with the specific intention of uniting whites and blacks. These included the Detroit Church of All Peoples, the San Francisco Fellowship Church of All Peoples, and the South Berkeley Congregational Church.⁴⁰ In 1942, Baptists Clarence Jordan and Martin England established an agrarian community in southwestern Georgia named “Koinonia Farm.” There, Jordan, England, and other white Christians endeavored to

³⁶ Loescher 1948, pp. 34, 42.

³⁷ Fred D. Wentzel, *Epistle to White Christians* (1948), p. 53.

³⁸ See chapter 4 of DeYoung et al., *United by Faith* (2003) for exact reference.

³⁹ Loescher 1948, pp. 116–17.

⁴⁰ Homer A. Jack, “The Emergence of the Interracial Church” (1947), pp. 31–37.

forge ties with local African Americans. They held summer camps where black and white children participated in activities together. A number of local blacks applauded the efforts. As one put it, “I wanted to be there. I liked it there. It was a nice place to live — the right way of living.” In the 1960s, Koinonia became a popular meeting ground for civil rights organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Local African Americans, however, refused to become full members of the Koinonia community. They cheered the efforts of these white Christians, but looked to their own church fellowships for social and political empowerment.⁴¹

Public pronouncements against segregation and interracial religious meetings ultimately did little to unify larger numbers of Christians of different racial backgrounds. For example, in 1948 sociologist Frank S. Loescher estimated that of the 14,000,000 African Americans in the United States at the time, 8,000,000 belonged to some type of Protestant Christian church, but of these, fewer than 500,000 (about 6 percent) were part of churches with whites in the congregation. The general pattern seemed clear: “If there are Negroes in the local churches at all, they are in very small and inconspicuous numbers.”⁴² A survey of Congregational ministers conducted in 1945 supported Loescher’s findings. Of 3,800 canvassed Congregational ministers, only 388 (10 percent) indicated that their churches had any non-white members. Follow-up research on 189 of these 388 churches found that only 14 had non-white memberships of more than ten individuals.⁴³ Baptist preacher and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., described the typical lifestyle of African American Christians in 1963 this way: “If your family attended church, you would go to a Negro church. If you wanted to visit a church attended by white people, you would not be welcome. For although your white fellow citizens would insist that they were Christians, they practiced segregation as rigidly in the house of God as they did in the theatre.”⁴⁴

The level of general interracial interaction rose enormously during the late 1950s and 1960s as civil rights organizations stormed the citadels of white power and privilege. African American churches provided the primary organizational locations for the movement and spirit for the crusade. They became hot spots of interracial activity, opening their doors to whites who sought to enlist in the struggle for

⁴¹ K’Meyer 1997, p. 97.

⁴² Loescher 1948, pp. 51, 68.

⁴³ Liston Pope, “A Check List of Procedures for Racial Integration” (1947b), pp. 38–43.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait* (1964), p. 48; Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Word That Moved America* (1995).

social justice. Throughout the South, white and black civil rights workers and leaders convened in predominately African American churches to sing, to pray, and to organize. Blacks and whites marched together on picket lines and sang in unison, “We shall overcome, Black and white together, we shall overcome someday.” At the March on Washington in August 1963, church groups including more than 40,000 white people swelled the masses that heard King’s now-famous “I Have a Dream” speech. As we noted earlier, the dream for many of these civil rights workers was, in the words of King, to create a “beloved community” where “the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities.”⁴⁵

During the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956, which began when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus, a white Lutheran pastor of an African American church, Robert S. Graetz, supported the boycott by using his station wagon to carpool blacks to work or home. In return, Graetz and his family were viciously attacked by white supremacists in Montgomery. Their house was bombed repeatedly, and their children threatened. But the animosity of the local whites was matched by the support of local blacks who went to great lengths to defend the Graetz’s. Amid the struggle, he and his wife felt as if they were full-fledged members of the African American community. As Graetz recalled of his church services with local blacks, “Here was a white man, standing in front of an almost totally Negro gathering, saying, ‘We are going to have to find a way to make it *ourselves*. We are going to have to reach down into *our* own pockets and pay *our* own money if *we* want *our* freedom movement to succeed.’ Jeannie and I felt totally part of the Negro community. It had never occurred to me that there was anything unusual about the pronouns I was using. Apparently other people almost viewed me as a Negro, as well.”⁴⁶ Others were influenced by the movement to the point of working to integrate their congregations, such as Father Nick Perusina and the congregation of St. Pius X Catholic Church in east Texas. This congregation, like some others, began racial integration during the early 1960s, when segregation was still maintained by law.⁴⁷

Although thousands of white church people joined the struggle,

⁴⁵ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (1984); James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (1993); King 1964, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Robert S. Graetz, *A White Preacher’s Memoir: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (1998), p. 86.

⁴⁷ DeYoung et al. 2003, chapter 5.

other white religious leaders equivocated in response to the civil rights movement, while some African American ministers opposed church integration. Along with a number of white Christians, the popular evangelist Billy Graham did support the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* (1954), in which the Court declared segregation in primary and secondary education unconstitutional. Graham even referred to Dr. King and the black participants in the Montgomery Bus Boycott as "setting an example of Christian love." But Graham also urged moderation and slow change. In response to King's dream that his four children "one day will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character," Graham commented, "Only when Christ comes again will the little children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little black children." At the same time, a young Baptist and soon-to-be powerful minister Jerry Falwell used his pulpit in Lynchburg, Virginia, to denounce integration as the beginning of the end for the white race.⁴⁸

Some African American leaders also expressed reluctance to accept church integration, especially the kind that would merely fold black Christians into predominately white churches. Drawing upon the teachings of African American religious leaders such as Richard Allen and Frederick Douglass, a number of black intellectuals, including James Cone and Albert B. Cleage, Jr., created a "black liberation theology" that stressed God's connection with oppressed peoples. To them, the African American church and even a "black Christian nationalism" held the keys to a true understanding of Christianity. As Willie White, an African American pastor in North Carolina, wrote, "White men must be made to realize that the black church is the instrument of God in this world, not just a group of nigger churchgoers who are separated unto themselves until the good graces of white men call them back into fellowship with white congregations." White further contended that it was vital for African Americans to remain in their own congregations, because God still had much to teach the world through them. "God's revelation in the black experience calls for continued development of, and continued commitment to, a theology that will counter oppression and uphold justice the world over." The black church, he concluded, was necessary for such a theology.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (1996), pp. 42–45, 57–58, 80; William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (1991), pp. 167–71.

⁴⁹ James H. Cone, *Liberation: A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970); Albert B.

By the late 1960s, American congregations were far from overcoming racial segregation in their congregations, perhaps farther than they had been in the 1860s. American society, through the civil rights movement and changes in laws, had made progress reducing segregation in public arenas. Yet, in 1968, the nation was rife with racial tension. King was assassinated in Memphis. Race riots bloodied the streets of northern cities. A group of leaders at the National Black Economic Development Conference cried out against “the racist white Christian church with its hypocritical declarations” and called for white churches to pay \$500 million to African Americans in “reparations.”⁵⁰ In response many white Protestants retreated from the support they had once given the civil rights movement. As one white Protestant put it, African Americans “should be treated fairly at all times but WE DON’T OWE THEM ANYTHING.”⁵¹

Even this statement of defiance, however, demonstrated some change, because it acknowledged that African Americans should receive equal treatment. Because of the courage of black and white civil rights workers and the pronouncements from major religious leaders, worship-attending whites could no longer be unaware that their congregations were deeply divided by race. At the same time, many African Americans recognized that although they lived in a racialized society that privileged individuals deemed white, there were whites who would join them in their struggle against Jim Crow. The nation was also diversifying racially. Changes in the immigration laws led to the increase in immigrants from Latin America and Asia, especially since 1970. The resurgence of American Indians in local and national politics brought Native American issues to the forefront. The United States was no longer mainly black and white.

But when the racial composition of congregations is surveyed today, little seems to have changed since the civil rights movement. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, most congregations remain racially segregated. Since the 1960s, a proportionately small number of congregations have struggled to be multiracial, and a few seem to have succeeded, but they are the exceptions to be sure (as detailed in chapter 2). No research has yet systematically studied these multiracial congregations, to understand why they exist, how they work, and what they mean.

Cleage, Jr., *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (1972); Willie White, “Separate unto God” (1974), pp. 179–81.

⁵⁰ R. S. Lecky and H. E. Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations* (1969), pp. 125–26.

⁵¹ Findlay 1993, p. 206. The emphasis was added in the original text.

TRAVELING

This book reports on the first systematic study of multiracial congregations. Given the importance of religion and religious congregations in American life and armed with a historical understanding, my purpose was clear. I needed to go to the organizations labeled as the most racially segregated of all—religious congregations—and study specific cases where they were not segregated.

My colleagues and I spent six years studying multiracial congregations.⁵² We began by conducting more than 2,500 telephone interviews with Americans. We talked to a random sample of adult Americans who speak English or Spanish (most everyone in the United States), whether they were religious or not. This gave us excellent information about who is in multiracial congregations and who is not, and how such people differ. Also as part of our surveys, we asked people who attended a religious congregation for the name and address of their congregation. We then sent surveys to these congregations, in order to study the congregations themselves. The survey responses provided broad information of a good cross-section of U.S. congregations, helping us to understand the differences between multiracial and other congregations. It also helped us identify a sizable pool of interracial congregations from which to select thirty to study in depth.

For this in-depth next portion of the research, we traveled to a variety of congregations, spending at least two weeks in each location, and often having the opportunity to return at a later time. We attended worship services and meetings, interviewed parishioners and the clergy, read historical documents about the congregations, studied the neighborhoods of the congregations, and gathered other information shedding light on the experiences of the congregations. Finally, to gain a richer understanding of change over time, I spent five years in a congregation that was in the process of transforming from a uniraical to a multiracial membership.⁵³

⁵² On the Lilly-funded project, these colleagues included George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, as well as a number of graduate and undergraduate assistants mentioned in the preface. Other important colleagues that I worked with included Korie Edwards and Brad Christerson.

⁵³ For the details of the research design, see appendix C. As noted in appendix C, after our national survey of all Americans, we limited our collection of congregational data and interviews to those from Christian traditions. We initially intended to include all faith traditions, but the number of non-Christians was far too small to make generalizations from our data (I do use the National Congregations Survey to look at other faith traditions). Although the United States is religiously diverse in terms of the num-

My desire to communicate my quest to understand multiracial congregations led me to structure this book somewhat unconventionally. To provide a foundation from which to understand the national findings, we will enter into the life of one congregation as it transforms from a uniraical to multiracial membership. Although I spent five years in this congregation, I rely heavily on the perceptions and words of the senior congregation clergy person, the Reverend Dr. Rodney Woo.⁵⁴ Beginning in chapter Two, we follow Rodney Woo through the transformation, complete with his congregation's and his own struggles, victories, doubts, and joys. From this narrative, I examine the larger issues, comparing and contrasting the experiences of this one congregation with others around the country. This congregation, then, is the thread used to weave together the findings of this book, and to make the findings more understandable.

The turbulent 1960s ushered in a new United States, a post-civil rights nation. Not only was this decade the beginning of the dramatic increase of non-European immigration, which continues to change the face of racial and ethnic categories, but it also saw the growth feminism, assassinations, riots, youth counterculture, the realization of suburbs as the primary place where Americans live, and the emergence of a new alignment in U.S. religion, including the decline of denominational loyalty.⁵⁵

The 1960s encapsulated decades and even centuries of questioning about what the United States was and hoped to be, who belonged, and how Americans should relate to each other. The questions were not answered during that decade and they remain unanswered, but especially in the 1960s the questions exposed the tensions that the United States has always had to negotiate. The nation's motto, *e pluribus unum* — out of many, one — reveals both an early recognition of diversity and the value of unity arising from this diversity. But the motto also is sufficiently vague to leave much room for debate and change

ber of traditions and groups (Eck 2001), most of the diversity is found in different forms of the same tradition — Christianity (Beaman 2003). About 90 percent of religious people in the United States claim a Christian affiliation, with no other religion having more than a 3 percent share (Emerson and Kim 2003). As R. Stephen Warner (2004, p. 20) has argued, at least to date, “the new immigrants represent not the de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity.”

⁵⁴ Dr. Woo granted me multiple interviews. I also gave Dr. Woo several topics and questions to address in writing. He wrote nearly two hundred typed pages in response to my inquiries. Because of his central contribution to gaining an inside look at a congregation transforming, he serves as a “with” author. Except when Dr. Woo's voice is directly quoted, all interpretations and analyses in the book are mine, and do not necessarily reflect Dr. Woo's perspective. For a more detailed discussion, see appendix C.

⁵⁵ Wuthnow, 1988.

over time. What does it mean to say from many, one? There have been many different answers over the nation's history (see appendix A for a much fuller discussion); we continue today asking and trying to answer that question. It is within this churning context that the multiracial congregations my colleagues and I studied are attempting to make a way.

WHY "PEOPLE OF THE DREAM"?

This attempt to make a way in shifting, uncertain times led to the book title, *People of the Dream*. The word "dream" is used in many ways, with multiple meanings. In the United States, the "American dream" is one of the nation's most central metaphors. "The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one — if you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you," said former President Bill Clinton.⁵⁶ Most U.S. presidents, in fact, refer to the American dream as the great promise of the country. People growing up in the United States spend much of their time pursuing this dream, and people from around the world migrate to the United States for the chance to do the same.

Dreams are also often thought of as visions or hoped-for directions that guide people from a problematic place to a better one. At a very individual level, this partly captures the meaning of the American dream. King also used the word "dream" in this way, saying his dream was deeply rooted in the American dream. But his dream was much larger than the American dream. His dream was the creation of what he called the Beloved Community, "where brotherhood is a reality" and there is "genuine intergroup and interpersonal living—*integration*."⁵⁷ By an integrated society, he meant one in which people "relate to each other across those nonrational, psychological barriers which have traditionally separated them in our society," and there is a complete sense of the interrelatedness of humanity.⁵⁸ In an integrated society—the Beloved Community—not only will *all* people be free to pursue the American dream, but they will care for one another, work for justice, and come to talk and walk as if "[w]e are tied to-

⁵⁶ Bill Clinton as quoted in Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (1995), p. 18.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Smith (one of King's professors in seminary) and Religious Studies professor Ira Zepp, Jr. explore this question in detail in their book, *Search for the Beloved Community* (1998), p. 130.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

gether in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”⁵⁹ They will truly believe and live as if “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

There are still other meanings of the word “dream.” Some dreams are scary. To be a dreamer can also mean to be someone who never comes “down from the clouds” to get things done or who lives in a make-believe, fantasy world. In such cases, dreams are not good. Malcolm X strongly communicated the negative side of dreams: “What is looked at as an American dream for white people has long been an American nightmare for black people.”⁶⁰ “No, I am not an American. I am one of 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism.”⁶¹ “We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock—that rock landed on us.”⁶² “I am not interested in being American, because America has never been interested in me.”⁶³ When it came to religion, Malcolm X said:

Brothers and sisters, the white man has brainwashed us black people to fasten our gaze upon a blondhaired, blue-eyed Jesus! . . . The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die, to wait until death, for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we’re dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars here on this earth!⁶⁴

This book is called *People of the Dream*. But an important question eventually to answer is, “Which dream?” Are the people of multiracial congregations people of Bill Clinton’s American dream, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Beloved Community dream, or Malcolm X’s nightmare? And what difference does that make for American religion and race relations? To answer that question, the pages that follow have us travel to a variety of places, learn from multiple methods, and explore many levels of life.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America* (1991), p. 89.

⁶¹ Quoted in Cone 1991, p. 1.

⁶² Taken from Cone 1991, p. 197, and see p. 339.

⁶³ Quoted in Cone 1991, p. 38.

⁶⁴ Speech in Harlem, 1954, quoted in Cone 1991, p. 151.