TRANSGRESSIONS · CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States

Warren J. Blumenfeld, Khyati Y. Joshi and Ellen E. Fairchild (Eds.)

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TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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Scope

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity--youth identity in particular--the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM / TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-90-8790-676-4 (paperback)
ISBN 978-90-8790-677-1 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-8790-678-8 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858, 3001 AW
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
http://www.sensepublishers.com

Printed on acid-free paper

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INVESTIGATING CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION IN THE UNITED STATES: INTRODUCTION TO THE ANTHOLOGY

CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

One of the most enduring and powerful misconceptions about religion in American history—the national origins myth we all learned in elementary school—is that U.S.-America was created so that members of all religions could practice freely. In fact, the Puritans fled England in search of a place where they could practice *their* religion without fear or oppression. Their agenda for religious freedom was limited to their own freedom, which they did not extend to other religious groups. Whatever the precise contours of the truth behind this U.S.-American origins myth, this much is clear: many facets of U.S.-American society are shaped, informed, defined, or given its vocabulary and structure by religion. Concepts of religious freedom and religious expression are among those considered our most foundational.

While there are countless sources on religious pluralism in the U.S., very few include discussions on Christian privilege and religious oppression. Peggy McIntosh's (1988) pioneering investigations of White and male privilege, by analogy, can help readers understand Christian privilege as being an invisible, unearned, and largely unacknowledged array of benefits accorded to Christians, with which they often unconsciously walk through life as if they effortlessly carry a knapsack tossed over their shoulders. By "unpacking" this knapsack of privilege (whether is be White, male, heterosexual, owning class, temporarily able bodied, English as first-language speakers, Christian, and others) is to become aware and to develop critical consciousness of its existence and how it impacts the daily lives of both those with and those without this privilege.

In keeping with McIntosh's (1988) inventory outlining the manifestations of White privilege, authors have developed parallel lists summarizing examples of Christian privilege (see e.g., Clark, Vargas, Schlosser, & Alimo, 2002; Schlosser, 2003). As Clark et al. (2002) assert:

> [T]he fact remains that all Christians benefit from Christian privilege regardless of the way they express themselves as Christians in the same way that all White people benefit from White privilege (¶4).

Building on the above concept, Joshi (2006) argues that Christian privilege, like White privilege, exists through the cultural power of the *norm*; by extension,

everything not adhering to the way religion is understood, taught, and practiced by Christians is considered as abnormal. Christianity is the privileged religion in the United States because Christian groups, people, organizations, have the power to define normalcy.

As there is a spectrum of Christian denominations and traditions, so too is there a hierarchy or continuum of Christian privilege based on 1) historical factors, 2) numbers of practitioners, and 3) degrees of social power. In this regard, in a United States context, though the gap in privilege between Christian denominations is apparently shrinking, White Protestant denominations may still have some greater degrees of Christian privilege, relative to some minority Christian denominations, for example, African American, Asian American, Native American Indian, and Latino/a churches, Eastern and Greek Orthodox, Amish, Mennonites, Quakers, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, adherents to Christian Science, and to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and still in some quarters, to Catholics (Blumenfeld, 2006). An oppression-based analysis of religious diversity in the United States must consider the dominant status of Christianity—in some cases, specifically *Protestant* Christianity—and the subordinate status Atheism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Native American faiths, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and many others, as well as some non-Protestant or non-mainline Protestant sects of Christianity.

SOME MANIFESTATIONS OF CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

Christiancentric Calendar: For all intent and purposes, the academic calendar is scheduled around Christian holidays and celebrations. Students who are not Christian must often miss classes if they are to participate in their religious activities. Even the language we use in reference to the mainstream calendar reflects Christian assumptions by marking time in referenced to the birth of Jesus. This fact is brought home each time we hear someone mention the date followed by "in the year of our Lord, Jesus Christ." Therefore, let us view the year 2000 as <u>one</u> milepost, though, for many religious traditions, it also marks a heightening of their invisibility.

Worship as Place and Group Practice: The idea that real worship occurs in a church and in the company of a member of the clergy. Here, the church represents both a place outside the home to go and pray, and the more fundamental phenomenon of congregationalism—the idea that prayer, properly performed, is done in groups and led by a person imbued by an institution with special theological authority.

Images of God: Many of the "traditional" U.S.-American images of "god" derive from Western (i.e., Christian) art and literature. This god is anthropomorphized in a particular manner: he is singular, male, White, often elderly, and usually bearded, with two arms and two legs. Hindu deities such as Ganesh (being half human and half elephant), Krishna (often appearing with blue skin), Sarasvati (a multiarmed goddess) are characterized within a Christiancentric society as something whimsical (Joshi, 2006).

Architectural Norms relating to houses of worship follow Christian models: A steeple is "normal"; a minaret that is part of a Mosque is something "foreign." These norms combined with nativism and xenophobia also illuminate another Christian privilege: The privilege of being able to build a house of worship without opposition from neighbors and local authorities. In instances across the U.S., neighborhoods and communities have fought to prevent temples, gurdwaras, synagogues, and other houses of worship from being built. In many cases, residents argue that communities would turn into a "Disneyland," and there would be parking chaos (See Singh 2003; Eck 2001)

"Believable" Stories: In American society, the virgin birth, however fantastical, is considered credible. The stories told in other faiths, which are no more fantastical, are seen as impossible myths: for example, Mohammed's midnight flight to heaven (Islam) or Hanuman leaping from India to Sri Lanka in the *Ramayana,* one of the sacred texts of Hinduism (See Joshi, 2006) ,

Safety for Christians in the U.S.: Christian students and school personnel can be reasonably assured that when they talk about their religious traditions or wear religious symbols, they will not be the targets of ridicule, discrimination, or harassment by their peers and school officials. Students and school personnel of other faith communities have no such assurance.

Curricular Materials: Another manifestation of Christian privilege in the schools centers around the issue of curricular materials, which in the United States celebrates primarily the heroes, holidays, traditions, accomplishments, and importance of a European-heritage, Christian experience. Sonia Nieto (1998) labels this as the "Monocultural" school, in which school structures, policies, curricula, instructional materials, and even pedagogical strategies are primarily representative of only the dominant culture. Students of other faiths and ethnicities see few if any people who look like them, people who believe as they believe, or people who adhere to the cultural expressions that they adhere to introduced and discussed in their classroom lessons. When other then dominant perspectives are included, this often resembles what James Banks (2004) refers to as the "Contributions Approach," when very little emphasis is given to the *meanings* and *importance* of these cultural elements within the communities in which they exist. With this approach, the mainstream curriculum remains basically unchanged.

In the context of curriculum, when other than Christian-based perspectives are introduced in a classroom session, if a student representing that faith, (also ethnicity or race, sexual identity, disability, socioeconomic class, and others) is present in the class, whether they do or do not raise their hand, often the teacher or professor will call on that student to speak for "their people"; those of their religious traditions are singled out to "educate" others. A form of Christian privilege involves the notion that one does not have to educate oneself to the languages, customs, and traditions of other religious communities. Members of these other communities, however, often need to become familiar with Christian traditions not only because of Christian hegemony, but also as a necessary condition for emotional and often physical survival within the dominant culture. This is an example of W. E. B. Du Bois's (1903) "double consciousness" whereby those outside the mainstream culture are

> born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields [them] no true self-consciousness, but only lets [them] see [themselves] through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (pp. 1–2).

Though not in the truest sense "bicultural" or "bireligious," members of non-Christian faith communities are compelled to negotiate between the dominant Christian culture and their own religious cultures.

SOME MANIFESTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

In the United States, we have "freedom of religion," the right to choose and practice the faith we hold dear. But having a choice is not the same as to have that choice accepted and supported rather than ignored, marginalized, exoticized, or demonized. Notwithstanding the United States' history of having minority religions present and the nation's self-image as a haven for those fleeing "religious oppression," the reality of life in U.S.-America as a follower of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Santeria, Sikhism, Wiccan, etc. is one of misunderstanding, missed opportunities, and outright abuse.

Religious oppression is embedded in the systemic dominance and privilege Christianity enjoys at all levels of U.S. society. Religious oppression recognizes that the disadvantages of non-Christianity are played out not merely at the interpersonal one-on-one level, but that these disadvantages exist at a societal and institutional level where individuals are socialized, punished, rewarded, and guided in ways that maintain and perpetuate oppressive structures. Identifying a social phenomenon as *oppression* "emphasizes the pervasive nature of the social inequity woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness" (Bell, 1997, p. 4).

> Religious oppression specifically refers to the systematic subordination of [those who are not Christian] by the dominant Christian milieu. This subordination is a product of power and the unequal power relationships among religious groups within American society and is supported by the actions of individuals (*religious discrimination)*, cultural norms and values, institutional structures, and societal practices. Through religious oppression, Christianity is used to marginalize, exclude, and deny the members and institutions of non-Christian religious groups in society the privileges and access that accompany a Christian affiliation (Joshi, 2006, p. 121.)

The government, media, and the educational systems are just some of the institutional structures that manufacture and maintain religious oppression. As with other types of oppression, religious oppression is more than an ideology asserting superiority, and more than a condition of being, a particular stance one is forced to assume with respect to oneself. It is a pervasive social creation, involving what Paulo Freire (1996) called the *oppressor* and the *oppressed.* The product is an

individual (or a community) who is in fact alienated, isolated, and insulated from the society of which she or he nominally remains a member. In the context of U.S.-America's racial schema, religious oppression sets up a dichotomy between that which is privileged and normative—Whiteness and Christianity—and that which is not: dark skin and non-Christian-ness (See Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). These levels are dynamic, each affecting the other two in ways that may be conspicuous or exceedingly subtle. Some examples of religious oppression:

Hate Crimes against non-Christians: Today, especially since September 11, 2001, we see growing numbers of violent incidents directed against Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews in the United States (Pluralism Project, 2005).

Houses of Worship Vandalized: gurudwaras, temples, mosques, synagogues, and other houses of worship are vandalized in communities across the U.S.

Students Harassing and Making Fun of Other Students for Their Religion and the Deities to Which They Pray: For example, Hindu students report being made fun of for praying to the elephant (referring to Ganesh who is a half elephant and half human deity). Also, students are being forced to listen to and participate in prayer in team sports in public school or face being treated as a second-class team member. Students are also harassed for being non-believers.

In addition, teachers and professors are increasingly less familiar with the cultural diversity associated with students' ethnicity, religion, and race. This, in turn, can lead to teachers' and professors' mistaken assumptions or diagnoses whereby the teacher confuses religious diversity with behavioral and intellectual differences or insufficiencies. McDermott (1987), for example, maintained that school failure of students of color could be at least partially explained by looking at clashes between the students' cultural background and the dominant culture reflected in the classroom.

> If the teacher frequently devalues or ignores these children's cultural backgrounds, they will often reject the teacher's messages as worthless…. Reciprocally, if the behaviors of the child are not consistent with the expectations and standards espoused by the teacher and the dominant culture as a whole, the child may be seen as behaviorally and/or academically deficient (quoted in Artiles & Trent, 1994, p. 423).

A vicious cycle, of sorts, then continues.

In addition, if Christian students or their families are dissatisfied with the degree and level of education within the public schools and wish to enroll in a local parochial Christian-based school, they are usually given many option from which to choose. On the other hand, even when they have the financial means to enroll in a nearby parochial school reflecting their ethnoreligious traditions, members of faith communities other than Christian have very limited if any options for parochial education.

HOW DOMINANCE (CHRISTIAN AND OTHERS) IS PROMOTED

Alexis de Tocqueville, French political scientist and diplomat, traveled across the United States for nine months between 1831-1832 conducting research for his epic work, *Democracy in America* (1956 edition). He was astounded to find a certain paradox: on one hand, he observed that the United States presented itself around the world as a country separating "church and state," where religious freedom and tolerance were among its defining tenets, but on the other hand, he witnessed that: "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America" (Tocqueville, 1840/1956, pp. 303–304).

Tocqueville answered this apparent contradiction by proposing that in this country with no officially sanctioned governmental religion, denominations were compelled to compete with one another and promote themselves in order to attract and keep parishioners, thereby making religion even stronger. While the government was not supporting Christian denominations and churches, *per se*, religion to Tocqueville should be considered as the first of their *political* institutions since he observed the enormous influence Christian churches had on the political process (Tocqueville, 1840/1956). Though he favored U.S. style democracy, he found its major limitation to be in its stifling of independent thought and independent beliefs. In a country that promoted the notion that the majority rules, this effectively silenced minorities by what Tocqueville termed the "tyranny of the majority."

This is a crucial point because in a democracy, for without specific guarantees of minority rights—in this case minority religious rights—there is a danger of religious domination or tyranny over religious minorities and non-believers. The majority, in religious matters, have historically been adherents to mainline Protestant Christian denominations who often imposed their values and standards upon those who believed otherwise.

The concept of "hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971) describes the ways in which the dominant group, in this case Christians in general and predominantly Protestants, successfully disseminate *dominant* social realities and social visions in a manner accepted as common sense, as "normal," as universal—even though only an estimated 30 percent of the world's inhabitants are Christian (Smith & Harter, 2002)—and as representing part of the natural order, even at times by those who are marginalized, disempowered, or rendered invisible by it (Tong, 1989). This religious hegemony maintains the marginality of already marginalized religions, faiths, and spiritual communities. According to Beaman (2003), "the binary opposition of sameness/difference is reflected in Protestant/minority religion in which mainstream Protestantism is representative of the 'normal'" (p. 321).

The form of hegemony examined in this anthology is primarily "Christian hegemony," which we define as the overarching system of advantages bestowed on Christians. It is the imposition and institutionalization of a Christian norm or standard, which establishes and perpetuates the notion that all people are or should be Christian, thereby privileging Christians and Christianity, and excluding the needs, concerns, religious cultural practices, and life experiences of people who are

not Christian. Christian hegemony is very often direct. At times, though, it can be more subtle, and also includes oppression by neglect, omission, erasure, and distortion (Blumenfeld, 2006).

Hegemony is advanced through "discourses" (Foucault, 1980), which include the ideas, written expressions, theoretical foundations, and language of the dominant culture. These are implanted within networks of social and political control, described by Foucault as "regimes of truth" (p. 133), which function to legitimize what can be said, who has the authority to speak and be heard, and what is authorized as true or as *the* truth (Kreisberg, 1992, in Bell, 1997).

> However we conceptualize diversity, religious groups on the margins are not taken seriously in social surveys. Protestantism, and to some extent Catholicism, are constructed as the normal against which the "other" is established (Beaman, 2003, p. 313).

On the societal and institutional levels, the media transmit what they constitute as "normal" in terms of religions and religious beliefs, while maintaining the marginalization of the "other." According to Beaman (2003):

> New religious movements attract media attention for apocalyptic views and actions, and remain "cults" in public discourse. Muslims are the subject of biased media reports that seem to result in attacks on mosques and anti-Muslim sentiment. Aboriginals, for whom daily life and the physical world are inseparable from spirituality, are constructed as "problematic" because of their demands for equality and restitution (p. 315).

The norms and practices of religious oppression at the societal or cultural level are perhaps the most ubiquitous and yet the most difficult to describe. The level of society and culture is where our society's norms are "perpetuate[d as] implicit and explicit values that bind institutions and individuals" (Bell, 1997, p. 19). A norm, of course, is illustrated also by its opposite: the "other." The process of "othering" entails a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion simultaneously (Pharr, 1988; Said, 1978). By comparison with the norm, which encompasses everything from theological "truth" to manners and customs of practice, the non-Christian "other" religions come to be seen as evil, wrong, deviant, threatening, and/or sick. That which is associated with the Christian norm is considered religious or spiritual, while that which is not is rendered exotic and illegitimate and relegated to cult status. By attributing to a population certain characteristics in order to categorize and differentiate it as an "other," those who do so also establish criteria by which they themselves are represented (Miles, 1989; Said, 1978). In the act of defining, for example, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism as deviant, and thereby excluding them from society, U.S.-American Christians represent themselves as good, normal, and righteous. Moreover, by using the process of racialization further to exclude and make these groups inferior, that same discourse, but with inverted meanings, serves to include and make superior another group—White Christians.

The concept of oppression, then, constitutes more than the cruel and repressive actions of individuals upon others. It involves an overarching system of

differentials of social power and privilege by dominant groups over subordinated groups based on ascribed social identities and reinforced by unequal social group status. And this is not merely the case in societies ruled by coercive or tyrannical leaders, but, as we assert and will show, occurs within the day-to-day practices of contemporary democratic societies such as the United States (Young, 1990).

THIS ANTHOLOGY

The essays in this collection examine the dynamics of Christian privilege and religious oppression (domination and subordination) of minority religious groups and non-believers in the United States. We investigate Christian privilege *as well as* religious oppression, for we perceive the two in symbiotic relationship: oppression toward non-Christians gives rise to Christian privilege in the United States, and Christian privilege maintains oppression toward non-Christian individuals and faith communities (Blumenfeld, 2006). Through religious oppression, Christianity and its cultural manifestations function to marginalize, exclude, and deny to members and institutions of other religious groups and non-believers in society the privileges and access that accompany a Christian affiliation.

In addition, this anthology provides historical and contemporary cases exposing Christian privilege and religious oppression on the societal, institutional, and personal/interpersonal levels. A number of chapters include sections suggesting change strategies, and in particular, ways to achieve the national goal of religious pluralism in the United States.

Section I: "Historical Perspectives" explores historical foundations to illustrate the roots and legacies of a Protestant, leading to a larger Christian hegemony and privilege within dominant U.S. legal and social policies, practices, and beliefs.

Section I begins with "Christian Privilege and Hegemony in the United States: An Overview" by Warren J. Blumenfeld. Using the conceptual organizer of Hardiman and Jackson's (1997) "levels of oppression" (societal/cultural, institutional, and personal/interpersonal), the author investigates the multifaceted nature of domination and subordination, Christian privilege, and the subtle and not-so subtle promotion of Christianity in public schooling and in the larger United States society to provide an historical foundation to ground the anthology.

In its annual survey, "State of the First Amendment 2007," conducted by the First Amendment Center, 65 percent of the U.S. population actually believe that the founders of the country had intended the United States to be a Christian nation, and also believe that the Constitution has established this as a Christian nation. As debates often still center on the claim that the United States was conceived as an officially Christian nation, Hector Avalos, in "The Treaty of Tripoli and the Myth of a Christian Nation," focuses on an often overlooked document known as the Treaty of Tripoli, which formed a prelude to the first war fought between the United States and a group of north African Muslim states on the Mediterranean (1801-1805). Of particular interest is Clause 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli, which

Avalos explores to argue that the founders, in fact, had no difficulty in asserting that the nation was *not* founded on the Christian religion "in any sense."

Section II: "Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations" investigates some of the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of Christian privilege and hegemony leading to religious forms of oppression in the United States.

Looking over the historical emergence of the concept of "race," critical race theorists remind us that this *concept* arose concurrently with the advent of European exploration as a justification and rationale for conquest and domination of the globe beginning in the fifteenth century of the Common Era (CE),[1] and reaching its apex in the early twentieth century CE (see, for example, Zuckerman, 1990). Geneticists tell us that there is often more variability *within* a given so-called "race" than between "races," and that there are no essential *genetic* markers linked specifically to "race." They assert, therefore, that "race" is discursively constructed—an historical, "scientific," biological myth, an idea—and that any socially-conceived physical "racial" markers are fictive and are not concordant with what is beyond or below the surface of the body (see, for example, Cameron & Wycoff, 1998).

In "The Racialization of Religion in the United States," Khyati Y. Joshi connects the concept of the social construction of "race" to posit the "racialization" of religion, which she perceives as a process whereby certain physical characteristics associated with a group of people and attached to "race" in popular discourse becomes associated with a specific religion or religions, thereby rendering these primarily *non*-Christian religions theologically, socially, and morally illegitimate and as a threat to the dominant culture. The author discusses the racialization of religion, specifically in relation to Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States.

Vermont, in April 2000, became the first state in the United States to establish "civil unions" for same-sex couples creating an institution parallel to marriage—an institution that grants the same benefits the state confers through marriage but does not carry the title "marriage." The Massachusetts Supreme Court, however, ruled in 2003 that denying same-sex couples access to the institution of marriage, with all the rights and privileges accorded therein, violated that state's constitution. In subsequent years, some other state courts followed suit. Prior to the Massachusetts ruling, and further inflamed by this court decision, opponents of same-sex marriage, including then President George W. Bush, increased their efforts to pass a U.S. constitutional amendment to restrict marriage to other-sex couples.

Jennifer Harvey, in her chapter "So, Why This Fracas over Marriage? And, What Might It Tell Us about 'America' as a 'Christian' Nation," interrogates the ways in which the seemingly neutral language—for example, "marriage must be reserved only for a man and a woman"—in public discourse becomes camouflage for the privileging of a particular Christian stance, and how, therefore, anti-same-sex marriages narratives invoke the existence—and the need for protection—of a single, monolithic, "traditional" U.S.-American culture, despite how this contradicts a supposed separation between religion and government.

Miriam Singer, in "Implications and Complications of Faith-Based Initiatives for Educational Programs," discusses concerns about a relatively new U.S. federal

practice, Community and Faith-based Initiatives, which the author argues that if not carefully monitored, can and will promote services based upon a single religious doctrine: Christianity. She addresses issues of textbook selection, sex education, curriculum, parent resource centers, and allocation of federal funding to support religious organizations involved in education. Singer poses the following critical questions: "Can we allow groups—faith-based or otherwise—which profess only Christian viewpoints, to address policy issues for public education and other public services and/or use government funding to promote delivery of such services in their image?"

Section III: "Cases in Point" locates topics of Christian privilege, hegemony, and religious oppression by examining specific situations on the micro level, which hold immense and wide-ranging implications outside of these precise circumstances on the macro level.

We begin Section III with "Clash over the Crosses: Las Cruces, New Mexico—Preserving 'Our Cultural Heritage' or Maintaining Christian Hegemony," by Lisa Weinbaum, who with her husband, Paul, in 2003 and again in 2005, filed two lawsuits, first against Las Cruces, New Mexico Public Schools, in which Lisa is employed, and then against the city of Las Cruces. Their suites challenged the proliferation of three Latin crosses on school and city property, which are boldly printed on school maintenance vehicles, the high school sports complex, police uniforms and cruisers, fire trucks, city employment applications, city hall inside restrooms and council chambers, public announcements, and public parks. The author and her husband contend that the three Crosses of Calvary, at least to some non-Christians, convey a disregard for the separation of religion and government by indicating which religion is state-sponsored, who is welcome in the town, and who is not. This chapter chronicles the public saga during and since their fight for the removal of the crosses as portrayed in the local media.

On college and university campuses, especially on predominately White campuses, students of color often seek the campus's Multicultural Center for socialization, a sense of empowerment, and to celebrate their racial/ethnic identities within a society and campus culture that often minimizes or trivialize the impact of racial and ethnic oppression. In her chapter, "When the Safest Space on Campus becomes the Most Oppressive: Christmas in a Multicultural Center," Mamta Motwani Accapadi has discovered that despite the philosophic commitment to inclusion, Multicultural Centers still function under mainstream Christian religious norms, often marginalizing non-Christian students of color. In her qualitative investigation, the author interviews students who attended the Multicultural Center at the University of Texas at Austin to address the ways in which the Center celebrates Fall/Winter festivals, which have a strong Christmas overtone. Larger questions the author raises include: "How do we engage in a dialogue surrounding religious privilege on a college campus's Multicultural Center?," "What populations served by Multicultural Centers are most likely to be impacted by Christian privilege?," and "What are some strategies for ensuring that Multicultural Centers remain safe spaces for all students of color?"

Section IV: “Education and Pedagogy” investigates topics of Christian privilege and hegemony within the area of education, specifically implications for teachers and its impact on students. By addressing these educational issues, the authors within this section also propose systemic and pedagogical institutional change strategies to help ensure religious pluralism and equity for believers of all faiths as well as for non-believers within educational communities.

In his qualitative study, “Christian Privilege and Christian Teachers,” Jason Nelson explores the practical reality of how Christian privilege manifests in schools by examining the experiences of teachers who actually deliver (and have a great deal of control over) the ideological content of both the open and hidden curricula within our schools. The teachers involved in this study all define themselves as Christian. They are drawn from two different populations of Protestant Baptist churches: one of these churches is predominantly African American, and the other one predominantly White.

“‘I Believe’ in Education,” by Ellen E. Fairchild, closes this anthology by asking what can be done to identify, recognize, and challenge the privilege and oppression that comes from Christian domination, entitlement, and power differentials. The author addresses this question in a rather `unique manner by utilizing educational philosopher John Dewey’s format of placing the information in direct “I believe” statements.

CONCLUSION

The editors of *Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States* consider that this anthology will provide useful historical, theoretical, conceptual, and practical information for scholars and students in the fields of ethnic, racial, multicultural, and diversity studies, religion, sociology, psychology, and education. The multiple perspectives on religion presented in the context of contemporary U.S.-American society can be used as tools enabling multicultural education to account for the full breadth of contemporary student experiences and to enter some previously unexamined or unconsidered territory. The anthology will also be useful to theologians, both scholars of religion and clergy seeking to engage other religious groups in their public work. In terms of course adoption, the anthology can serve as a primarily or supplementary text in courses in a number of varied academic disciplines. The editors also intend the book to be used by the general reader who is interested in the field of multicultural education and the place of religion and religious oppression issues within this ever-expanding field.

Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States will further the discussion while advancing the national goal of true and lasting religious pluralism in the United States.

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Section I: Historical Perspectives