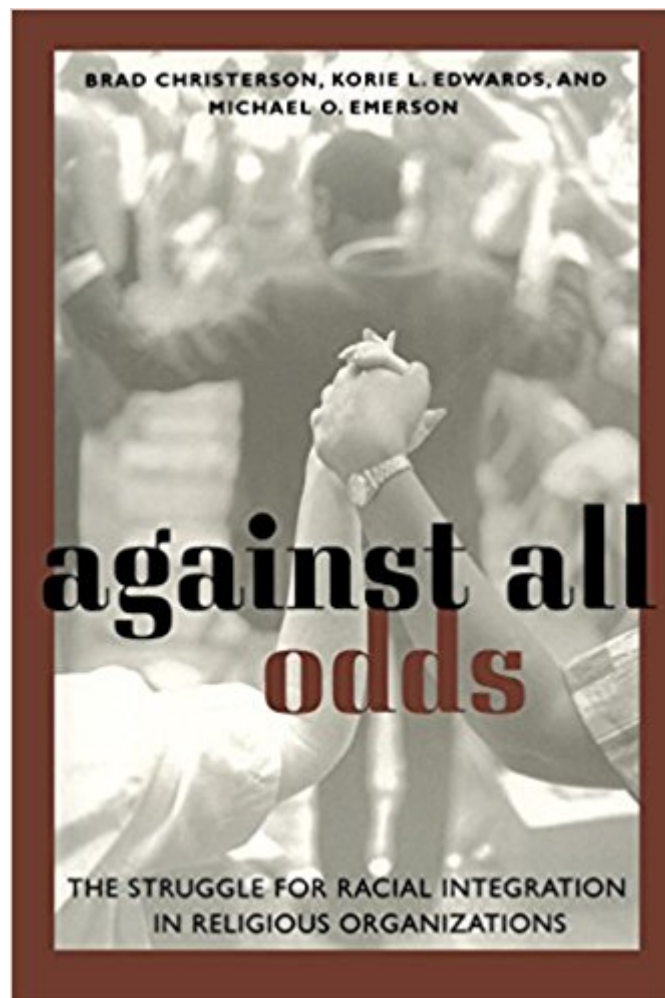




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Against All Odds: The Struggle For Racial Integration In Religious Organizations



Synopsis

Religious institutions are among the most segregated organizations in American society. This segregation has long been a troubling issue among scholars and religious leaders alike. Despite attempts to address this racial divide, integrated churches are very difficult to maintain over time. Why is this so? How can organizations incorporate separate racial, ethnic, and cultural groups? Should they? And what are the costs and rewards for people and groups in such organizations? Following up on Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith's award-winning *Divided by Faith, Against All Odds* breaks new ground by exploring the beliefs, practices, and structures which allow integrated religious organizations to survive and thrive despite their difficulties. Based on six in-depth ethnographies of churches and other Christian organizations, this engaging work draws on numerous interviews, so that readers can hear first-hand the joys and frustrations which arise from actually experiencing racial integration. The book gives an inside, visceral sense of what it is like to be part of a multiracial religious organization as well as a theoretical understanding of these experiences.

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Customer Reviews

“Draws on six case studies to propose a nuanced theory of the dynamics associated with the success or failure of multicultural congregations. This book honestly confronts the issues related to taking part in or pastoring an integrated congregation.” —Donald E. Miller, Executive Director, Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California

“Breaks new

ground by offering us a much better understanding of the operation of both religious congregations and race relations in the U.S. The research is impressive, the analysis smart, and the insights and implications important. This is a unique and significant book. —Christian Smith, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“Against All Odds whets our appetite for a larger research study using hundreds of churches. It is a welcoming beginning.” —Missiology

Brad Christerson is associate professor of sociology at Biola University. Michael O. Emerson is Allyn and Gladys Cline Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University. He is author or co-author of several books, including *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, and *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (NYU Press, 2005).

This book is a very enjoyable read. It dives into reasons some interracial religious organizations decide to become interracial, and what the members within think. It is more of a sociological experiment of six organizations with carefully thought out questions by the authors and utter transparency in the answers of the respondents. Very interesting!!

This is a smart book for two reasons: it is the original sin of the United States and it is current referring to six cases within the country. It is very American because the subject is very American. It is also an oxymoron - church congregations should by definition be a place of acceptance and love, but also an arena for subtle racial tension. The emphasis of this book was not to solve a national problem but to manage it within a congregation. I found this approach sensible as the examples and churches illustrated were real. Also, the title sets the reader up for a challenge. Chapter two approaches a unilateral need in every culture, the need to belong. Using Messiah Fellowship in L.A and the life of Eddie (Filipino Catholic) the authors track his story emphasizing how social integration between a Filipino culture and a non-Filipino culture would make for a new kind of church. One Filipino member is quoted addressing how difficult it was to socialize with other ethnic groups. Another was interviewed revealing that Filipino people avoid individuals who are direct and confronting. With this in mind the authors address division by small groups concluding that the best connection between cultures in this church was through worshipping God together. Chapter four offers a provoking title using the word ‘white’ and the example of Pastor Barnes, the African American at Crosstown Community Church. The honesty in this chapter opens up a dialogue that hopefully finds a national platform to engage in the ‘real world.’ The issue was not ‘why are

non-whites joining the church' but 'why whites are leaving the church.' The refreshing (although negative) emphasis was the concern of the non-white Christian over the white Christian. Chapter seven was almost humorous in its title that 'Jesus is color-blind' using the example of Emmanuel Bible College. At least a quarter of the student body is non-white and a visit to the cafeteria reveals tables filled with uniform color. Blacks, whites, Latino's and Asians. The unofficial uniforms for administrators and the faculty add to this separatist atmosphere. Another ingredient to the mix is the way each culture views matters of faith. The surprising factor is the white students and faculty is blinded to the reality of separatism on campus. After being asked the question, 'how the ethnic groups get along' the whites respond, 'by and large, very well.' This color blindness seems to put non-white students into a no-win situation. If students of color try and explain themselves they are viewed as being divisive. Political correctness seems to be a goal that this organization strives for, but unless there is an open dialogue on issues of race and cultural practice, the white view remains dominant - 'we all get along very well.' The faculty was united in their desire for the mission of the organization to embrace diversity as a priority. But the reasons behind this united effort were diverse in and of themselves. The first was the idea that the organization had something every ethnic group should know. The second was that the church represented in the world was diverse so the student body should be diverse. The third was the idea that students with different cultural background bring a fuller perspective to matters of faith. But this was only promoted by the faculty not the administration. Against All Odds was a compelling read that concluded with a challenge. Interracial religious organizations will always provide a visible stage to observe human relationships in community. Andrew Fox author of Change Through Challenge

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