Ranking Faiths

Religious Stratification in America

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1

Ranking Faiths

Although the United States prides itself on being a land of equal opportunity, in fact, some people have always had more access to resources such as higher education, wealth, and political power. To this day, whites have more social, economic, and political influence than blacks. Throughout U.S. history, people with northern European (Anglo-Saxon) backgrounds have had more power, privilege, and prestige than people with other ethnic ancestries. People who are born into wealthy families have always had more access to first-rate educations, lucrative careers, and political offices than people who are born into poverty. Despite recent gains, women still have fewer opportunities for worldly success than men.

Thus, American society is stratified in many ways: by race, ethnicity, class, and gender. With whites still having more opportunities than blacks, the persistence of racial stratification cannot be denied. The fact that Anglo-Saxons have had the upper hand on other nationalities shows that ethnic stratification has been a part of our nation's history. The fact that inherited wealth gives rich people advantages over the poor shows that class stratification is still an important part of America's social fabric. Men's disproportionate control of resources calls our attention to the tenacity of gender stratification.

The effects of race, ethnicity, class, and gender are well documented by sociologists. They have written many books about racial stratification, ethnic stratification, class stratification, and gender stratification (e.g., Anderson and Massey 2004; Crompton and Mann 1986; Geschwender 1978; Huber 1986; Nerad 1999). All of the major textbooks in the field of stratification also include chapters on race, ethnicity, class, and gender (e.g., Aguirre and Baker 2008; Hurst 2007; Kerbo 2006; Landry 2007; Marger 2009; Rossides 1997).

The same cannot be said about the effects of religion and the existence of religious stratification. Although sociologists of religion have produced numerous books and articles showing that religious groups differ in terms of their members' educations, occupations, and incomes (e.g., Johnstone 2007; Kosmin and Keysar 2006; Smith and Faris 2005), scholars specializing in the study of social stratification pay little or no attention to religious stratification. For example, none of the major textbooks in the field of stratification have chapters on religious stratification. In fact, they make almost no reference to religion as a factor in the unequal distribution of power, privilege, and prestige. Based on the content of these texts, one could easily get the impression that there is no such thing as religious stratification.

When we ask colleagues who share our interest in social inequality why they pay so little attention to religious stratification, they give us one or more of the following explanations:

1. Our society is increasingly secular. Religion may have been an important part of public life at one time, but it isn't any more.
2. Religious affiliation has gone from being a largely ascribed and permanent status to being largely a matter of personal choice, so if religion has any adverse effects on people's access to resources, they are free to switch religions or drop out of religion altogether.
3. Religion is not as visible as race and gender and, therefore, is not as useful as a consideration when it comes to allocating social rewards and benefits.
4. If there is any relationship between religion and resources, it is (a) because resources affect people's religious affiliations, not because religious affiliation affects people's resources, or (b) it can be explained away by controlling for other factors, such as education.
5. Even if religious stratification existed at earlier points in U.S. history, it is no longer an important part of American society.

Although there is some empirical evidence to support each of these assertions, the weight of the best and most recent evidence tilts the scales toward five alternative assumptions.

1. Religion continues to be an important influence in modern society.

For a long time, European and American scholars argued that the modernization of society was contributing to the demise of religion (e.g., Bellah 1970; Berger 1967; Dobbelaere 1981; Wilson 1966). With tongue in cheek, Hadden (1987) argued that this secularization thesis had become an article of faith in sociological theory and research. Then, in one of his most important contributions to current scholarship, Hadden presented a very compelling body of evidence challenging the secularization argument. Finke and Stark (1992) and Warner (1993) then took Hadden's thesis to the next level, arguing that the secularization thesis does not apply to the United States, which—they showed quite convincingly—has become more religious (not less) over time. The prevailing view these days is that religion continues to be an important factor in our society. Its influence is documented daily on television, in the newspapers, on talk radio, on the Internet, and in social research on religion's impact on family life, economic growth, the law, health and medical care, political discourse and voting, and work (Barro and Mitchell 2004; Christiano et al. 2008; Ebaugh 2006; Dillon 2003).

2. Religious affiliation is still largely an ascribed and permanent status.

Factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, and gender used to be considered objective realities and inherited attributes that had inescapable effects on people's lifestyles and life chances. In recent years, it has become fashionable in some academic circles to view social reality as a social construct, to emphasize the active and creative role individuals play in shaping their own lives, and to see people as consumers who shop for identities and roles the same way they shop for cars and household appliances (Gergen 2009; Heiner 2009; Taylor 2009). These approaches have led to subjectivist views of race, ethnicity, and gender (e.g., Aguirre and Baker 2008) and a growing interest in seeing religion as a voluntary matter and religious affiliation as a personal choice (Ammerman 2003; Cimino and Lattin 2002; Pew Research Center 2010). This approach is bolstered by evidence showing that one-fourth of Americans change religions at some point in life, usually when they are relatively young (typically before they are thirty-five years of age) and especially when they marry someone who was raised in another faith (Hoge et al. 2001; Kosmin and Keysar 2006; Fischer and Hout 2006; Roof and McKinney 1987). For example, former president George W. Bush was raised Episcopalian, but became a United Methodist when he married Laura Welch, a United Methodist. His brother Jeb Bush, also raised Episcopalian, converted to Catholicism to share the faith of his wife, Columba Garnica Gallo, who grew up Catholic.

However, the emphases on "social construction," "agency," and "rational choice" do not come to terms with other research showing that, to this day, the vast majority of Americans inherit their religion from their parents and never change faiths. Nelsen (1988), for example, shows that well over 90 percent of teenagers growing up in families with two Protestant parents or two Catholic parents take on their parents' religion. He also found that the sons and daughters of two parents who have no religious preference (Nones) tend to become Nones. When parents are of different faiths, children are most likely to take on the religious affiliation of their mothers, though not in all cases. More recently, Smith and Denton (2005) also have documented adolescents' tendencies to take on the religious identities and ideas of their parents. Other studies confirm the fact that three out of four Americans never leave the religion they inherited from their parents (Fischer and Hout 2006; Keister 2005; Kosmin and Keysar 2006). Even when there might be good reasons for them to change faiths or drop out of religion altogether, most people remain affiliated with the religion of their childhood throughout their lives. Thus, for most Americans, religious group membership is far more ascribed and permanent than it is voluntary.[1]

3. Religion is quite visible.

There is not much research on the extent to which people accurately perceive or correctly predict other people's race, ethnicity, class, gender, or religion. We don't know of any empirical basis for saying that religion is any harder to identify than other attributes.

Without research, most of us are tantalized by cases of mistaken identity. John Howard Griffin's book *Black Like Me* (1976) taught us that a white man can pass as a black man, and James O'Toole's book *Passing for White* (2003) reminds us that light-skinned blacks are often considered white. It is not uncommon for Latinos to be mistaken for Italians, or for Irishmen to be mistaken for Scots. The question "Is that a boy or a girl?" indicates an inability to tell the difference between male and female in some individual cases. Non-Asians acknowledge having difficulty telling the difference between Koreans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese people. Some people find it hard to tell an Episcopalian from a Presbyterian, or a Hindu from a Buddhist. And some Jews have changed their names to pass as WASPs.

We grant that some group traits are more identifiable than others. Skin color and sexual attributes are very identifiable to most people. But, in our experience, people who say that religious affiliation is not visible still make reasonably accurate decisions about people's religious affiliations. Based on the language students use in the essays they submit with their applications for graduate school, our academic colleagues have little or no difficulty telling the difference between an applicant who is a fundamentalist Protestant and one who is an atheist. They also are quite willing to assume that an Italian male who graduated from Marquette is a Catholic. When a woman who grew up in Mississippi says she was "born again" at vacation Bible school, they are quite rightly prepared to assume that she is Baptist. If a job candidate has an English name and refers to his prep school's headmaster as "rector," their assumption is that he is Episcopalian. If a coed's curriculum vitae says she is from Iran and is living in Dearborn, Michigan, while attending graduate school, they would accurately assume she is Muslim. Sure, they might be wrong every now and then, but more often than not, they will be right.

4. Religion has important effects on people's access to resources, even after other factors are taken into account.

We do not deny that conditions such as education, occupation, and income affect some people's religious affiliations (McCloud and Mirola 2009; Roof and McKinney 1987). Many of us know someone who, in the course of being upwardly mobile, has switched from an evangelical Protestant sect to a mainline Protestant denomination, or has gone from being a Reform Jew to being a Unitarian-Universalist. These cases—in which increasing access to resources is the independent variable and religion is the dependent variable—account for a portion of the correlation between religion and resources.

Another portion of the correlation is due to the fact that religion is linked to other factors that increase access to resources. For example, mainline Protestants tend to be white and highly educated (Roof and McKinney 1987; Smith and Faris 2005), and being white and highly educated increases one's chances of becoming wealthy (Keister 2000). When race and education are taken into account, the correlation between religion and resources is reduced a bit (Keister 2005).

However, even after these other factors are taken into account, religion continues to have effects. Some of its effects are indirect, through variables such as the division of labor in families, attitudes about education, family values, and economic values (Beyerlein 2004; Hertel and Hughes 1987; Keister 2008; Sherkat 2007; Lehrer 1999). Others are direct effects on outcomes such as education, labor force participation, social contacts that can provide information, and opportunities that can enhance wealth ownership, asset accumulation, and net worth (Burstein 2007; Homola, Knudsen, and Marshall 1987; Keister 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008; Pyle 1996, 2006). Thus, even after factors such as race and education are controlled, religious affiliation has significant effects of its own on people's access to social, economic, and political resources.

5. Religious stratification has always been and continues to be an important part of our society.

This claim can be verified in several ways. Historical documents, church records, and national telephone surveys provide information about the number of different religious groups in the United States at various points in time, as well as the size of these groups and the religious composition of the U.S. population. Public records provide the names of public officeholders, including all U.S. presidents, cabinet officers, Supreme Court justices, and members of the Congress. Through historical accounts and public records, one can identify who the nation's business leaders and wealthiest people have been at various periods of time. Websites and university histories record the names of people who have served as presidents of the nation's leading colleges and universities. The U.S. census, which is conducted every ten years, and national surveys provide data on the educational achievements, occupational status, and incomes of the American people in general. Historians and social scientists also have produced excellent descriptions of important cities and towns, including the religious backgrounds of the cultural elites, business elites, and political elites in these settings. Several more contemporary studies have used the *Who's Who in America* to locate the religious backgrounds of America's elites. In recent decades, it has become possible to calculate the socioeconomic status and discover the religious identifications of representative samples of American citizens.

Using these various sources of information, we have made connections between people's religious backgrounds and their access to important social resources. In some studies (Davidson and Pyle 2005; Pyle 2006), we have analyzed data on religion and the socioeconomic status of Americans in general. In others, we have investigated the religious affiliations of economic, political, and cultural elites (see appendix 1 for details). With regard to religion and power, we have documented the religious affiliations of the people who signed the Declaration of Independence, were delegates to the Constitutional Convention, were Speakers of the House in the thirteen original colonies, have been cabinet officers and Supreme Court justices, have been president of the United States, and have been identified as political leaders or political elites. With regard to religion and privilege, we have confirmed the religious affiliations of business leaders at both the local and national levels and the occupational status and income characteristics of people who belong to different religious groups. With regard to religion and prestige, we have gathered data on the religious ties and educational attainment of Americans in general, Ivy League presidents, and other cultural elites. Let's take a look at just some of the data documenting the history of religious stratification in America (other data are reported in later chapters).

RELIGIOUS STRATIFICATION IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, about 15 million people lived on the land that we now know as North America, and "tens of millions" more lived in Central America, and South America (Feagin and Feagin 2008, 136). These indigenous people lived in tribal communities that had different topographies, different economies, and different worldviews. These "Native Americans" have been described as "extremely religious," believing in a Creator, evil forces, and an afterlife and participating in a variety of religious practices asking the Creator for help and trying to ward off evil (Feagin and Feagin 2008, 137).

Then, Columbus landed in San Salvador in 1492, Ponce de Leon arrived in Florida in 1513, St. Augustine was settled by 1565, Jamestown became a settlement in 1607, and the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620. In the next 150 years or so, people belonging to many different religious groups settled in the thirteen original colonies (Finke and Stark 1992). During the colonial period, the largest groups were the Congregationalists, who settled in the northeast, the Presbyterians, who settled in the middle colonies, and the Anglicans, who settled in the South. Other sizable Protestant groups included the Baptists, the Quakers, the Dutch Reformeds, and the Methodists. There also were small numbers of Moravians, Mennonites, Huguenots, Catholics, and Jews.

Unitarianism was taking root among Congregationalists such as Charles Chauncy and a growing number of other educated colonists, such as John Adams and John Quincy Adams. Because these people increasingly considered themselves Unitarians, met in Unitarian congregations, and made church-related decisions as Unitarians (Cooke 1910), we consider Unitarianism a colonial religion, even though the congregations did not unite into a single denomination until 1825. Similar schisms were occurring in other groups. The Methodist Episcopal Church (aka Methodists) split off from the Church of England in 1784. The Protestant Episcopal Church (aka Episcopalians) separated from the Church of England in 1789. By 1793, German Reformeds had separated themselves from Dutch Reformeds.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, some of these religious groups had accumulated more power, privilege, and prestige than others.

Power

An examination of the religious affiliations of the founding fathers provides a clear indication of religious stratification in the colonies. Table 1.1 shows that 95 percent of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and 85 percent of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention belonged to just three Protestant denominations: Anglican, Congregational, and Presbyterian. Anglicans alone accounted for over 60 percent of the signatures on the Declaration and almost half (47.5 percent) of the participants at the Convention. Congregationalists ranked second, and Presbyterians were third. Together, these groups were 17.5 times more likely than all other groups combined to sign the Declaration and 5.7 times more likely to participate in the Conven-

Table 1.1. Religious Representation of America's Founding Fathers

	Signers of the Declaration of Independence[a]		*Delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention*[b]	
Religion	*N*	*Percent*	*N*	*Percent*
Anglican (Episcopalian)	34	60.7	19	47.5
Congregationalist	13	23.2	8	20.0
Presbyterian	6	10.7	7	17.5
Quaker	1	1.8	2	5.0
Roman Catholic	1	1.8	2	5.0
Dutch Reformed	—	—	1	2.5
Methodist	—	—	1	2.5
Baptist	1	1.8	—	—
Total	56	100	40	100

[a] Stokes (1950, 464).
[b] Olmstead (1960, 217).

tion. They also were way overrepresented in these settings (85 to 95 percent) relative to their numbers in the total population (about 9 percent).[2] Other groups, which were highly popular among the people, were hardly represented among national political elites. For example, Baptists, who had more adherents than Anglicans at the time, were not even present at the Constitutional Convention.

Privilege

There was a considerable concentration of wealth in the colonies. It is estimated that "the top 1 percent of free households owned about 13 percent of the wealth" (Beeghley 2005, 166). Congregationalists were well positioned among economic elites in New England. On the eve of the Revolution, two-thirds of rich merchants of Boston were Congregationalists (Baltzell 1982). Almost all of Boston's fifty leading families during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were Congregationalists. Anglicans were overrepresented among wealthy individuals in New York City in the 1750s (Meyers 1943, 58–59), and they dominated economic relations in the Southern provinces (Longmore 1996).

Quakers were highly visible among the wealthiest 2 percent of New Jersey residents in the middle of the eighteenth century (Purvis 1980, 597), and they were disproportionately represented among wealthy Philadelphians at the end of the colonial period (Nash 1968). The 1769 Philadelphia tax list showed that Quakers, who constituted no more than one-seventh of Philadelphia's population, accounted for more than half of those who paid taxes in excess of one hundred pounds (Tolles 1948, 49).

Presbyterians were fast rising in influence in the late colonial period and were beginning to achieve visibility among people of importance in all regions. In Pennsylvania's Chester and Lancaster counties, Presbyterians were overrepresented in the upper tax brackets by 1782 (Bonomi 1986, 96). By the time of the Revolution, Presbyterians stood on the threshold of being one of the most elite of the new nation's denominations.

Prestige

Education has always been one of the leading indicators of prestige. People with the most education have always been granted more honor and respect than people with fewer years of schooling. What, then, were the religious affiliations of the most highly educated colonists?

A majority of the "university men" in seventeenth century New England, and other colonies no doubt, came from England, where most had attended Oxford and Cambridge universities (Stout 1974). Both schools were affiliated with the Church of England and only Anglican communicants were allowed to matriculate. Another one-third of New England scholars had graduated from Harvard, which was founded by Congregationalists in 1636 (Stout 1974). Thus, Anglicans and Congregationalists were disproportionately represented among the colonies' educational elites.

The prominence of these groups persisted into the eighteenth century, largely through their own efforts. Congregationalists saw to it that their Calvinist brand of Protestantism was incorporated into public elementary and secondary schools intended for lower status children in New England. In Virginia, Anglicans saw to it that such public schools were under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London (Butts and Cremin 1953). Attempting to solidify their elite status even further, especially in areas where religious diversity prevented them from enforcing religious conformity in the public schools, these elite faith groups created private secondary schools of their own through endowments, denominational funding, and entrepreneurship (Butts and Cremin, 1953).

These Latin schools and academies were seen as stepping stones to higher education. Some well-to-do colonists sent their sons back to England, so they too could attend Oxford and Cambridge. Others, wanting their sons to go to such schools but not wanting to send them all the way to England, played a major role in the formation of institutions of higher learning in the colonies (Barck and Lefler 1958). As a result, six of the nine leading colleges founded between 1636 and 1769 were associated with just three Protestant denominations: the Congregational Church (Harvard, 1636; Yale, 1701; Dartmouth, 1769); the Church of England (William and Mary, 1693; Columbia, 1754); and the Presbyterian Church (Princeton, 1746). Most of the presidents and leading faculty at these schools—such as Yale's Thomas Clap, William and Mary's Hugh Jones, Columbia's Samuel Johnson, and Harvard's John Winthrop—were members of (and, in many cases, ministers in) the same elite denominations (Coe and Davidson 2010). So were the graduates, most of whom went on to careers in Protestant ministry, public service, medicine, education, commerce, and the military (Cremin 1970; Vine 1978).

Overall Ranking

Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, religious groups were differentiated on the basis of their representation in the social, political, and economic hierarchies of the new nation (see figure 1.1). Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, which were about 9 percent of the total population, clearly were the Upper stratum in colonial life, so much so that Baltzell (1964) later dubbed them "the Protestant Establishment." Quakers and Unitarians also were overrepresented in some spheres of colonial influence but can best be described as members of the Upper Middle stratum. Other Protestant groups were less prominently positioned in the Lower Middle stratum, but ranked ahead of Catholics, Jews, Others, and people with no religion, who, taken

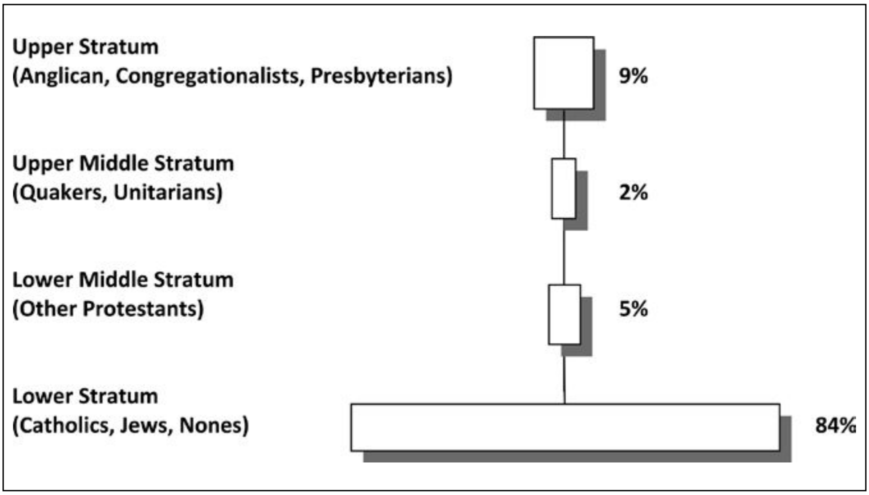

Figure 1.1. Religious Stratification in the Colonial Period

together, comprised the Lower stratum even though they far outnumbered the groups in higher strata.

RELIGIOUS STRATIFICATION IN THE 1800s

The nation's religious composition changed dramatically in the next one hundred years. Unitarianism officially became a separate denomination when the American Unitarian Association was founded in 1825. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (aka Mormons) emerged from the "burned over district" of upstate New York in 1830. The Christian Church/Disciples of Christ came into being in 1832. The Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists not only grew in size (Finke and Stark 1992), they also divided into separate groups along racial and regional lines. For example, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845. The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America split off from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1861 and, later, became the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Black denominations such as the Union American Methodist Church (1813) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (1820) sprung up before the Civil War, but there was a veritable explosion of new black denominations in the thirty years following the war. By the end of the 1800s, there were many more religious groups than there had been in the colonial period.

In addition to the formation of new groups, several groups that were only a small percentage of the colonial population increased their memberships. Baptists and Methodists increased to 4.3 million members in 1850 and 13 million members in 1890, mainly as a result of their evangelistic efforts (Finke and Stark 1992). Catholics and Jews benefited from increased immigration. The Catholic population, which was only about 40,000 at the end of the colonial period, increased to 195,000 in 1820, jumped to 650,000 in 1836, then skyrocketed to 12 million in 1900 (D'Antonio et al. 2001). There were only 2,000 to 3,000 Jews in the colonies, but enough to establish congregations in New York (1656), Newport, Rhode Island (1677), Savannah (1733), Philadelphia (1745), and Charleston, South Carolina (1750). The Jewish population was still only about 5,000 in 1820. However, with the immigration of Jews from Germany, it grew to about 50,000 in 1850 and 250,000 in 1880. With the immigration of East European Jews, the Jewish population jumped to about 1 million by 1900.

What effects, if any, did these changes have on the pattern of religious stratification that emerged in the colonial period? Let's see.

Power

Between 1800 and 1899, twenty-three men served as presidents of the United State (see table 1.2). Fifty-two percent of the presidents belonged to just two Protestant denominations: Episcopal and Presbyterian. Thirty percent of the presidents were Episcopalians; 22 percent were Presbyterians. Considering the fact that these two groups were only about 5 percent of the total U.S. population at this time, they clearly were overrepresented in the White House during this period in our history.

Three presidents were Unitarians. Three others were Methodists. Three were Nones. One president was a Disciple of Christ, and one was Dutch Reformed. Unitarians and Dutch Reformeds had more presidents in the first half of the century; Methodists and Nones had more in the second half. There were no Catholics, Jews, or people of any other faiths among nineteenth century presidents.

In the midst of the continuing political dominance of the Protestant Establishment, there were some indications of change. Episcopalians and Presbyterians were 63 percent of all presidents in the first half of the nineteenth century and 46 percent in the second half. Relative to their numbers in the total population, there were ten to twelve times as many Episcopalian and Presbyterian presidents as one would expect in the first half of the century and eight to ten times as many in the second half. Episcopalians had more access to the presidency in the first half, whereas Presbyterians had more in the second half.

Privilege

There was a marked increase in the concentration of wealth during the 1800s (Beeghley 2005, 166–67). Recall that the top 1 percent of households controlled 13 percent of the wealth in the colonial period. By the 1860s, and from that point to the end of the century, the top 1 percent controlled between 26 and 29 percent of the wealth.

Who were these richest of all Americans? What were their religious affiliations? (See table 1.3.) A study of leaders in the textile, railroad, and steel industries between 1870 and 1879 (Gregory and Neu 1962, 199–200) shows that these business elites were most likely to be Episcopalians (25 percent) and Congregationalists (22 percent). Presbyterians ranked third (14 percent), followed by Unitarians (10 percent), and Quakers (8 percent). Methodists (6 percent) and Baptists (4 percent) were farther down the list. An additional 11 percent belonged to a variety of other Protestant denominations (6 percent) or were Protestant but did not specify their denomination (5 percent). There were no

Table 1.2. U.S. Presidents, 1800–1899, by Religious Affiliation

	Total		*1800–1849*	*1850–1899*
	N	*%*	*(%)*	*(%)*
Episcopalian	7	30	45	15
James Madison (1809–1817)				
James Monroe (1817–1825)				
William Henry Harrison (1841)				
John Tyler (1841–1845)				
Zachary Taylor (1849–1850)				
Franklin Pierce (1853–1857)				
Chester Arthur (1881–1885)				
Presbyterian	5	22	18	31
Andrew Jackson (1829–1837)				
James Polk (1845–1849)				
James Buchanan (1857–1861)				
Grover Cleveland (1885–1889, 1893–1897)				
Benjamin Harrison (1889–1893)				
Unitarian	3	13	18	8
John Adams (1797–1801)				
John Quincy Adams (1825–1829)				
Millard Fillmore (1850–1853)				
Methodist	3	13	—	23
Rutherford B. Hayes (1877–1881)				
Ulysses S. Grant (1869–1877)				
William McKinley (1897–1901)				
Nones	3	13	9	15
Thomas Jefferson (1801–1809)				
Abraham Lincoln (1861–1865)				
Andrew Johnson (1865–1869)				
Disciples of Christ	1	4	—	8
James Garfield (1881)				
Dutch Reformed	1	4	9	—
Martin Van Buren (1837–1841)				
Total	23	99	99	100

Table 1.3. Religious Affiliations of American Industrial Leaders in the 1870s

Religion	%
Episcopalian	25
Congregationalist	22
Presbyterian	14
Unitarian	10
Quaker	8
Methodist	6
Baptist	4
Other Protestant	6
Protestant Unspecified	5
Catholic	—
Jewish	—
Total	100

Source: Gregory and Neu (1962).

Catholics or Jews. Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians were 1.5 times more likely to be business leaders than members of all other religious groups. These three denominations were far overrepresented relative to their numbers in the total population. One of the leading analysts of America's upper class also noted that there was an "affinity between the gentleman-businessman of the 'Gilded Age' and the Episcopal Church" (Baltzell 1958, 229).

The dominance of Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and—to a lesser extent—Presbyterians was reflected in many urban centers. For example, Philadelphia's moneyed class in the same period (including leaders in banking, shipping, real estate, textiles, chemicals, iron works, coal, canals, railroads, steel, oil, department stores, and utilities) was largely made up of Episcopalians and Presbyterians (Baltzell 1958, 70–129, 223–61). There was a "growing influence of the Episcopal Church upon the Victorian upper class" (Baltzell 1958, 247).

Prestige

One of the leading indicators of prestige has to do with the types of schools people attend or work at as faculty or administrators. Private education is admired more than public education, and there are no more prestigious schools than those which make up the Ivy League. Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth have Congregational roots; Columbia was started by the Church of England; Princeton is Presbyterian; Brown is Baptist; Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania are nonsectarian.

One way to estimate the stature of religious groups in the 1800s is to determine the religious affiliations of the presidents of Ivy League schools (Coe and Davidson 2010). Between 1800 and 1899, these schools had a total of fifty-four presidents. Table 1.4 shows their religious affiliations.

Twenty-six percent were Episcopalians, 22 percent were Congregationalists, and 17 percent were Presbyterians—eight to ten times more than one might expect considering the size of these groups in the total population. Nearly twice as many members of these groups were Ivy League presidents, as compared to members of all other religious groups. Seventeen percent were Unitarians, and 13 percent were Baptists. The overall pattern was pretty stable throughout the century.

Thirteen of the fourteen Episcopalians (93 percent) were presidents of Columbia and Penn. The other one was at Cornell. Ten of the fourteen Congregationalists (83 percent) were presidents of Dartmouth and Yale. The other two were at Columbia and Cornell. Five of the nine Presbyterians (55 percent) were presidents of Princeton. Two others were presidents at Dartmouth, one was at Penn, and one was at Columbia. All nine of the Unitarians were presidents of Harvard, and all seven of the Baptists were presidents of Brown. The one Reformed president was at Penn, and the one Disciple was at Cornell. No Other Protestants, Catholics, Jews, or Nones were Ivy League presidents in the nineteenth century.

It is not surprising that the religious affiliations of the presidents tended to be the same as the church that founded the institution. Schools were often required to hire "their own kind." But that was not always the case, and the cases where it was not reveal the stature of the elite denominations. Whenever Dartmouth's president was not a Congregationalist, he was a Presbyterian. When Columbia's president was not an Episcopalian, he was either a Con-

Table 1.4. Ivy League Presidents, 1800–1899, by Religious Affiliation

	N	*1800–1849 (%)*	*1850–1899 (%)*	*Total (%)*
Episcopalian	14	27	25	26
Congregationalist	12	23	21	22
Presbyterian	9	19	14	17
Unitarian	9	19	14	17
Baptist	7	8	18	13
Reformed	1	4	—	2
Disciples of Christ	1	—	4	2
Unknown	1	—	4	2
Total	54	101	100	101

Source: Coe and Davidson (2010).

gregationalist or a Presbyterian. Penn had eleven presidents during the 1800s. Five were Episcopalians, two were Presbyterians, one was Reformed, and the religion of the other is unknown. Cornell had three presidents between its founding in 1865 and the end of that century. One was an Episcopalian, one was a Congregationalist, and the other a Disciple of Christ. Thus even when schools were not required to hire Episcopalians, Congregationalists, or Presbyterians, they tended to do so. The only exception was Harvard: when its president was not a Congregationalist, he was a Unitarian.

Combining these data, we see that the groups that comprised the Upper stratum in the colonial period continued to be dominant religions in the nineteenth century. Other Protestants, such as Methodists and Baptists, ranked lower, but these groups still had more stature than Black Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Nones.

RELIGIOUS STRATIFICATION FROM 1900 TO THE PRESENT

America's religious landscape has continued to change in the past 110 years. In the early 1900s, the changes were largely due to the influx of Catholic and Jewish immigrants. The Catholic population, which stood at 12 million in 1900, was 20 million by 1920. The Jewish population, which was about 1 million in 1900, was about 2 million in 1920. The rapid increase in these non-Protestant groups triggered a nativist reaction that culminated in the Immigration Act of 1924. That act all but stopped the in-migration of people from eastern and southern Europe (the main sources of Catholic and Jewish immigrants) and Asian and Middle Eastern countries (the main sources of Hindus, Buddhists, and other eastern religions). What was a flood of immigrants was reduced to a trickle between 1924 and 1965. Except for the in-migration of some Jews from Germany and some Puerto Ricans to the mainland, this period was one of religious consolidation, not religious diversification.

That all changed in 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed a new Immigrant Act. This one reopened the doors of immigration and in came millions of newcomers. The largest percentage of the new immigrants has been Hispanic Catholics from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Central and South America. Other groups have included Protestants and Catholics from the Pacific Rim. Large numbers of Hindus and Buddhists also have arrived from a variety of Asian nations. Muslims have come to the United States from the Middle East. Today, Protestants are on the verge of being less than half of the total population for the first time in U.S. history. Catholics, Jews, Others, and Nones are almost a majority of all Americans. Catholics alone are about one-quarter of the total population. Nones are about 15 percent. Jews are about 2 percent. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others are about 8 percent. Clearly, the diversity of the nation's religious landscape has increased. What has happened to its historical pattern of religious stratification? First, let's look at data on the religious affiliation of American elites, then some data on the connection between religion and socioeconomic status for the general population.

Elites

Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and—to a lesser extent—Congregationalists continue to be overrepresented among presidents of the United States and presidents of Ivy League schools, but they no longer have the virtual lock they once had on these positions. In the early 1900s, there were five to ten times as many members of these religious groups in these positions. Now there are about twice as many.

Between 1900 and 1959, 44 percent of U.S. presidents were members of the Protestant Establishment (Presbyterians Woodrow Wilson and Dwight Eisenhower, Episcopalian Franklin Roosevelt, and Congregationalist Calvin Coolidge). Since 1960, 30 percent of presidents have been affiliated with Protestant Establishment denominations (Episcopalians Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush and UCC/Congregationalist Barack Obama). The increasing number of "outsiders" includes two Baptists (Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton), two Disciples of Christ (Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan), one Methodist (former Episcopalian George W. Bush), and one Catholic (John Kennedy).

Between 1900 and 1959, 63 percent of Ivy League presidents were Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Congregationalists. Since 1960, only 17 percent have been. The growing number of Others includes ten Jews, three Catholics, a Mormon, a Quaker, a Methodist, a Church of the Brethren, an Eastern Orthodox, a None, and fourteen people whose religious affiliations are unknown.[3]

Other studies of elites also point to both continuity and change. Fry (1933a and 1933b) recorded the names and religious affiliations of every person listed in the 1930–1931 edition of *Who's Who in America*, which is considered the best single source of information about America's elites (see table 1.5).[4] Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists clearly were the dominant groups. Episcopalians ranked highest with 22 percent of all listees, 6.3 times more than their percentage in the total population. Presbyterians ranked second at 20 percent (3.3 times what one might expect). Congregationalists ranked third at 11 percent and 5.6 times their representation in the population. Together, these three groups accounted for 53.5 percent of all listees.

Unitarians and Quakers came next. Unitarians were only 6 percent of all listees, but there were twenty times as many of them in *Who's Who* than one might expect. There were even fewer Quakers, but they too were over-

Table 1.5. Religious Affiliations of Individuals in *Who's Who in America* (percent)

Religious Group	*1930–1931*[a]	*1950–1951*	*1970–1971*	*1992–1993*
Protestant Establishment				
Episcopalian	21.94	23.12	20.22	18.04
Presbyterian	20.31	18.39	19.62	13.91*
Congregationalist/UCC	11.29	8.84	5.91	3.19*
Other Elite				
Unitarian-Universalist	5.98	4.03	3.60	2.39*
Quaker	1.09	1.75	1.50	.65
Catholic	4.45	8.41	13.21	23.12*
Jewish	1.31	2.54	6.91	12.32*
Other Protestant				
Baptist	8.97	6.21	5.11	4.71*
Disciples	2.05	2.36	2.20	.36*
Lutheran	2.41	2.71	3.70	6.01*
Methodist	14.50	15.50	14.21	9.57*
Reformed	1.00	.44	.30	.36
Other[b]				
Mormon	.39	.27	1.10	1.52*
Christian Science	.69	.70	.60	.22
All Others	3.62	4.73	1.81	3.63
No Affiliation Listed	43.86	48.49	69.01	65.66

[a] The 1930–1931 figures are reported by Fry (1933a).
[b] Reported by Ament (1927).
* 1930–1992 difference significant $p < .001$.

represented (4.8 times as many). Christian Scientists were even smaller (less than 1 percent), but there were slightly more of them (1.3 times as many) in *Who's Who* than one might expect. All other groups were underrepresented. Methodists came closest to parity (.88), followed by Jews (.73), Reformed (.72), Disciples (.67), Baptists (.55), Lutherans (.33), Mormons (.33), and Catholics (.13).

The rankings were very similar in 1950–1951. Half of the listees were Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. These groups were still overrepresented, as were the Unitarians, Quakers, and Christian Scientists. For the first time, Methodists were slightly above parity at 15.5 percent of all listees. None of the other groups had more than 10 percent of the listees, and all of them were underrepresented relative to their numbers in the population.

The 1970–1971 rankings were a little different. Episcopalians (20.2 percent) and Presbyterians (19.6 percent) were still the largest groups and were still overrepresented. Congregationalists' numbers slipped noticeably, although they—like Unitarians, Quakers, and Christian Scientists—were still overrepresented. Methodists were slightly above parity once again. Catholics were up to 13.2 percent of listees but had not reached parity. Baptists, Lutherans, Reformeds, and Mormons continued to be small in numbers and underrepresented. The biggest change involved Jews, who now were 6.9 percent of all listees and 2.4 times more likely to be in *Who's Who* than in the total population.

By 1992–1993, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists had slipped to 35.1 percent of all listees, but remained overrepresented. Though small in numbers, Unitarians, Quakers, and Christian Scientists were still overrepresented. Methodists declined percentage wise and slipped slightly below parity, while Lutherans continued their steady climb up the ranks. The biggest gainers were Jews (who now were 12.3 percent of all listees, six times more than one might expect) and Catholics (who were nearly one-fourth of all entries and were closing in on parity).

Population as a Whole

The other way to describe religious stratification is to estimate the socioeconomic status of people who belong to various groups. The evidence in table 1.6 shows the ranking of nineteen religious groups at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first (Davidson 2008). The Privilege column reports each group's ranking in terms of the median household income of its members. The Power column indicates each group's presence in the 107th Congress (2001–2002). The Prestige column shows the percentage of each group's members who are college graduates. The last column indicates each group's overall ranking or total score on all three dimensions.

Episcopalians, Jews, Presbyterians, and Unitarians ranked the highest. They were followed by Hindus, the United Church of Christ, Methodists, Mormons, Catholics, and Lutherans. A third stratum consisted of Nones, members of the Church of Christ, Adventists, the Assemblies of God, Baptists, and Buddhists. Muslims, the Church of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses were at the bottom. This profile is similar to other recent rankings of religious groups.

There is considerable consistency across the three dimensions. This consistency is most apparent in the Upper stratum, where all four groups score high in all three domains. For example, Episcopalians averaged $55,000 in income. There were four times as many Episcopalians in Congress as one would have expected based on their numbers in the total population. And 56 percent of Episcopalians were college graduates. Essentially, the same pattern occurs among Presbyterians. They averaged $50,000 per household,

Table 1.6. Religious Stratification, 2001

	Privilege		*Power*		*Prestige*		*Total*
Stratum	*Inc*[a]	*R*[b]×*W*[c] = *S*[d]	*Cong*[e]	*R*[b]×*W*[c] =*S*[d]	*Coll*[f]	*R*[b]×*W*[c] = *S*[d]	*Score*
Upper							
Episcopal	55	1 × 3 = 3	4.0	1 × 2 = 2	56	1 × 1 = 1	6
Jewish	72	1 × 3 = 3	7.0	1 × 2 = 2	58	1 × 1 = 1	6
Presbyterian	50	1 × 3 = 3	3.0	1 × 2 = 2	51	1 × 1 = 1	6
Unitarian Universalist	58	1 × 3 = 3	3.3	1 × 2 = 2	72	1 × 1 = 1	6
Upper Middle							
Hindu	51	1 × 3 = 3	0.0	4 × 2 = 8	67	1 × 1 = 1	12
United Church of Christ	41	2 × 3 = 6	2.0	2 × 2 = 4	49	2 × 1 = 2	12
Methodist	48	2 × 3 = 6	1.7	2 × 2 = 4	36	3 × 1 = 3	13
Mormon	40	3 × 3 = 9	3.0	1 × 2 = 2	30	3 × 1 = 3	14
Catholic	47	2 × 3 = 6	1.1	3 × 2 = 6	33	3 × 1 = 3	15
Lutheran	49	2 × 3 = 6	0.8	3 × 2 = 6	36	3 × 1 = 3	15
Lower Middle							
None	46	2 × 3 = 6	0.1	4 × 2 = 8	34	3 × 1 = 3	17
Church of Christ	34	3 × 3 = 9	1.0	3 × 3 = 6	30	3 × 1 = 3	18
Seventh-day Adventist	30	4 × 3 = 12	2.5	2 × 2 = 4	29	3 × 1 = 3	19
Assembly of God	38	3 × 3 = 9	1.0	3 × 2 = 6	24	4 × 1 = 4	19
Baptist[g]	33	3 × 3 = 9	0.8	3 × 2 = 6	22	4 × 1 = 4	19
Buddhist	38	3 × 3 = 9	0.0	4 × 2 = 8	42	2 × 1 = 2	19
Lower							
Muslim	31	4 × 3 = 12	0.0	4 × 2 = 8	46	2 × 1 = 2	22
Church of God	26	4 × 3 = 12	0.0	4 × 2 = 8	15	4 × 1 = 4	24
Jehovah's Witnesses	24	4 × 3 = 12	0.0	4 × 2 = 8	12	4 × 1 = 4	24

Note: Within strata, groups with the same scores are listed alphabetically.

[a] Inc = median household income (rounded to nearest $1,000) in 2000. Data from Kosmin and Keysar (2006, 153).

[b] Rank within this dimension (1 = Upper, 2 = Upper Middle, 3 = Lower Middle, 4 = Lower).

[c] W = weight (3 for privilege, 2 for power, 1 for prestige).

[d] S = score.

[e] Cong = percent in 107th Congress/percent in society. Data from www.adherents.com.

[f] Coll = percent college graduates. Data from Kosmin and Keysar (2006, 157).

[g] There are differences between American, Southern, and Black Baptists, but Kosmin and Keysar (2006) do not distinguish between these types in the calculations on income and education, and www.adherents.com does not in its calculations on the religious affiliations of members of Congress.

there were three times as many in Congress as one might have expected, and 51 percent were college graduates. There also is considerable consistency among lower status groups. Muslims, the Church of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses scored low on all three dimensions. For example, the median income for members of the Church of God was $26,000 (less than half the median of groups in the Upper stratum). The Church of God had no members in the 107th Congress, and only 15 percent of its members were college graduates. Jehovah's Witnesses averaged only $24,000, also had nobody in Congress, and had very few members who had graduated from college.

There is a bit more inconsistency in the other strata. For example, Mormons' educational and income rankings were modest, yet there were three times as many Mormons in the 107th Congress than one might have expected based on Mormons' representation in the total population. On the other hand, Hindus ranked high in privilege ($51,000 median income) and prestige (67 percent college graduates), but were low in power (with no members in Congress). Buddhists ranked highest in prestige (42 percent college grads), lower in privilege ($38,000 median income), and lowest in power (no members in Congress). Nones were prosperous ($46,000 median income) and fairly highly educated (34 percent are college graduates), but they were underrepresented in the Congress (only one-tenth as many members as one might have expected).

But, even in these middle ranks, there is more consistency than inconsistency. The United Church of Christ is a good example. Its members were above average in education (49 percent college grads) and income ($41,000), and they were twice as likely to be in Congress as one might have expected. For Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Baptists, the Church of Christ, and the Assemblies of God, scores on any one dimension were within one rank of their scores on the other dimensions.

Thus, there has been a transition from an Old Upper stratum made up of Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians to a New Upper stratum made up of Episcopalians, Jews, Presbyterians, and Unitarian-Universalists. The four groups in the New Upper stratum sit atop a vertical ranking of other groups that have less access to power, privilege, and prestige.

THREE KEY QUESTIONS

Given the evidence showing that religious stratification arose in the colonial period, it is only natural to wonder about the conditions under which it developed. What were these conditions and how did they combine to produce an unequal ranking of religious groups so early in our history? Also, given the evidence that religious stratification persists but also has changed over time, we need to explore the forces that have produced these outcomes. For example, why does it appear that religious inequalities were larger in the colonial period and early 1800s than they are now? Why have some groups remained high in the rankings throughout U.S. history? Why have some groups remained low for 250 to 300 years? And why have some groups slipped in the rankings while others have improved over the years? Finally, what effects has religious stratification had on the society as a whole? To what extent and in what ways has it contributed to the well-being of the society? To what extent and in what ways has it caused problems that otherwise might not exist? Do its effects vary with changes in the magnitude of religious inequalities?

When we turn to the experts for explanations, we run into another problem. The people who specialize in the study of social stratification have not investigated these questions, so they don't have answers, and the people who specialize in religion and have studied religious group rankings have answers that are not very helpful. Instead of linking their interpretations to the conflict approach that researchers use to explain other types of stratification, religion scholars tend toward a functionalist view of religious group rankings. In a nutshell, they tend to see society as a social system made up of social institutions (marriage, education, religion, politics, economy) that contribute to society's equilibrium by meeting basic societal needs. They assume that leadership positions in these institutions are more important than other social positions, that these positions require the most talented members of society, and that higher wages and benefits are useful in getting the right people into these leadership positions and rewarding them for working for the well-being of the society as a whole. It is said that the people who occupy these leadership roles need rational and refined lifestyles that are compatible with their station in life. Protestantism's emphasis on work as a calling and the importance of self-discipline are seen as key elements in such a lifestyle. One might learn these things early in life as members of mainline denominations, or discover that the religious message emphasized in mainline denominations reinforces a rationalized view of the world that is suited to the life experiences of those in the middle strata. People of lesser means join religions offering beliefs and practices that are more suited to their life situations. Thus, religious differences in socioeconomic status are seen as arising out of society's need for order, as persisting because they reflect core cultural values, and as having functional consequences for the society as a whole.

Here's the problem. The vast majority of sociologists, including those who study stratification, abandoned this point of view years ago (Davidson and Pyle 2005). Their criticisms were that the functionalist argument makes unsubstantiated claims about society's need for order, does not account for social change and unrest, and justifies the status quo, including racism, sexism, and other inequalities (Ritzer 2010, Turner 2002, Ryan 1981). Also, as we have said elsewhere, Weber's thesis that Protestants are better suited for worldly success "treats religious groups as separate entities, which they are not (historically, theologically, or sociologically)," "blames the victims, which we are not willing to do in studies of race, class, and gender," and lacks empirical support (Davidson 2008, 373).[5]

Thus, we have a reality—religious stratification—that specialists in social stratification have tended to overlook (even deny) and which specialists in religion acknowledge but tend to interpret in terms of outdated theories and unverified hypotheses. Seeing this conundrum as a worthwhile challenge, we thought it would be fun to explore the origins, persistence and change, and consequences of religious stratification (something experts in stratification would not be inclined to do) by using conflict theory (something experts in religion would not be inclined to do). The risk would be doing something that neither group would like. On the other hand, the reward could be causing scholars who study stratification to give more consideration to the existence of religious stratification, and prompting scholars in the study of religion to make more use of conflict theory when they try to explain its origins, its persistence and change, and its consequences for society. We decided to go ahead with the project and let the chips fall where they may.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have stated our assumptions about religion's continuing role in modern society and presented evidence that religious stratification has been an important part of American life from colonial times to the present. We also have asked key questions about its origins, how it has persisted and changed over the years, and how it has affected our society. Here's the rub: specialists in the study of social stratification do not have any answers to these issues, and the explanations in the study of religion are antiquated and seriously flawed. We have taken this dilemma as a challenge: to increase interest in the study of religious stratification and to do so using an approach that could provide a more unified understanding of inequalities based on race, ethnicity, class, gender . . . and religion. Let's begin our journey by outlining that approach.