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Race and Ethnic Differences in Religious Involvement: African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Non-Hispanic Whites

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Abstract

This study examined differences in religious participation and spirituality among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks (Black Caribbeans) and non-Hispanic Whites. Data are taken from the National Survey of American Life, a nationally representative study of African Americans, Black Caribbeans and non-Hispanic Whites. Selected measures of organizational, nonorganizational and subjective religious participation were examined. African American and Caribbean Blacks were largely similar in their reports of religious involvement; both groups generally indicated higher levels of religious participation than non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans were more likely than Black Caribbeans to be official members of their places of worship, engage in activities (choirs, church clubs) at their place of worship and request prayer from others. Black Caribbeans reported reading religious materials more frequently than African Americans. The discussion notes the importance of examining ethnic differences within the black American population of the United States.

Keywords

African Americans; Caribbean Blacks; religious involvement

Introduction

Over 30 years of data from national opinion polls and social surveys of the U.S. population have consistently demonstrated significant and pervasive differences between African Americans and Whites in relation to religious involvement (Gallup and Lindsay 1999). Differences are noted across a range of religious involvement indicators including organizational participation (e.g. church attendance rates, church membership), non-

organizational or devotional activities (e.g. use of religious media and reports on daily prayer), subjective measures of religious identification, and use of religious resources in coping with life problems. For example, prior work indicates that blacks feel more strongly about religious beliefs (Alston 1973; Gallup and Lindsay 1999), attend services more frequently (Nelsen et al. 1971; Sasaki 1979), and pray more frequently (Greeley 1979) than do Whites. Gallup and Lindsay (1999) note that African Americans exceed national rates for church membership, church attendance, self-identification as being 'born again,' and beliefs that religion is very important in their own life and that religion can answer many of today's problems (pp. 52–53). Further, race differentials are consistent across various age groups such that Black adolescents (Smith et al. 2002), as well as adults (Taylor et al 1996) and elderly persons (Levin, Taylor and Chatters 1994; Krause and Chatters 2005), all demonstrate higher levels of religious involvement than do their respective White age counterparts.

Early studies of race differences in religious involvement were criticized for the lack of controls for demographic factors (e.g. regional, socioeconomic status) and denominational affiliation (George 1988; Ellison and Sherkat 1995) that are known to pattern religious participation and are differentially distributed across racial groups. However, subsequent investigations employing multivariate analyses that control for demographic factors and denomination, nonetheless found that Black respondents demonstrate higher levels of public and private religious behaviors and higher levels of religious commitment as reflected in attitudes and beliefs (Levin, Taylor and Chatters, 1994; Taylor et al. 1996). Recently, Krause and Chatters (2005) examined a diverse set of items related to prayer practices (e.g. social and substantive content of prayer, interpersonal aspects of prayer) in a national sample of older adults. They similarly found that older Blacks were more deeply engaged in prayer activities than their White counterparts. In sum, available evidence indicates higher levels of religious involvement among African Americans as compared to White Americans and these differences persist even with controls for demographic factors and denominational preference.

Diversity within the Black Population

Prior research has documented significant demographic variability in religious involvement within the Black population, based on factors such as gender, age, region, and marital status (Taylor et al. 2004). However, in addition to these structural and social factors, ethnic diversity is an important and largely unrecognized source of divergence within this population group. In particular, recent growth in the size of Black Caribbean immigrant populations contributes to significant within group ethnic variation in the African American population. The Black Caribbean population in the U.S. has grown 67 per cent from 1990 to 2000 (Logan and Deane 2003). Although Caribbean Blacks represent roughly 4.5 per cent of the black population overall, they make up over 25 per cent of the black population in cities such as New York, Boston, Nassau-Suffolk, NY, Miami, West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL, and Fort Lauderdale (Logan and Deane 2003: Table 2) and reflect a larger pattern of immigrant growth in major metropolitan areas in the U.S.

In both local community and national surveys of the population, persons of African descent who originate from the Caribbean region are, for the most part, designated as black Americans. As noted by several authors (Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman, 1999; Waters 1999; Foner 2005), race status has been of overriding importance in American society and, as a consequence, the issue of ethnic differences *within* the black racial group has been largely ignored. The use of broad categories such as 'African American' or 'Black American' masks discrete sub-groups (e.g. Caribbean Blacks and immigrants from African countries) that are defined by ethnicity. More importantly, the failure to examine this source of intragroup variability potentially obscures important differences associated with ethnic and national heritage and life circumstances. Specifically, the distinctive histories and life experiences of Blacks of Caribbean descent likely

have important influences on shaping both the overall patterns and correlates of religious involvement.

Roles of Religious Institutions

A tradition of sociohistorical and ethnographic research has documented that African American religious institutions and practices have been pivotal in supporting the development of black communities with regard to social welfare, educational, civic, and economic goals and pursuits (Frazier 1964; Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004; Wielhouwer 2004). In fact, the prominent historical role of religious institutions and practices in black community life is frequently cited as a reason for the continued significance of religion for African Americans (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Taylor et al. 2004; Wielhouwer 2004; Krause and Chatters 2005). In effect, these roles and activities constituted the ‘civic tradition’ of the Black Church that had its roots in the particular social, economic, and political culture of the U.S. In addition, because the Black Church ‘civic tradition’ was both sacred and secular, it was uniquely and deliberately responsive to the shifting race dynamics and power differentials that existed between blacks and whites (Wielhouwer 2004).

In contrast, the historical experiences of Caribbean Blacks were shaped by very different circumstances associated with the divergent national histories and patterns of governance, race and class relationships, and social, economic and political systems prevailing in their respective countries of origin. Moreover, current-day profiles of Caribbean Blacks in the U.S. suggest that they are distinctive from African Americans with regard to social and economic status and community profiles (Logan and Deane 2003). For example, Caribbean Blacks are heavily concentrated on the East Coast in cities such as New York, Miami, and Fort Lauderdale, while African Americans are more geographically dispersed throughout the nation. Caribbean Blacks also tend to live in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of homeowners than do African Americans. Caribbean Blacks experience similarly high levels of racial segregation from whites as do African Americans. However, African American and Black Caribbean neighborhoods are geographically distinct from one another and only partially overlap (Logan and Deane 2003).

Given these differences in social and life circumstances, religious institutions and involvement may have very different meanings and purposes for Caribbean Blacks. However, in at least one respect, religious institutions have served similar roles and functions for both native born American Blacks and Caribbean Blacks. Both the Black Church and Black Caribbean churches have been instrumental in assisting in the relocation and resettlement of large groups of immigrants. The Black Church served a vital function in the internal migration of blacks from the rural South to the Northern U.S., providing needed assistance with housing, jobs, and integration into community life. Similarly, Black Caribbean churches have aided in the transnational migration from Caribbean countries to the U.S. In this role, religious institutions have facilitated the relocation and resettlement of recent arrivals, provided resources for community groups and organizations, and served as arbiters of the broader social and cultural system (Waters 1999). In addition, Bashi’s (2007) analysis of the social networks of Black Caribbean immigrants notes that religious beliefs and practices are a central component of their life histories and immigration experiences.

In general, there is a dearth of research on religious participation of Black Caribbeans. A number of excellent ethnographic studies have focused on the immigration patterns of Black Caribbeans (e.g. Waters 1999; Foner 2005; Bashi 2007). However, religion and religious institutions are of limited concern in these investigations. A number of anthropological and humanities-based studies focus on Rastafarians (Chevannes 1999; Homiak 1999; Yawney 1999), Vincentian Converted (Zane 1999), voodoo, and other very small religious sects.

However, this work does not address the more populous and mainstream religious traditions and denominations that are practiced by the vast majority of Caribbean Blacks (e.g. Baptists, Catholic). As a consequence, there is a lack of information regarding even the most fundamental aspects of religious participation among Caribbean Blacks, including topics such as rates of service attendance and church membership, frequency of prayer and reading religious materials, and subjective evaluations of religiosity.

Focus of the Present Study

Over the past several years, research has confirmed that religious involvement of various forms is associated with countless social, psychological and health outcomes (Koenig et al., 2004). Further, investigations involving African Americans similarly indicate that religious involvement is consequential for social, psychological and health behaviors and outcomes (see Taylor, Chatters and Levin 2004 for a review of this research). Further efforts to advance our understanding of the role of religious involvement in social, psychological, and health outcomes requires the development of baseline information on race and ethnic differences in religious behaviors and attitudes, as well as the specific ways that demographic and denominational factors shape religious involvement across population groups.

The present study examines race and ethnic differences in religious involvement and spirituality among African Americans, non-Hispanic Whites and Caribbean Blacks. The analysis is based on the National Survey of American Life (NSAL), a nationally representative sample of these three race/ethnic groups. Several indicators of organizational, non-organizational, and subjective religiosity are examined across these three groups. This study of race and ethnic differences uses multivariate analyses to control for demographic factors and religious affiliation differences, factors that are differentially distributed within these three groups and associated with variability in religious involvement.

METHODS

Sample

The National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century (NSAL) was collected by the Program for Research on Black Americans at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (Jackson et al. 2004). The field work for the study was completed by the Institute of Social Research's Survey Research Center, in cooperation with the Program for Research on Black Americans. A total of 6,082 face-to-face interviews were conducted with persons aged 18 or older, including 3,570 African Americans, 891 non-Hispanic whites, and 1,621 Blacks of Caribbean descent. The NSAL includes the first major probability sample of Caribbean Blacks ever conducted. For the purposes of this study, Caribbean Blacks are defined as persons who trace their ethnic heritage to a Caribbean country, but who now reside in the United States, are racially classified as black, and who are English-speaking (but may also speak another language).

The NSAL sample has a national multi-stage probability design. The overall response rate was 72.3 per cent. The interviews were face-to-face and conducted within respondents' homes. Respondents were compensated for their time. The data collection was conducted from 2001 to 2003. Response rates for individual subgroups were 70.7 per cent for African Americans, 77.7 per cent for Caribbean Blacks, and 69.7 per cent for non-Hispanic Whites. This response rate is excellent considering that African Americans (especially lower income African Americans) and Caribbean Blacks are more likely to reside in major urban areas which are more difficult and much more expensive to collect interviews.

The African American sample is the core sample of the NSAL. The core sample consists of 64 primary sampling units (PSUs). Fifty-six of these primary areas overlap substantially with existing Survey Research Center's National Sample primary areas. The remaining eight primary areas were chosen from the South in order for the sample to represent African Americans in the proportion in which they are distributed nationally. Both the African American and White samples were selected exclusively from these targeted geographic segments in proportion to the African American population. The Caribbean Black sample was selected from two area probability sample frames: the core NSAL sample and an area probability sample of housing units from geographic areas with a relatively high density of persons of Caribbean descent.

In both the African American and Black Caribbean samples, it was necessary for respondents to self-identify their race as black. Those self-identifying as black were included in the Caribbean Black sample if they answered affirmatively when asked if they were of West Indian or Caribbean descent, said they were from a country included on a list of Caribbean area countries presented by the interviewers, or indicated that their parents or grandparents were born in a Caribbean area country (see Heeringa et al. 2004 and Jackson et al. 2004 for a more detailed discussion of the NSAL sample).

Measures

Dependent Variables—Several measures of organizational, nonorganizational, and subjective religious participation, in addition to measures of spirituality are investigated in this analysis. Measures of organizational religious participation included: frequency of service attendance, church membership, and frequency of participation in church activities. Frequency of religious service attendance is measured by combining two items—one that indicates frequency of attendance and one that identifies respondents who have not attended services since the age of 18. The categories and values for this variable are: attend nearly everyday (6), attend at least once a week (5), a few times a month (4), a few times a year (3), less than once a year (2) and (except for weddings and funerals) never attended services since the age of 18 (1). Church membership is measured by the question: “Are you an official member of a church or other place of worship?” Frequency of participation in church activities is measured by the question: “Besides regular service, how often do you take part in other activities at your church? Would you say nearly everyday (5), at least once a week (4), a few times a month (3), a few times a year (2), or never (1)?” It is important to note that respondents who attended religious services less than once a year were not queried regarding church membership and participation in other activities.

Five measures of nonorganizational religious participation are used in this analysis: reading religious books or other religious materials, watching religious television programs, listening to religious radio programs on the radio, praying, and asking someone to pray for you. Respondents were asked the frequency with which they engaged in these activities (i.e. nearly everyday, at least once a week, a few times a month, at least once a month, a few times a year or never). The range of each item was 6 for nearly everyday to 1 for never.

Four measures of subjective religiosity are examined: 1) importance of religion while growing up, 2) importance of parents taking or sending their children to religious services, 3) overall importance of religion in the respondent's life, and 4) respondents' self-ratings of religiosity. All of these items had 4 categories ranging from 4 (very important or very religious) to 1 (not important at all or not religious at all). The means and standard deviations of the dependent variables are presented in Table 1.

Independent Variables—Demographic variables (i.e. age, gender, income, education, marital status, and region) and denominational affiliation are used as controls in multivariate

analyses examining the influence of race/ethnicity on religious participation. The frequency distribution for the demographic variables and denomination is presented in Table 2.

Analysis Strategy

Multivariate analyses of religious participation by race/ethnicity are presented in which demographic factors and denominational affiliation are used as controls. Two sets of regressions are conducted in which race/ethnicity is represented by a set of dummy variables. In the first set, African Americans are used as the excluded or comparison category; while in the second set (not shown) Black Caribbean is the excluded or comparison category. Logistic regression was used with the dichotomous dependent variable (church membership), linear regression was used with the other measures of organizational and nonorganizational religious participation and Ordered Logit regression (Borooah 2002) was used with the measures of subjective religiosity. All regression analyses were conducted with STATA 9.2 using `svy:logit`, `svy:regress` or `svy:ologit`. The regression coefficients are weighted based on the sample's race-adjusted weight measure and the standard errors reflect the recalculation of variance using the study's complex design.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides the overall sample distribution for the religious involvement factors. More than two-thirds of the sample indicates that they are official members of their place of worship. Overall, respondents report higher average levels of involvement in non-organizational religious behaviors (e.g. prayer, read religious materials) and endorsements of the subjective religiosity items (e.g. importance of religion in life), as compared to organizational religious behaviors (e.g. service attendance, church activities).

Table 2 provides the demographic and denominational profile of the sample by race/ethnic group. The data indicate several mean differences between the groups, notably for income level, gender, marital status, region and denomination. Briefly, non-Hispanic Whites tend to be slightly older, possess more years of education and higher incomes and are more likely to be married. Both Caribbean Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites report comparable incomes which are higher than those for African Americans. The majority of Caribbean Blacks in the sample reside in the Northeast region of the country. Finally, with regard to denominational affiliation, Caribbean Blacks are less likely than African Americans to indicate that they are Baptist (21 per cent vs. 49 per cent, respectively), but are similar to non-Hispanic Whites in reports of being Catholic, Episcopalian, or a member of some other Protestant group. Caribbean Blacks are more likely than either African Americans or non-Hispanic Whites to report that they are Seventh Day Adventist.

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients for the effects of race/ethnicity on religious participation and spirituality. Race/ethnicity is represented by a dummy variable with African Americans as the excluded category in regression results reported in Column 1; Black Caribbeans are designated as the excluded category in regression results reported in Column 2. For each dependent variable, the regression models assess the impact of race/ethnicity while controlling for the effects of sociodemographic (i.e. age, gender, marital status, education, family income, and region) and denominational factors. The regression coefficients in Column 1 indicate that African Americans report higher levels of religious participation than do Whites for all 12 of the measures of religiosity and these effects are independent of religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, region, and other demographic factors. Comparisons of African Americans and Black Caribbeans (Table 3, Column 1) indicate only four significant differences (out of 12 regression models). African Americans report higher levels of church membership and frequency of church activities, requests for prayer from others and reading religious

materials. In contrast, Black Caribbeans indicate that they read religious materials more frequently than their African American counterparts.

The data in Table 3, Column 2 present the corresponding analyses as Column 1, but in this case, Black Caribbeans is the excluded category in the race/ethnicity dummy variable. The regression coefficients indicate that in 10 of the 12 models, Black Caribbeans report significantly higher levels of religious participation than Whites. There are no significant differences between Black Caribbeans and Whites with regard to church membership and frequency of other church activities. None of the regression models indicate that Whites report higher levels of religiosity than either Black Caribbeans (Column 2) or African Americans (Column 1). Overall, across a number of measures and three dimensions, both African Americans and Black Caribbeans have comparable and consistently high levels of religious participation.

DISCUSSION

This study examined race and ethnicity differences in levels of organizational, non-organizational and subjective religiosity among a national sample of African Americans, Black Caribbeans and non-Hispanic whites. The analysis found that for all 12 measures of religious participation, African Americans reported higher levels of religious participation than non-Hispanic whites. This finding is consistent with historical and ethnographic research on the centrality of religion and religious institutions in the lives of African Americans (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). It is also consistent with previous survey research indicating uniformly higher levels of organizational, non-organizational and subjective religious involvement among African Americans in comparison to whites (Taylor et al. 1996; Krause and Chatters 2005).

The National Survey of American Life is the first national survey to investigate ethnic differences within the black population by including significant numbers of Black Caribbeans. This analysis showed that, similar to African Americans, Black Caribbeans have significantly higher levels of religious participation than whites (10 of the 12 regressions). Church membership and frequency of participating in other church activities were the only two variables where no significant differences were found between Black Caribbeans and non-Hispanic whites. Overall, the high levels of religious involvement among Caribbean Blacks are consistent with research on the importance of churches in Black Caribbean communities, as well research on the importance of religion among immigrants (Waters 1999; Maynard-Reid 2000; Bashi 2007).

The pattern of findings indicates that Caribbean Blacks and African Americans diverge with respect to four indicators—church membership rates, participation in church activities, reading religious materials, and requesting prayer from others. One potential explanation as to why Black Caribbeans have lower rates of church membership and participation in church activities centers on the immigration experience. Recent immigrants may be less likely to have found a church home and thus less likely to be official church members. This thesis is supported by other analyses of this data which finds that recent immigrants (0–5 years in U.S.) were less likely to be official members of their place of worship than native born Caribbean Blacks (analysis not shown). There were no differences, however, in the likelihood of church membership between native born Caribbean Blacks and those who have immigrated to the United States 6 or more years ago. This finding suggests that locating a ‘church home’ may not be an easy task and may involve considerable time and effort. Following relocation to new area or community, it is not unusual for individuals to spend a significant amount of time in the process of ‘church shopping.’ That is, although they attend religious services on a frequent basis, this often involves visits to different churches until they find a suitable religious

community or church home. This investment of time and energy may be particularly important task for Black Caribbeans who have emigrated from another country and are attempting to navigate completely new social and cultural environments. This is particularly important given the pivotal role of religious institutions in assisting Caribbean immigrants in relocation and resettlement, enhancing social and human capital in the form of organizational and personal resources, and helping individuals negotiate a largely unfamiliar social and cultural environment (Waters 1999; Bashi 2007).

Similarly, less frequent requests for prayer among Black Caribbeans (as compared to African Americans) may, in part, be a reflection of one's level of participation in the life of a church. People generally request prayers from members of one's social support network, including family members, close friends and church members during times of particular need (Taylor, Lincoln and Chatters 2005). Church support networks are particularly important when individuals are experiencing interpersonal conflicts with their own family members. However, individuals who are not church members and participate in church activities on an infrequent basis may have fewer people from whom to request prayer. Research on church support networks (Taylor, Chatters and Levin 2004) indicates that social involvement and integration in these networks is associated with receiving assistance. However, as discussed earlier, Caribbean Blacks who have immigrated to the U.S. may be in the process of locating and establishing long-term ties with a church home. As a consequence, they may not be fully invested in a religious community and not able to reap the social and support benefits of ongoing involvement. In essence, the differences between Caribbean Blacks and African Americans in levels of requests for prayers from others may be a reflection of their different histories of involvement with and levels of social integration in a particular church community.

Alternatively, it may be the case that the basic nature of interactions within religious institutions and expectations regarding behaviors like requests for prayers from others, differ across the three groups. Research on congregational climate (Pargament et al. 1983) indicates that Black congregations demonstrate higher levels of expressiveness, stability, and social concern than do White congregations. It is interesting that although African Americans report more frequent prayer requests than either Caribbean Blacks or non-Hispanic whites, Caribbean Blacks report more frequent requests for prayer than do non-Hispanic whites. The pattern of findings suggests that while African Americans and Caribbean Blacks are different from one another in regard to this behavior, they are both more likely than non-Hispanic whites to request prayer from others. It may be that the very act of soliciting formal requests for the prayers of the church is a distinctive element of the Black worship experience, irrespective of ethnicity. Alternatively, the fact that African Americans report the highest levels of requesting prayer from others may indicate that this is an especially prominent feature of African American worship communities that may reflect the communal practices of churches in historically Black denominations. Finally, more frequent reading of religious books and other materials by Black Caribbeans could be due to a substitution effect. That is to say, Black Caribbeans may spend less time engaging in church activities, but more time reading religious materials. This finding may also reflect the fact that Caribbean Blacks have higher levels of education and are more likely to be college graduates than African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Previous research has found that individuals with more years of formal education indicate that they read religious materials more frequently than their counterparts (Taylor, Chatters and Levin 2004).

Findings of similarities and differences for African Americans and Black Caribbeans indicate that both race and ethnicity are important in understanding religious involvement. Potential explanations for these differences may be related to broader cultural factors and life experiences associated with these groups (Maynard-Reid 2000; Krause and Chatters, 2005). First, a growing body of literature identifies several similarities in religious involvement among

African Americans and Black Caribbeans reflecting their common African heritage (Baldwin and Hopkins 1990; Maynard-Reid 2000). Among African Americans, key aspects of black worship traditions such as a collectivist orientation, communal practices, participatory worship styles and direct communication with a divine power are attributed to a common cultural background and the spiritual traditions from West Africa (Baldwin and Hopkins 1990; Stewart 1999). Similarly, research on the religious and spiritual systems of the Caribbean region has documented the presence of distinctive practices that have their origins in African worship traditions (Baldwin and Hopkins 1990; Black 1999; Maynard-Reid 2000). This work suggests that collectivistic and communal orientations, participatory worship styles and immediate and personal connections with a divine power are common to both African American and Black Caribbean traditions and constitute distinctive forms and patterns of devotional practice (Black 1999; Krause and Chatters 2005) that are characteristic of peoples of African descent (Maynard-Reid 2000).

Second, because African American religious practices developed within the unique social, and historical context of the U.S., they incorporated a self-help tradition (i.e. 'civic tradition') in which worship communities played a pivotal role in the development of social capital and personal resources (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Religious institutions have had a continuing social prominence within Black communities that is reflected in the centrality of religion in contemporary African American life (Taylor, Chatters and Levin 2004). Accordingly, race differences in religious involvement, in part, reflect important social and cultural influences such as the historically important role of the church in black communities and black secular life, as well as worship and devotional practices that have their origin in an African cultural legacy (Krause and Chatters 2005).

Similar to African Americans, Black Caribbean religious traditions and worship communities have performed analogous civic functions (Warner and Wittner 1998; Maynard-Reid 2000), assisting in the process of transnational migration, providing community resources and social capital, and facilitating immigrants' adjustment (McAlister 1998; Waters 1999; Bashi 2007). Further, the immigration experience itself has an important influence on the development of immigrant worship communities and the forms and meaning of religious participation (McAlister 1998; Warner and Wittner 1998; Waters 1999; Foley and Hoge, 2007). Although this discussion has centered on religious involvement as it relates to the experience of immigration, it is important to recognize that diverse religious and spiritual traditions are well-established features of Black Caribbean life (Stewart 1999; Maynard-Reid 2000). The high levels of religious involvement among Caribbean Blacks in this study, in part, reflect the general religious socialization experiences of this group. For example, Vickerman (1999) notes that Jamaican immigrants' inherent conservatism in relation to religious concerns, lifestyle behaviors and general outlook is a product of their childhood socialization and life experiences in Caribbean societies that are less secularized than the U.S.

Finally, despite several similarities in religious involvement for African Americans and Caribbean Blacks, it would be misleading to view the groups as completely comparable to one another. There may be more subtle and nuanced distinctions between these groups with respect to religious involvement that are associated with their separate national histories and cultural heritages. For example, African Americans have largely affiliated with traditional black denominations [e.g. Baptist (National Baptist Convention), African Methodist Episcopal] that have been instrumental in shaping the nature of religious worldviews, worship and devotional practices for this group. Consequently, for African Americans, religious identity and involvement, denominational affiliation, and racial identity are closely aligned with one another and mutually reinforcing (Wielhouwer 2004). In contrast, patterns of denominational association for Caribbean Blacks reflect wider diversity of membership in traditionally white affiliated churches (e.g. Episcopal, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist), suggesting that religious

and racial identities are not as closely aligned as is the case for African Americans. On the other hand, Black Caribbean immigrants often worship in churches that are comprised of other immigrants who are often from the same country (Waters 1999), suggesting correspondence between religious and cultural/ethnic identities. For example, research on Seventh Day Adventists congregations in New York indicates that a large influx of Black Caribbean immigrants has had a significant impact on the growth and composition of these congregations as a whole, transforming their character to reflect immigrant issues and concerns. The demographic transformation of the U.S. Adventist church is a consequence of prior missionary efforts in the Caribbean region, as well as the appeal of strong behavioral and doctrinal rules to immigrants who come from more conservative social backgrounds (Lawson 1998).

Overall, the study findings indicate a fair degree of similarity in the levels of religious participation for African Americans and Black Caribbeans, despite vast differences in life experiences and denominational affiliations and controlling for relevant demographic factors. The relative lack of ethnic group differences in religious participation may suggest that the impact of differences in the life histories and circumstances of Caribbean Blacks and African Americans may be somewhat over-stated. Scholars in this area (e.g. Waters 1999; Foner 2005) have noted that, despite the felt importance of ethnic identity to the individual, these assessments may be particularly sensitive to personal and social contexts, as well as generational status. In the U.S. context, Black race clearly surpasses Caribbean ethnicity as the predominant social marker. Further, with successive generations, Caribbean Blacks come to look more similar to their African American counterparts, both with respect to objective status indicators, as well as behaviors and attitudes. These observations suggest that a more nuanced understanding of race and ethnicity differences and similarities in religious involvement requires an appreciation for: 1) the social and personal significance of religious institutions and practices in maintaining group and individual identity and cohesion, 2) the relative importance of racial versus ethnic markers within past and current social contexts, including worship communities.

In conclusion, this study is the first survey-based analysis comparing religious involvement across African American, Black Caribbean and non-Hispanic whites adults in the United States. The incorporation of these three population groups allowed the investigation of both racial and ethnic group differences in religious involvement. By using data from a major national sample and the first national probability sample of Caribbean Blacks, the study provided the opportunity to explore ethnic differences that exist within the black U.S. population. Prior research on race differences in religious participation among African Americans and whites served as the foundation for this investigation (Levin, Taylor and Chatters 1994; Taylor et al. 1996; Krause and Chatters 2005) and were largely confirmed in this analysis. We expected that ethnic distinctions and differences in the life experiences and histories of Black Caribbean immigrants would emerge as important factors in characterizing these two groups. The findings suggest that some of the divergence in religious involvement (i.e. church membership, church activities, prayer from others) could be attributed to differences in social integration and involvement in religious institutions. Furthermore, the analyses clearly demonstrated that African Americans and Caribbean Blacks, as compared to non-Hispanic whites had higher levels of religious involvement overall. There were no instances in which non-Hispanic whites indicated higher levels of religiosity, confirming the presence of fundamental race differences in responses to these indicators.

This study was an initial attempt to develop a more nuanced understanding of the effects of race/ethnicity on religious participation, controlling for key status characteristics (e.g. age, gender, socioeconomic position) and denomination. Although the current investigation addressed questions of basic group differences, it is also critical to supplement this information with studies of *within group* differences in religious participation and spirituality. Presently,

we have fairly solid information on within group differences for African Americans and whites (Taylor, Chatters and Levin 2004). However, to enhance our knowledge about the race/ethnicity effects, research focusing on the correlates of religious participation and spirituality exclusively among Caribbean Blacks is needed. This will permit the investigation of factors that are specific to the Black Caribbean population, such as country of origin and immigration status that may be consequential for religious participation. Ultimately, studies of the sociodemographic and denominational correlates of religious involvement among Black Caribbeans, African Americans, and whites will help to disentangle the complex associations between race, ethnicity, and religious involvement within these groups.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations/Percentages of Religion Variables

RELIGION VARIABLES	
Organizational	
Religious Service Attendance (Range = 1–6)	3.61 (.047)
Official Member	68% (.011)
Church Activities (Range = 1–5)	2.33 (.025)
Non-organizational (Range = 1–6)	
Read Religious Materials	3.83 (.078)
Watch Religious Programs on TV	3.04 (.094)
Listen to Religious Programs on Radio	2.88 (.084)
Prayer	5.24 (.080)
Request Prayer From Others	3.16 (.072)
Subjective Religiosity (Range = 1–4)	
Importance of Religion in Childhood	3.34 (.031)
Importance of Taking Children to Services	3.61 (.041)
Importance of Religion in Daily Life	3.46 (.049)
Self-rated Religiosity	2.94 (.038)

^aData are given as means (weighted standard error) for continuous variables and frequencies (weighted standard error) for categorical variables.

Table 2Demographic Description of the Sample^a

Demographic Factors	Race/Ethnic Subgroups			
	African American	Caribbean Black	White	TOTAL
Education	12.43 (2.23)	12.93 (1.00)	13.32 (5.00)	12.89 (2.65)
N	3523	1602	883	6008
Age	42.33 (14.50)	40.28 (5.78)	44.98 (31.11)	43.57 (16.61)
N	3570	1621	891	6082
Income	36846 (33236)	47017 (15242)	47397 (75266)	42455 (39594)
N	3526	1607	883	6016
Sex				
Male	1271 (44.03)	643 (50.87)	372 (47.26)	2286 (45.87)
Female	2299 (55.97)	978 (49.13)	519 (52.74)	3796 (54.13)
N	3570	1621	891	6082
Marital Status				
Married	960 (32.91)	559 (37.56)	383 (47.36)	1902 (40.25)
Partner	260 (8.74)	131 (12.58)	44 (6.59)	435 (7.81)
Separated	286 (7.16)	128 (5.37)	37 (3.11)	451 (5.08)
Divorced	524 (11.75)	178 (9.29)	147 (13.06)	849 (12.31)
Widowed	353 (7.90)	78 (4.29)	103 (7.83)	534 (7.74)
Never married	1170 (31.55)	542 (30.92)	173 (22.05)	1885 (26.81)
N	3553	1616	887	6056
Region				
Northeast	411 (15.69)	1135 (55.69)	107 (22.67)	1653 (20.56)
Midwest	595 (18.81)	12 (4.05)	83 (7.96)	690 (12.91)
South	2330 (56.24)	456 (29.11)	609 (54.60)	3395 (54.48)
West	234 (9.25)	18 (11.14)	92 (14.76)	344 (12.06)
N	3570	1621	891	6082
Denomination				
Baptist	1865 (49.08)	278 (20.52)	240 (21.18)	2383 (34.26)
Methodist	216 (5.88)	66 (3.17)	71 (6.90)	353 (6.29)
Episcopal	17 (0.45)	80 (3.32)	20 (2.06)	117 (1.35)
Pentecostal	304 (8.62)	152 (8.71)	32 (3.89)	488 (6.28)
Catholic	202 (5.96)	367 (18.67)	157 (20.21)	726 (13.47)
Other Protestant	549 (17.25)	420 (29.33)	203 (23.72)	1172 (20.88)
Other Religion	71 (2.25)	56 (3.56)	43 (6.54)	170 (4.42)
No Religion	344 (10.51)	194 (12.73)	122 (15.50)	660 (13.06)
N	3568	1613	888	6069

^aData are given as Means (weighted standard deviation) for continuous variables and frequencies (weighted percentages) for categorical variables.

Table 3

Regression Coefficients for Race/Ethnicity Group by Religious Participation Indicator^a

African Americans Excluded Category		Black Caribbeans Excluded Category			
		b	SE	N	
Organizational Participation					
Frequency of Church Attendance					
Black Caribbeans		-0.05	0.07	5983	0.69
Whites		-0.38***	0.57		-0.33***
					0.08
Church Membership					
Black Caribbeans		-0.75***	0.12	4848	0.75***
Whites		-0.49*	0.17		0.31
					0.12
					0.18
Frequency of Engaging in Other Church Activities					
Black Caribbeans		-0.16**	0.52	4851	0.16**
Whites		-0.16**	0.59		-0.01
					0.05
					0.06
Non-organizational Religious Participation					
Reading Religious Materials					
Black Caribbeans		0.28*	0.08	5983	-0.28**
Whites		-0.64***	0.09		-0.93***
					0.11
Watching Religious Programs on TV					
Black Caribbeans		0.07	0.12	5981	-0.07
Whites		-1.19***	0.08		-1.27***
					0.12
					0.14
Listening to Religious Programs On Radio					
Black Caribbeans		-0.11	0.13	5983	0.11
Whites		-1.35***	0.10		-1.23***
					0.13
					0.14
Prayer					
Black Caribbeans		0.14	0.08	5981	-0.14
					0.08
					0.08

African Americans Excluded Category				Black Caribbeans Excluded Category			
	b	SE	N		b	SE	N
Whites	-0.61***	0.07		Whites	-0.75***	0.09	
Requesting Prayer from Others							
Black Caribbeans	-0.32**	0.10	5974	African Americans	0.32**	0.10	5974
Whites	-0.83***	0.08		Whites	-0.50***	0.09	
Subjective Religiosity							
Importance of Religion While Growing Up							
Black Caribbeans	0.18	0.15	5979	African Americans	-0.17	0.15	5979
Whites	-1.23***	0.08		Whites	-1.41***	0.15	
Parents Taking Children to Religious Services							
Black Caribbeans	-0.05	0.33	5961	African Americans	-0.05	0.33	5961
Whites	-1.45***	0.14		Whites	-1.51***	0.35	
Importance of Religion in Your Life							
Black Caribbeans	-0.17	0.23	5976	African Americans	0.17	0.23	5976
Whites	-1.36***	0.08		Whites	-1.19***	0.23	
Self-Evaluated Religiosity							
Black Caribbeans	0.72	0.13	5981	African Americans	-0.72	0.13	5966
Whites	-0.85***	0.10		Whites	-0.93***	0.14	

^a Multivariate analyses control for the effects of age, gender, marital status, education, imputed family income, region and denomination.

* p<0.05

** p<0.01

*** p<0.001