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The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States

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In this article I posit the "racialization" of religion, a process that begins when certain phenotypical features associated with a group and attached to race in popular discourse become associated with a particular religion or religions. By examining the experiences of Indian Americans—a group made up primarily of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—I explore the racialization process and show how the racialization of religion exacerbates the "othering" of non-Christian religious groups. The article goes on to examine five major outcomes of the racialization of religion, as illustrated by the experiences of Indian Americans. In particular, I show how the racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism renders those faiths theologically, socially, and morally illegitimate in the popular eye.

The diversity of religious beliefs present in the United States is at a historical high. Each day, millions of South Asian American parents entrust the education of their children to the teachers in our nation's public schools. Their children are predominantly members of the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh religions, and they are no longer a "New York-and-California" phenomenon, affecting only the cosmopolitan coasts of America (Eck, 1996). There are between 1 million and 1.3 million Hindus in the United States and between 250,000 and 500,000 Sikhs.[1] Of the United States' 5.5 to 6 million Muslims, approximately 25% are South Asians.[2] The children in these cohorts, who include first-, second-, and third-generation South Asian Americans, can be found in every part of the United States. Teachers and school administrators are as responsible for the dignity and safety of these students in the classroom—as well as the quality of their education—as they are responsible for students of other races and religious affiliations. In order to meet this obligation, we must understand the major factors that differentiate these students from their "majority" peers—and, in particular, understand the way in which those factors interact with each other. Religion marks these students as outside the norm, but so do race and ethnicity. These factors combine and interact in complex ways to affect the racial marking of students' religious identities. This racialization of religion—in particular, the racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism—is the focus of this article. I begin by explaining how the racialization of religion occurs and positioning it in historical and social context, and I conclude by showing the ways in which the racialization of religion mean nothing until they are given social meaning. This social meaning—what Higginbotham (1992) calls race as a metalanguage—affects the construction and representation of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion. It connotes "relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves" (p. 253).

Whatever we may feel about race's social meaning and function, we must recognize that it is a part of our society and not an anomaly within it (Omi & Winant, 1997). That said, we also should not see race alone as the sole factor that distinguishes one person from another in society. Race does not, and should not be seen to subsume or replace other salient social identities such as ethnicity, nationality, or class (Goldschmidt, 2004). In the words of Patricia Wolfe (2002) "we should distinguish, albeit not too sharply, between race as concept . . . and the activation of that concept in the production of racial subjects, or racialization" (p. 58). We must identify those situations in society where race and religion appear to be conflated or mutually marked categories—or those situations where race appears to replace or subsume other identity categories such as religion. In the American visual library, race and religion not only affect the characteristics of the other but, for some groups, including South Asian Americans, race becomes a proxy for

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religion. We must understand the multiple points of intersection between race and religion in the United States without blurring the boundaries between racial construction of ethnicity and racial-ethnic construction of religion.

It is at these blurred boundaries between race and religion that we find the racialization of religion—a phenomenon wherein the fact of an individual's *race* creates a presumption as to her *religious* identity. Racialization refers to the extension of a racial meaning to a previously unclassified group (Omi & Winant, 1994). When religion is racialized, a particular set of phenotypical features, understood in a specific social and historical context, comes to be associated with a given religion and/or with other social traits. The racialization of religion results in or exacerbates the ethnoreligious oppression of the minority group. Yet at the same time, the essential nature of the discrimination—racial or religious—becomes disguised or lost entirely.

WHAT DOES RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION LOOK LIKE?

The racialization of religion occurs through multiple processes, involves multiple agents, and leads to multiple outcomes. Ultimately, racialization results in essentialism; it reduces people to one aspect of their identity and thereby presents a homogeneous, undifferentiated, and static view of an ethnoreligious community. While Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are three different belief systems, they share some of the major outcomes of racialization: they are rendered theologically, morally, and socially illegitimate. Despite this similarity of processes and often of outcomes, racialization affects each religious group that is targeted differently.

While one could argue that Christianity has been racialized through its association with whiteness—with distinctive designations for black, Korean, or Chinese Christian congregations—the results of racialization are different because whiteness and Christianity function as the United States' racial and religious norms, respectively.[3]

The construction of identity most often involves establishing both norms and opposites, who one "is" involves identifying "others" who are "not" (Pharr, 1988; Said, 1978). The process of "othering" entails a dialectic of both inclusion and exclusion. By attributing certain characteristics to a population in order to categorize and differentiate it as an "other," those who do so also establish criteria by which they themselves are represented. Indeed, a norm and its "other" or "others" are, to a great extent, each defined by reference to the other, by what each is *not.* For reasons that will become clear in the historical section that follows, it is the normative power of whiteness and Christianity, separately and in tandem, that makes the racialization of religion an essential problem for non-white non-Christians.

Thus, in order to understand the contemporary racialization of South Asian religions, we must begin by orienting ourselves historically and socially. In the next two sections, I show how the United States has developed as a society where Christianity and whiteness are intimately linked and where Christianity and whiteness generate social norms against which other religions and races are measured.

U.S. HISTORY AND THE RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION

Both race as a socially-meaningful distinction and the racialization of religion predate U.S. society. One useful illustration of religion's racialization can be found in Iberia during the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries (Fredrickson, 2002) when Iberian Jews—like those throughout the Jewish diaspora—faced anti-Jewish discrimination and pressure to convert to Christianity. The prevailing sentiment was that because Jews did not accept Jesus as the messiah and did not follow Christian scripture, they were a people who were misled. It was widely accepted that if Jews would accept Jesus Christ—that is, convert to Christianity—they would be redeemed and live in relative safety. In Iberia by the 15th-century, however religious anti-Judaism morphed into racialized antisemitism. Jews came to be seen no longer as merely misled and therefore theologically salvageable; instead, they were seen as "intrinsically and organically evil" (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 19). Conversion to Christianity was no longer an option; Jews' flaws were seen as innate, and conversion would not result in acceptance by Christian society. Here, to use Omi and Winant's (1997) words, a racial meaning became ascribed to a previously unclassified relationship, and Jews and Judaism became racialized. They went from being excluded in society because of their religious beliefs to being excluded from society because their religious identification became a biological trait that could not be changed, and so they as human beings were seen as evil.

Understanding this concept—the idea of religious affiliation as an essential human attribute and, being a non-Christian, an essential and irremediable flaw—is key to understanding the racialization of religion as it developed in Colonial America during the centuries that followed. The intimate embrace of whiteness and (initially Protestant) Christianity in America stretches back to the Puritans' encounter with the indigenous peoples of the "new world." The Puritans were Anglo-Saxon and Protestant; because of their own history, their religious identity was particularly salient. Religion was at the center of life in Colonial America; it was the major point of social organization (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002). The

Puritans' encounter with Native Americans (and later with Black slaves) made race and their status as Whites, an additional salient social factor. Whiteness emerged in the 17th century as a common identity across class lines among Europeans, setting the colonial majorities apart from both African slaves and Native Americans (Banton, 1977). Whiteness and Christianity came to be not so much conflated as co-existent, the two strands of the double helix of American identity. Many of the early white Protestant Americans saw themselves as inheriting the status of a chosen people, living in a land they saw as the "New Israel." In this light, we can understand the colonial mindset described by Lee (2004): "When men and women are brought into perfect harmony with God, it was thought, they become authentic White Americans" (p. 106).

Settlers thus had to confront the question of whether this understanding of Christianity could apply to black slaves at all, that is, whether Africans and African Americans were fully human. (This debate ultimately raged for several centuries, and indeed continued on into the post-Civil War era of scientific racism.) Colony by colony, new laws made slavery permanent for black people and for the first time the word "white," rather than "Christian" or "Englishman" began appearing in colonial statutes (Lincoln, 1999; Wills, 2005). Eventually, white, Christian, and free were metonyms.

So, too, the distinction between slave and free preceded the distinction between black and white. Because of the religious ethos that pervaded the Colonial Era in the United States, social justifications for slavery drew upon the notion that Africans brought to the U.S. were heathens (Takaki, 1993).[4] Racism interacted with Christian supremacy: Africans "were beings apart" because they "were not merely black, they were black *and* heathen" (Lincoln, 1999). Non-Christian Africans' "depraved condition" —a condition their enslavement both rescued them from and condemned them to—thereby explained their place in society as slaves. It was not until the 18th century that there was a concerted effort at converting black slaves to Christianity (Lincoln, 1999).

As slaves converted to Christianity, Whites used purportedly Christian doctrines both to rationalize slavery by describing their slave status as the "curse of Ham," the "destiny" God intended for them (Fredrickson, 2002). Many Whites were convinced of the incompatibility of blackness and Christianity because blackness conjured images of savagery. When Virginia decreed in 1667 that slaves could be kept in bondage even after converting to Christianity, not because they were actual heathens but because they had heathen ancestry, the justification for black servitude began to shift from religious status lineage and race (Harvey, 2003).

The debates continued through the antebellum and civil war periods, and during the height of scientific racism, race theologians and scientist asserted what Harvey (2003) calls "mythoscientific racism" (p. 22)—a blend of racism, Darwinian ideas, and Biblical exegesis. Christian Blacks were excluded from white congregational practice. Inasmuch as they therefore developed different ways of praying, the distinction between "black" and "white" Christianity played into the hands of those who saw Blacks as inherently spiritually different.

Race made its way into European and North American scientific writing of the late 18th century in order to name and explain certain phenotypical differences between human beings.

> As emerges in the late-eighteenth century, race is a classificatory concept with two general characteristics. First, it is hierarchical—difference is not neutral; to vary is to be defective, in proportion to the degree of variation alleged to obtain. Second, it links physical characteristics to cognitive, cultural and moral ones, fusing the concrete and the abstract, the animal and the human, the somatic and the semiotic. (Wolfe, 2002, p. 52)

Nineteenth century popular or pseudo-scientific ideas of race-based classification argued that the world's population constituted distinct races, hierarchically situated, and each of which had biologically determined capacities for cultural development (Miles, 1993). At the top of the hierarchy was the Caucasian or white (sometimes called Anglo-Saxon) race.

For many politicians, clergy, and citizens of the United States, the maintenance of white, Anglo-Saxon purity was of tremendous importance. By the end of the 19th century, the influx of the East European Jews and Irish and Italian Catholics—along with Asian immigrants who practiced religions like Sikhism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—was perceived as threatening to the maintenance of this racial purity (Jacobson, 1998; Ngai, 1999). Because, while skin could not be changed, faith could—it could transform the huddled masses into proper Anglo-Saxons. "As Christians, members of other races would become assimilated to Anglo-Saxon civilization. When men and women are brought into perfect harmony with God, it was thought, they become authentic White Americans" (D. Kim, 2004, pp. 105–106). Race could be, if not replaced, at least supplanted by religion. "By accepting Christ, it was asserted, even Blacks could be made white as snow" (D. Kim, 2004, p. 107).

The historic echoes of the Puritan norm, influenced by the European encounter with Native Americans and the social importance of black slavery carried forward into the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the influx of Eastern European Jews created a uniquely American religious dialogue in which two dichotomies were set up: the Christian and the Black and the Christian and the Jew. The conflation of Christianity and whiteness also resulted in Jews being defined as "not white" upon arrival. (Brodkin, 1998). These dualities played out even in

the distinction between the ambiguous whiteness status of Ashkenazi Jews, who are of East European descent, and the darker-skinned Sephardic Jews who were some of the earliest Jewish immigrants to the U.S. The legacy of these dichotomies continues to reverberate in scholarly work, where Native Americans and Blacks remain the quintessential racialized "other" of racial studies and Jews the quintessential religious "other."

Set up against these modes of thought, South Asian American Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims are a problematically situated "other"—brown-skinned, non-Christians who are therefore multiply foreign. In one sense South Asian Americans were grouped as non-white and in another sense they were located between black and white on a spectrum of color that corresponded to privileges of whiteness. Their place in the hierarchy of American religious identities, with Protestant Christianity at the pinnacle, is less clear but may prove just as problematic.

In addition to the question of whether South Asian Americans are white or non-white—a question that history indicates we may never entirely answer—there is also the question of who exactly South Asian Americans are as non-Whites (Kibria, 2000; Koshy, 1998). Phenotypical and cultural markers set South Asian Americans apart from white, black, and East Asian Americans and others. Phenotypically, South Asians have light- to dark-brown skin, brown or black hair, and round (rather than almond-shaped or "East Asian") eyes.

Many of the cultural markers of South Asian identity are actually religious markers as well. Too numerous to list comprehensively, they may include traditional garb such as the sari and salwaar kameez; the bindi or forehead "dot" worn by many Hindu women and some Hindu men; the hijab (headscarf or "veil") traditional among Muslim women or the kufi (skullcap) worn by some observant Muslim men; and the dastaar, uncut hair, and other religious accoutrements worn by many Sikhs.

Along with cultural makers, the *un*meltability of South Asian Americans invokes a concept essential to understanding the racialization of religion in contemporary America: "meltability." According to Suzuki (1979), "unmeltables" are those immigrants who, because they are racially "of color," can assimilate culturally but cannot racially melt—that is, disappear—into the American milieu. By comparison, "meltable" immigrants are those like the white-skinned Irish, Italian, Ashkenazi Jewish, and other immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who ultimately *did* "become white." These groups, considered white today, were not always seen that way. Whiteness has been a shifting designation that is impacted by social class, language, generational status, and religious affiliation. Historically, Catholics, Jews, and other religious minorities remained subject to officially-sanctioned discrimination (Jacobson, 1998; Moore, 1986). Brodkin (1998) argues that Jews were defined on arrival as non-white, or as "not-quite-white" because of the conflation of Christianity and whiteness. The entitlements of whiteness were only later extended to them, as they are extended to various groups at specific moments in history (Ignatiev, 1995; Orsi, 1992).

One can easily jump to the conclusion that South Asians are clearly and necessarily non-Whites within this schema. Historically, however, the racial label applied to South Asian Americans has been more ambiguous (Prashad, 2000; Shankar & Srikanth, 1998). At various times in American history, South Asians have found themselves on both sides of the line between white and non-white. In the early 20th century, for example, there was much debate about whether Indians in America should be granted naturalized citizenship. This was the era of scientific racism, and on one hand "Hindoos" could be considered to be Caucasian because they were considered to be Aryan; this made them like Americans of European ancestry and not in the same category as the Chinese or Japanese (Snow, 2004; Takaki, 1989). On the other hand Indians were dark, swarthy, and their forefathers were seen as "enslaved, effeminate, caste-ridden and degraded" (Takaki, 1989). The Asiatic Exclusion League asked what would become of the U.S. "if this horde of fanatics should be received in our midst?" (Takaki, 1989).

In 1910 and 1913, in two separate court decisions, lower federal courts ruled that Indians were Caucasians and hence entitled to be considered "white persons" eligible for citizenship under the Naturalization Act of 1790, which explicitly stated a racial criteria limiting citizenship to "free white persons." However, in 1923 the U.S. Supreme Court concluded that Indian Americans were "nonwhite" in popular U.S. understanding and thus ineligible for the privileges of white status, such as the acquisition of citizenship, and, along with that, the right to own land. In *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), the high court reversed a lower court's decision that granted citizenship to an Indian American, writing:

> It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today… [The law] does not employ the word "Caucasian" but the words "white person"… [The intention of the founding fathers was only to] confer the privilege of citizenship upon that class of persons [called "white."]. (pp. 207–209)

When he was granted citizenship in 1920, Mr. Thind's lawyers rested their case on a genealogical argument—characterizing Thind as "a high-caste Hindu" from Northern India and thereby drawing upon the accepted definition of the term "Aryan." Thinds' claim to Aryan status was thus strengthened by the popular and academic understanding of the racial and religious history

of India (Snow, 2004). Thind's lawyers invoked the caste system to prove that there had been no mixing of the good race (Aryans) with the dark race (the Dravidians, indigenous to the more southerly parts of India). In other similar cases, Indians and Armenians who had been granted citizenship rested on the fact that they were "Aryans" and "Semites," both then recognized as sub-categories of Caucasian (Gualtieri, 2001; Haney-López, 1996). In several of these cases, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization had threatened to appeal but never initiated the appeals process. However, with *Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) they took action.

In arguing against Thind's citizenship, the U.S. government avoided a frontal assault on his genealogical argument. Instead, it used Thind's own words as an argument that he was unmeltable; instead of arguing that Thind was not Aryan, the government argued that he could not fit in. The Bureau focused its argument "on the meaning of caste and the racial nature of Hinduism as a religious system" (Snow, 2004, p. 268). The lawyers for the United States attacked Thind's "meltability" by defining caste and Hinduism "as an alienating and barbaric social and religious system, one that rendered 'Hindus' utterly unfit for membership in the 'civilization of white men"' (Snow, 2004, p. 268). The government's invocation of religion to prove that Thind could not assimilate, particularly in tandem with the contrast the Court drew between "the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu," situates the *Thind* case squarely at the crossroads of race and religion where we find ourselves today.

An ironic factor in Thind's story is that he was not Hindu, but Sikh. Even the argument presented by his own lawyers, echoed by the U.S. government, illustrates an outcome of racialization discussed later in this article: Religions of the South Asia are conflated and distinctions are lost.

THE CHRISTIAN (AND WHITE) AS NORMATIVE IN THE AMERICAN SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The racialization of religion in the United States perpetuates the privilege of the dominant group, in this case of Christians, and marginalizes minority religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. The racialization of these three religions occurs in the sociopolitical and cultural context of the United States which is hegemonically Christian. Specifically, the U.S. is characterized by a white, male, Christian norm (Beaman, 2003; Feldman, 1997).[5] Christian normalcy is not a new phenomenon; its roots can be traced to before the birth of this nation.

The origins of contemporary Christian normalcy or hegemony can be traced to the Colonial Era. During this period, Protestant sects with their particular ethos and priorities had a dominant role in social organization and governance. The Puritans fled England during the years in the middle of the 17th century when British Christianity was convulsed by struggles. The American creation myth casts the Puritans as seeking a place where all people could be religiously free. A more accurate description would recognize that the Puritans sought a place where they could practice *their own* religion without fear or persecution. Once on North American shores, these Puritan leaders were intent on establishing an ecclesiastical order, not general religious liberty. The ethnocentrism and parochialism of their new republic set the United States on the path to modern nativism (Feagin, 1997).

Even after ratification in 1791 of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which provided that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," official support for the established Protestant churches continued. The First Amendment was not binding upon state governments until the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified after the Civil War. At the federal level, there were repeated efforts—including in 1844 by Senator (later President) James Buchanan—to declare, by law or even Constitutional amendment, that the U.S. is a Christian nation and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as America's savior. In 1870, Christmas was proclaimed a national holiday by Congress. Until later in the 1870s, federal and state funds continued to be used to fund private religious education offered by Protestant denominations (Library of Congress, 2006).

This brief historical overview illustrates not only how a Christian ethos pervaded life during the founding of the country but also how Protestant Christianity influenced all levels of society (D. Kim, 2004). It established the tone, the culture and the theology that continues to control the unspoken rules of society to this day. Christian groups, people, and organizations gained, and have always held, the power to define normalcy.

Because of Christianity's pervasive cultural sway, most Christians in the U.S. see everything they do as the normal or proper way of doing things. Social norms, rituals, and language, as well as institutional rules and rewards, presume the existence of a predominantly Christian sociopolitical history and a current Christian sociocultural context (Beyer, 2003). The language, metaphors, and symbols of faith practice, prayer, belief, and history prevalent in society largely ignore the coexistence of other religions.

In contemporary society, the normative Christianity is present at three levels: institutional, societal/cultural, and individual. The pervasive reach of Christian religious beliefs is readily acknowledged in American history. We need to be equally candid about the fact that Christianity remains not only a uniquely powerful American cultural[6] force but also one which is continually abetted by our institutions of government and culture.

At the institutional level, consider the policies and practices of federal, state, and local governments. "In an oppressive society the cultural perspective of the dominant groups [is] imposed on institutions by individuals and on individuals by institutions" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). The First Amendment requires the government to allow and accommodate individual religious practices and forbids the government to show hostility toward religion. But we must look behind the letter of the law and get a clear sense of what religion is accommodated and what religions are really *not* accommodated. The federal government and all its agencies, all 50 state governments, public school systems, and other taxpayer-funded entities manifest Christianity's cultural hegemony in the organization of the workweek based on the Christian holy days. Congress, public schools, the state and federal courts, government agencies at all levels, and other public entities adjourn for the Christmas and Easter holiday seasons, but not for Eid, Diwali, or any other non-Christian religious holiday. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have chaplains who are Christian and whose salaries are paid by U.S. taxpayers, yet there are no Imams or Hindu priests on the Congressional payroll as such.[7] State and local governments regularly issue proclamations and direct taxpayer money towards "public" events and images focused on Christian holidays and themes.[8]

At the societal level, Christianity provides the West's mental images of piety: praying in a church pew, with hands crossed; Western choral and organ music; white-skinned deities drawn in the western-style human image. Other methods of practice are seen as cultic and described with terms like "heathen" and "cult," which in the American cultural vocabulary connote evil, sickness, or misguidedness (much as the words "folk" or "Negro" were used to distinguish and diminish black Christian practices [Lincoln, 1999]). Likewise, the theological vocabulary in the United States—the foundational elements of how individuals understand and discuss religion and religiosity—is fundamentally Christian. Any authoritative book is a "bible," and Hanukah has become the "Jewish Christmas" because it happens to fall in December.[9]

These historical events show how institutional structures, buttressed by social norms, were put in place for the maintenance and perpetuation of Christian hegemony—particularly Protestant Christianity. Protestant Christian hegemony also was maintained through the oppression of other religious groups to the point where Christianity and whiteness, together and individually, took on the influence of social norms in the United States. The contemporary echoes of this history and its impact on South Asian American Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the present day are explained below. These norms are played out in interaction from innocuous inquiries to physical violence.

THE RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION: THREE INTERACTING PROCESSES

The racialization of religion is a process whereby a specific religion becomes identified by a direct or indirect reference to a real or imagined ethnic/racial characteristic. The social effect of the racialization of religion is that certain phenotypical features associated with an ethnic group and attached to race in popular discourse become associated with the religion or religions practiced by the ethnic group. The racialization of religion exacerbates the "othering" of a religious group and has frequently worked in tandem with the white supremacist beliefs in segments of the population (Singh, 2003). In this section, I begin by describing the processes involved in the racialization of religion, including how and why religion is racialized in the United States. I then discuss the outcomes of the racialization of religion by reference to the experiences of South Asian Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the United States.

The application of the racialization framework to these three religions allows me to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the theological differences among these target populations, the racialization processes at work (and often the outcomes) are the same. Rather than being dichotomous and mutually exclusive, these processes overlap each other and do not necessarily follow a specific sequence. Collectively, these processes affect the social re-construction of a *religious* group as a *racial* group in the popular mind (Alumkal, 2003; Singh, 2003).

Processes in the Racialization of Religion

Racial meaning is extended to a religion, a religious group, or a belief system that had previously been racially unclassified. Particular faiths come to be considered not for their worldwide practice by diverse peoples, but rather in direct association with colors of skin, textures of hair, and other phenotypical features that may characterize communities of believers. The process ultimately goes beyond phenotype, and results in a group of people being identified, based on shared ethnicity and nationality, as being of a particular religion.

In the context of the historical moment, social values and political presumptions are connected to the racialized religion. Within the unique context of their own time and place, human beings ascribe social meaning to certain biological characteristics in order to differentiate, to exclude, and to dominate. This process occurs not in a vacuum but in specific conditions that render the distinctions relevant in a particular historical moment.

Because racial systems of classification are intimately linked to systems of power and authority, these social categories take on everyday importance in social, ideological, and economic contexts. Most obviously, they become fodder for those who perpetuate physical violence

based on race. But more subtly, these categories become a part of our cultural vocabulary: our shared assumptions, our media "buzz," and our humor.

In the present day, for example, the racialization of Islam intersects with the West's encounters with enemies whose ideological identity is intimately linked to their interpretation and use of Islam. As a result, brown-skinned, non-Christian Americans become more (or less) than just an *other* within the society; they become an other who is associated with a foreign enemy. They go from merely being a minority to being viewed as a potential "fifth column"[10] due to their presumed connection with and loyalty to this enemy.

The impact of this process on South Asian Americans—on those unlucky adults who have been beaten or slain in post-September 11 "backlash" attacks and on those many children and adolescents who must "laugh off" or fight back against assumptions that they or their relatives are affiliated with terrorism—are described in greater detail in the next section.

The racialization of religion "locates" certain religious populations within the social strata of U.S. society by applying ideological forces in conjunction with social and political relations of domination. The racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism has Orientalist underpinnings (Said, 1978).[11] American society created an image of South Asianness—and of the South Asian religions—before it even encountered them physically. The writings of the Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, both of whose more philosophical works were influenced by the Bhagavad Gita, were the vehicle for this encounter (Eck, 2001). The West created the "East as a site of difference... reified in the anthropological mode where strange tongues, other beliefs, [and] centuries old (read unchanging) religions... mark out the community" (Hutnyk, 1999, p. 132). In an early example of Americans conflating immigrants' religions with their place of origin, 17th-century Sikh immigrants were known as "Hindoos" (Jensen, 1988).

The sense of danger that historically characterized Europe's post-Crusade view of the Muslim world was again projected onto Muslim immigrants. Meanwhile, Britain's approach to Hindu-majority India, always characterized by sentiments more proprietary than conflict-laden (Said, 1978), was transformed into the new American commodification of things Indian. Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism therefore become not merely non-Christian—they become the villainous, anachronistic religions of the East. Both Indians as a *race* and *ethnicity* and Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs as *religions* were "othered" and thereby diminished in the American mind's eye.

This "othering," in turn, has consequences for these minority groups in the U.S. South Asian Americans face what Pharr (1988) identifies as the common elements of oppression; In relation to a defined norm, which both buttresses and is buttressed by institutional and economic power, out-group members suffer violence and the threat of violence, stereotyping, invisibility, distortion, isolation, and internalized oppression. In the act of defining Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism as deviant, and thereby excluding them from society, white American Christians represent themselves as benevolent. This in/out group phenomenon reinforces Christian hegemony at the institutional and cultural levels, and enables individual members of the "in" group to rationalize (and to perpetuate) the exclusion of religious "others."

At the same time, this intersection of Orientalist prejudice and social oppression occurs in the context of a United States that already has racial and religious minorities. South Asian Americans are not only "othered" but also locateds in relation to the other others—both racial others like Blacks and Latinos and religious others like Jews. The confluence of racial and religious difference, acting simultaneously in contemporary society, has two effects. First, it complicates the outsider-status of Indian Americans through the interactions of religious and race-based outsider status. In this sense, Indian Americans differ from Blacks (many of whom are denominationally Christian) and Jews (most of whom in the United States are white).[12] By having multiply co-constructed factors of difference, Indian Americans can be seen as multiply different. When those Indian Americans are also new immigrants, additional factors (e.g., cultural and linguistic differences like ethnic dress and accented speech) magnify the effect. Second, against the backdrop of historical attitudes and current events each religious group within the racial category of Indian Americans is placed in a different position: the dangerous other (Muslims), the strange other (Sikhs), and the exotic yet safe other (Hindus).

OUTCOMES OF THE RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION

This section presents, in general terms, the outcomes of the racialization of South Asian religions in contemporary America. The racialization processes described above lead, in combination, to five identified outcomes. Like the processes, these outcomes may be experienced in combination by members of various South Asian American religious groups. As the next section reveals, particular religious groups are likely to experience certain outcomes more directly and profoundly than others. The process and impact of racialization can also change with the identity of the target group.[13] Notwithstanding the "lumping" outcome described above, to the extent American society understands and recognizes distinctions among the South Asian religions, the manner in which each is racialized and (mis)used differs across religious. In our current sociopolitical and cultural context, Hinduism is exoticized, Islam is demonized, and Sikhism is vilified.

Religion becomes a proxy for race. When religion is racialized, as it is in the U.S. context, race becomes a "marker" for religion. In the broader society, the association between the race and the religion evolves into a conflation of the two. South Asian Americans with fair to medium shades of brown skin are presumed to be a certain faith because of that brown skin. The assumption is often based in the sociohistorical moment. Historically, individuals from South Asia were often presumed to be Hindu. This was a product of the popular association between India and Hinduism wrought by Thoreau, Emerson, and even the travel writings of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). More recently, the popularity of Hinduism that arose in the 1960s, associated with the hippie movement and celebrities like the Beatles, reinforced this association. There is also the influence of mere numbers: Most people in India are Hindu. With these associations in place, an individual of Indian phenotype may confront the assumption that he is Hindu. While the mere assumption of religious identity may seem an "innocuous" error, repeated experiences of religious mis-identifcation are experienced by many non-Hindu South Asian Americans as a negation of their religious identity.

The racialization of religion also allows a reversal of the process—what might be called the "religionization of race." For example, Hindu images and ideas become representational of "Indian" culture and identity. Commercial outlets might use an image of the goddess Saraswati or the religious mantra "Om" to connote Indian or "Eastern" culture. This conflation, whereby religion is racialized, thus results in a one-dimensional identity. When race and religion (Hinduism) function as proxies for each other, "Indianness" in the cultural, geographic, or linguistic sense—which is shared by Indian Christians, Jews, and atheists as well as by Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims—becomes part of an indistinguishable mix characterized by a presumed association with Hinduism. Important distinctions are lost.

In our current sociopolitical climate and historical moment, the most conspicuous example of how South Asian American religions are racialized is not the Indian/Hindu connotation described above, but rather the association between brown skin and Muslim beliefs. Since the oil shock of 1973 and the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979, the United States has been confronting "enemies" in the developing world whose ideology is expressed and explained by reference to their interpretations of Islam. This theology/ideology is racialized via its association with Islam: "Arab" and "Muslim" are used interchangeably and the politics and tactics of terrorist movements are described as "Islamic" by the popular media. Stereotypes perpetuated by the government and media come to paint Islam and Muslim as intrinsically—perhaps organically—violent and evil in American public opinion (Afridi, 2001; Haddad, 2000; Nimer, 2002). Said (1996) argued that Islam has been turned into America's "post-Soviet devil" (p. 28) thereby replacing "godless Communism" as its sinister global enemy of the present historical moment. The mainstream news and entertainment media—most Americans' only source of information about non-Whites and the religions and cultures of the non-Western world—do little to educate and much to exacerbate this othering of religions beyond the Jewish and Christian faiths. From the attitudes of political leaders, the unenlightened coverage by the news media, and the caricatures that are the filmmakers' stock-in-trade, it is a small step to the notion of all brown-skinned Muslims as the enemy (Shaheen, 1984, 2001).

The racial/religious othering of Muslims has been used as a dehumanizing tool by political leaders who a generation ago were demonizing "yellow reds" (that is, the East and Southeast Asian communists against whom the Korean and Vietnam Wars were fought). Like these enemies and like Japanese Americans in the 1940s, Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans have faced negative representations in the media since the 1972 killing of Israeli athletes at the Olympic games in Munich and the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979–1981, through the Intifada and First Gulf War of the 1980s and 1990s, and even more since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Consider just one popular manifestation of American thought: the editorial cartoon. Hundreds of cartoons have vilified Osama bin Laden and his allies in ways that both draws upon and exacerbate hackneyed images of the Semitic, Muslim villain. Like the mid-century cartoons of the Japanese emperor, the figures are exaggerated—usually with a large turban, protrusive nose, and beady eyes—all stereotypical "Arabic" features often found represented in the media. As a result, U.S. society and culture tends to ascribe collective guilt on an entire ethnic group, just as it did half a century ago with respect to Japanese Americans, by associating these stereotypically Arab features with the acts committed by al-Qaeda.

Such simplistic stereotypes are further perpetuated by the media's decision to use "Islamic" as the adjective of choice: "Islamic terrorists," "Islamic militants."[14] By contrast, killers, such as the "anti-abortion activists" Paul Hill and Michael Griffin, are described not merely as "Christian" but "radical Christian" or "Christian extremist" or dissociated from Christianity entirely by the use of more theologically-neutral adjectives like "anti-abortion." The media's willingness to acknowledge that Christianity is not inherently murderous, despite Hill's and Griffin's actions, shows an attention to nuance not equally applied to Muslims.

So how does this approach to Islam—and, in particular, "mental association" of Islam with Arab ethnicity—affect South Asian Americans? The answer lies at the intersection of Orientalist thought and the phenotypical similarity of South Asians to Arabs. The U.S. school

systems' attention to world geography being negligible, few individuals really know or understand who or what lies geographically between Greece and Japan. South Asians are part of an undifferentiated category of brown-skinned people, neither Black nor "Asian" (that is, East Asian). In this context, someone neither black nor East Asian is associated—not always at the level of presumption, but at least at the level of doubt—with a region of the world associated with the United States' Muslim "enemy." South Asians may not be seen as Arabs per se, but they are mentally associated with a presumptively-monolithic part of the world that makes its appearance in the American media only when there is a bombing in the world. As Said (1978) points out, this is one of the "luxuries" of Orientalism: Americans need not think hard about distinctions within the brown-skinned "other" they have conceptualized.

Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and even South Asian American Christians have been targets of anti-Muslim violence because their brown skin becomes a proxy for "Muslim" in the American eye. Islam is a global religion; there are not only Arab and South Asian Muslims but also black and white Muslims (African and African American Muslims and Muslims from Albania and from Bosnia and Herzegovina). Yet these Muslims have not been the targets of "racial violence" in the United States' so-called "post-September 11th backlash."[15] Rather, brown skin "equals" Islam in the news media and in popular culture in the U.S. As a result, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and even South Asian American Christians have been "backlash" targets because their race connotes a demonized religious identity—a racialized identity in the U.S.

The racialization of religion thus results not only in normative meanings but also in concrete—sometimes life-and-death—implications for South Asian Americans. Its effect is felt most dramatically by children and adolescents, whose home belief systems are invalidated, ignored, and even actively contested by educators and other adults. Thus, South Asian American adolescents have reported feeling that the dominant culture in their schools and society often has shown disinterest in and disrespect for fundamental dimensions of their identity, particularly their religious identity (Joshi, 2006; Wingfield, this issue; Zine, this issue).

Theological Conflation of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam Occurs

Racialization of religion results not only in the conflation of religion with race but also, in the case of South Asian Americans, in the conflation of that racial group's diverse religions with each other. The ascription of "X" racial features to the tenets of religion "Y" leads easily to the presumption that all people who look like "X" share a belief in "Y." Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are presumed to be theologically similar because their adherents are racially similar.[16] Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

While it uses a geographic rather than a racial term, strictly speaking, the phrase "Eastern religions" is a useful illustration of this phenomenon of conflation and how it is aggravated by lack of knowledge about the faiths. Used most often to connote Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, the phrase represents a host of flawed and troubling assumptions. It implies that religions with widely divergent practices, beliefs, and scriptures are theologically similar or even derivative of one another. By ascribing geography to theology, it inaccurately characterizes Islam, diminishing it from a global religion followed by people of all races—and, indeed, one of the three Abrahamic faiths[17]—to something merely distant and exotic.

The theological conflation of South Asian American or "Eastern" religions contributes to misunderstandings about theology and culture that affect the lives of individual South Asian Americans in a variety of ways, from the mere frustration of being misidentified to a lack of services (or the provision of inappropriate services) in contexts such as the public school system and commercial transactions.

This theological conflation of ethnic minorities in the United States has a long history. By 1910 there were between 5,000 and 10,000 South Asians in the United States. The majority were Sikh and about a third were Muslim, but they were all called Hindus (or "Hindoos") by both the media and by federal and state agencies (Jensen, 1988; Takaki, 1989). "'Hindu' served as a *racial* appellation of difference, its use of obscure but certain origins in the Western colonial discourse of race, culture, civilization, and empire" (Haney-López, 1996, p. 88).

U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923) is a historical example of this phenomenon. As noted earlier in this paper, Thind's case for citizenship rested on the merit of his "Aryan" designation and his presumed status as a high-caste Hindu from the Punjab region of India. His own lawyers continually asserted his Hindu and Aryan identity as proof of his whiteness. Yet he was visibly a Sikh man; he kept a long beard and wore a turban. He never identified as Hindu and maintained his Sikh identity (Snow, 2004). Nonetheless, neither his own lawyers nor the courts made the distinction—perhaps unwilling to tread the even more unfamiliar ground of Sikhism or perhaps wedded to their legal theory that linked the concept of being "high-caste" to the concept of being Aryan and, therefore, white.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this phenomenon has been the presumption that Sikhism is theologically similar—words like "offshoot" and "sect" are often used—to Islam or Hinduism. In months after September 11, 2001, media images of Osama Bin Laden and Afghani Taliban leader Mohammed Omar, two

Muslims who wear a turban as is customary in Afghan culture, resulted in the presumption that Sikh men were followers of an Islamic sect.[18] (Many observant Sikh men, and some observant women as well, wear a dastaar, or turban.) In an ironic attempt to rectify this error, the Seattle Times reported that Sikhism was a Hindu sect (Dickie, 2001). Neither is true.

Each Religion is Seen as Monolithic

When religion is racialized, the diversity of belief within each religion is erased. Just as racial similarity allows for the presumption that Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are theologically related, it allows the theological differences *within* each belief system to be ignored. The shared phenomenon of brown skin erases the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, among the many regional and caste-based affiliations within Hinduism, or even between individual members of any group who choose to be "observant" and those who do not.

The tendency of most Americans to engage in the unconsidered assumption that "all Muslims" or "all Hindus" subscribe to certain beliefs is illustrated in the popular media. On those rare occasions when South Asian religious events receive press coverage, it is often characterized by blanket statements like "Hindus revere" a particular god, when in fact what is being described is an event unique to a specific mandir, caste, or regional/linguistic group. In the current socio-historical moment, where the "Islam" of media discourse is radical Wahhabism, this presumed uniformity then sanctions discriminatory statements like "Muslims are all terrorists" or "All Muslims are fundamentalist."

The racialization of religion permits such assumptions through the conflation of phenotype and theology. It allows for the belief that those who look alike also think (and believe) alike. Highly-visible political and religious leaders and groups such as "the Hare Krishnas,"[19] the Ayotollah Khomeni, the Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh, and Osama Bin Laden are presumed to speak for all adherents of the faith. Most people who would never assume that the Rev. Jerry Falwell or anti-abortion radical Randall Terry speak for all Christians, or that the Pope speaks for all Catholics, nevertheless engage in the thoughtless assumption that they can generalize about "what Muslims think"—in this particular historical moment, that Muslims all subscribe to a monolithic, radical, and Wahabist belief system. The complexity and diversity of religious traditions and beliefs encapsulated by the terms "Islam" and "Muslim" disappear.[20]

Even where there is an acknowledgment that the three religions are different, racialization can still allow the assumption that there are "basic beliefs," the differences among which may be ignored as irrelevant or peripheral. These overlapping concepts—the racialization of religion and the incidence of "mistaken religious identity"—illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon.

The demonization (or, perhaps, "terrorization") of Islam functions in tandem with normative American Christianity to delegitimize Islam as a belief system and to ascribe to all Muslims a presumed and monolithic "faith" defined by images of explosions, martyrdom, and death, rather than piety and service. The racialization of Islam also makes the distinction among black, white, and Asian adherents invisible and thereby diminishes society's ability to understand Islam as a global faith.

South Asian Religions are Misrepresented and Robbed of Legitimacy

By exacerbating the "otherness" of South Asian American Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, the racialization of religion contributes to the delegitimization of these three faiths in a four-step process. First, in social dialogue and thought on theological topics, the Christian norm is applied. Second, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism are then compared to this norm. Third, differences, real or imagined, from the Christian norm are found with respect to the South Asian religions' theology and manners of practice. For example, the Christian image of "prayer"—kneeling, with the fingers of both hands interlaced—is compared to the Muslim saalat (bowing toward Mecca five times a day) or to Hindu aarti (fire offering) or pradakshina (worshipful circumambulation of an image of the deity). Articles of belief for dominant religions are seen as distinct from "myths" of delegitimized religions. Articles of Christian belief, such as the virgin birth or the Assumption, are compared to "myths," such as Mohammed's midnight flight to heaven or Vishnu's periodic visitation of the Earth in different incarnations. Finally, the combination of the white Christian norm, which is associated by the Christian majority with the idea of "goodness" or righteousness, and the different-ness of these other faiths with their different practices and beliefs are seen as illegitimate by comparison.

Sikh Americans, particularly those who observe the five Ks[21] show how visible difference are an essential element of racialization. Singh (2002) observes,

> The obviously visible differences of the swarthy-skinned, dark-bearded, turban-wearing, sword-carrying Sikhs present a protuberant obstacle to many Americans imagining them as conjoined citizens of the American polity, instead of potentially fear-inspiring foreigners. The American society into which Sikh immigrants have transplanted their culture, one they perceive as hostile and forbidding to their cultural traditions, has racialized them as a result of their ostensible "racial uniform." Consequently, the intersections of white and Christian supremacy have made the integration of Sikh Americans into the Republic all the more formidable a task. (p. 10)

The major outcome of the racialization of religion experienced by American Sikhs is the misrepresentation or misunderstanding of Sikhism as something else; specifically, the racialization of the religion leads to a "mistaken identity." One of the most harmful ways we have seen this "mistaken identity" recently manifested is in physical attacks on Sikh Americans. In the days and weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans were exposed to images of a particular regional/cultural manifestation of Islam: Afghani Islam, where men wear turbans and long beards. Specifically, the images of Osama Bin Laden, an Arab, and Mohammed Omar, an Afghani, became associated in the American mainstream mind with Sikh men because of the visual similarity of turbans. Americans (including not only white but also black and East Asian Americans) "saw" Sikh Americans as Muslims due to their understanding of Muslims' purported "racial uniform"—a turban and beard (Goodstein & Lewin, 2001).

The mistaken association of Sikh cultural implements with radical Islam has led to a large number of physical or verbal attacks, including the murder of Balabar Singh Sodhi in Arizona. Sodhi, a 51-year-old Sikh gas station attendant in Mesa, Arizona, was killed on September 15, 2001 by a man police described as angry about the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington DC. Whether we understand this tragedy as a lack of information or a casual disregard for accuracy, it is undeniable that the particular ways in which Sikhs are "misunderstood" theologically spring from two factors: their brown skin, turbans, and beards, and their association with the undifferentiated swath of geography between "West" and "East." While Sikhs may also be singled out for abuse simply because of their conspicuous appearance, accents, or skin color,[22] it seems clear that a substantial proportion of anti-Sikh discrimination in fact springs from the phenomenon of mistaken identity. As there was no money stolen from the cash register, people have surmised this was a hate crime, though law enforcement officials initially refused to classify it as such (Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force [SMART], 2001). Not only after September 11 but also in the wake of other national and international incidents, Sikh Americans have been targeted for hate crimes by misguided racists who found them to be convenient scapegoats for the actions of the dehumanized, non-white "others" at whom they wanted to strike (National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2002). If we want to tease out the nuance of the concept here, note that Sikhism is not itself racialized; rather, the racialization of *another* religion (Islam) results in the victimization of Sikhs.

It is important to note that the delegitimization of South Asian religions is largely a cultural rather than a religious phenomenon. Notwithstanding the exclusionary "one true faith" language of the Christian Bible, the process described above springs not from Christian scripture but from American culture and the privilege and cultural sway of its Christian majority. Christianity is not doing these things to South Asian religions, but rather Christianity's normative power in U.S. culture, coupled with the enduring salience of race as a reference point for social stratification, is. Churches are not to blame, but most churches could be doing much more to build bridges of understanding with South Asian American religious groups.

Along with being misrepresented and misunderstood, South Asian religions are rendered illegitimate, and this perceived illegitimacy is reinforced and exacerbated by the racialization of the religions. Hinduism, which has multi-armed gods and goddesses among its religious images, has often been characterized as cultish, fraudulent, and deviant. Furthermore, the way Hindus pray and to "whom" they pray are distorted. The source of these mischaracterizations is, again, the normative effect of Christianity. A "real" (read "legitimate") American religious image is an old white man with a flowing beard or the Virgin Mary, not Krishna with his blue skin or the four-armed Saraswati, goddess of knowledge, wisdom, and learning. This distinction cannot be characterized as anything but normative; otherwise, how do we accept the idea that Christian stories of the supernatural are regarded as plausible, while similar Hindu stories are seen as strange and impossible fantasies (Sethi, 1994)?

Once a belief system is rendered illegitimate, the "artifacts" and concepts associated with the religion no longer hold any religious value (in the eyes of the majority) and can be appropriated for a variety of uses. Western appropriation of Hindu terms such as karma and guru also reflects the view that the religion is charlatanic and distorts and decontextualizes the theological meaning of those terms. The commodification of religious images—placing god and goddess images on candles and lunchboxes and the sacred symbol "om" on perfume and crop-top T-shirts—is another example of this misappropriation. Uses like these are neither driven by respect nor reflective of any legitimate invocation or "practice" of Hinduism.

The religious roots of discrimination are hidden by race. There is no more resonant phrase in the American myth of national origins than this one: "freedom from religious persecution." Since the arrival of Puritans and Anabaptists in the 17th century, religious affiliation has been an important marker of individual and group identity in the United States (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Murrin, 2003). Members of various American immigrant groups have created and used religious institutions to maintain their social identities and transmit culture to the second and subsequent generations. Thus, religion is popularly understood as a legitimate form of ethnic expression in the United States (Warner & Wittner, 1998).

American society at least purports to support and practice religious tolerance. In fact, however, each new

wave of immigrants, along with the Native Americans, arriving on these shores has been the target of discrimination based on religion: from the "heathen" epithet hurled at African slaves of the 18th and 19th centuries (many of whom were Muslim) to the anti-Catholic and antisemitic sentiments common at the turn of the 20th century, to the historical and contemporary xenophobia directed toward Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism. As already noted, each of these religions has been racialized on arrival. Groups that are considered white today, for example, the Irish, the Italians, and Jews of European lineage, were not always white (Brodkin 1998). The entitlements of whiteness were only later extended to them—as they are extended to various groups at specific moments in history (Ignatiev, 1995; Orsi, 1992).

In order to understand how contemporary immigrant populations' experiences will be different, we must return to the phenomenon of "meltability"—the distinction between those who are phenotypically white, like the Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish European immigrants of a century ago, and those who are not. Today, when a target population is racially white, religious discrimination, for example, antisemitism and anti-Catholicism, can be seen as religious discrimination. However, when a "non-white" religion is racialized and racial characteristics become attached to the religion, the religious and racial identities are conflated; the result is a one-dimensional identity that is predominantly racial. The religious nature of discrimination is overlooked because the visibility of the target population's ethnic and racial identity permits the presumption that the bias is racial/ethnic in nature. This is the experience of South Asian Americans.

This outcome has the effect of masking the existence and extent of religious discrimination in this country. Attacks on South Asian American people—even turban-wearing Sikh men and bindi or "dot"-wearing Hindu women—are understood to be, and treated by the government and media as, *racial* bias crimes. For example, in the late 1980s, a group of young toughs calling themselves the "dot-busters" attacked and intimidated Indian Americans in northern New Jersey, killing at least one person and leaving another with permanent brain damage (Sengupta, 1998b).[23] The *Bergen Record* (1993) called the attacks "racial beatings," and the *New York Times* (Sengupta, 1998a) called them "attacks on South Asians." Even a scholar of Hinduism wrote that "the attacks had nothing to do with Hinduism as a religion" (Eck, 2001, p. 305). All these writers ignore the fact that the "dot" or bindi is a symbol worn by Hindu women, not all Indians. Likewise, referring to post-9/11 attacks on turban-wearing Sikh men as "racial violence" ignores the obvious fact that while the victims' brown skin was visible to their attackers their turbans and beards were just as visible.

Conflating victims' racial and religious identities—a process aided and abetted by the racialization of religion—tells them that their religious identity is less meaningful to society than their "brown-ness." It may result in the under-reporting and -prosecution of bias crimes, and it leads society to under-emphasize programs that combat religious prejudice as compared to those directed at solving the problem of racism.

CONCLUSION

Several contemporary scholars believe we will again see a shift in the color line and that Asian Americans are white or will become white (Volokh, 1998; Yancey, 2003). France W. Twine (1997) theorizes that "the back door to whiteness" is open to South Asians Americans because they are not black. These beliefs are aided by the perception of Asian Americans as a "model minority" and the belief on the part of some Asian Americans themselves that they are poised to become white. In this possibility we can hear the echoes of Takao Ozawa (*Ozawa v. United States*, 1922), a Japanese immigrant of the early 20th century who, in court papers supporting his application for citizenship, asserted "his family had attended American churches" in order to prove that he was legally "white" (See also Haney-López, 1996). Indeed, to the extent that this theory of impending whiteness is applied to East Asian Americans, we should bear in mind that most Chinese and Korean Americans in the U.S. today identify as Christian (R. Kim, 2004). They and those with whom they interact may construct racial identities that draw upon the association of Christianity with whiteness, yet also retain their ethnic identity (Alumkal, 2003; Busto, 1999; R. Kim, 2004).

How are the 1.7 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001) South Asian Americans who identify religiously with Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam to be understood? Twine's (1997) theory of a "back door to whiteness" ignores the centuries-old symbiotic relationship between whiteness and Christianity in America. While the back door to whiteness may be open, the aspirant must show her Christian I.D. card to enter.[24] The door may in fact be closed even to East Asian American Christians, who despite their religious affiliation remain unmeltable. But for South Asian American Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims—who are neither meltable nor Christian—Twine's fictional door is not even unlocked.

For all the reasons described above, race is both an essential element and a unique challenge in the study of South Asian American populations. The scholarly theory that the importance of race for many of the post-1965 immigrants will fade over time (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Warner, 1998), like the theory that economically successful non-Blacks can "become white," springs from flawed assumptions. First is the wishful idea that U.S. society is moving toward the multicultural ideal that will soon render race obsolete. Second, these scholars' theory relies heavily on the experiences of early-20th-century white

ethnics, who despite their Catholic and Jewish religious identities had substantially "melted" into the dominant white milieu by the third generation. Just as recent scholarship has shown that concepts of race were significant for white immigrant groups of the past two centuries, and illustrated the shortfalls of earlier work on Catholic and Jewish American populations that failed to account for race as such (Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2002), so I believe this and future works will show the continuing salience of race for South Asian Americans. Race is too irreducible and the arc of multiculturalism's role in society too long to support with any immediacy the theory of race's growing irrelevance. While one can predict that race's role in their lives many change—its impact may be felt differently, its "flavor" may change, or the "color lines" that demarcate racial groups' access to relative privilege in the United States may shift—race will remain significant for first- and second-generation South Asian Americans and likely for their progeny as well.

I have theorized the racialization of religion: that particular religions in particular historical moments, come to be associated with certain real or imagined phenotypical characteristics and that race thereby becomes a proxy for a presumed belief system. The process is both enabled and aggravated by the presence of a white and Christian norm in American society. I presented examples of this phenomenon and discussed its impact and outcomes for the followers of three specific faiths: Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism.

While the causes and effects of racialization are different for each faith, they are most usefully considered as a group. This is because they face a common outcome, whether by exoticization, vilification, or "terrorization." The three faiths are rendered invisible, illegitimate, and unworthy of attention beyond the level of novelty or stereotype. They suffer the same final fate: They are rendered theologically, morally, and socially illegitimate. This illegitimacy is acted out in ignorance of, contempt for, and mischaracterization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism by the mass media, the government, and individuals. These phenomena function cyclically to maintain a white, Christian hegemony in the United States. Their effect is felt dramatically by children and adolescents, whose home belief systems are invalidated, ignored, and even actively contested by educators and other adults (Joshi, 2006). In a research study of second-generation Indian Americans, many research participants (including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Indian American Christians) reported feeling that the dominant white U.S. culture has shown disinterest in and disrespect for fundamental pieces of their identity, particularly their religious identity (Joshi, 2006; Wingfield, this issue; Zine, 2001).

At its edges, the line between racial and religious oppression blurs to the point of vanishing. Consider, for example, the struggle that Sikhs have faced in community after American community when they seek to construct sacred sites in which to worship peacefully and practice their religious and cultural heritage .(Singh, 2003). The building proposed is different in many ways from "houses of worship" as the American Christian mind understands them: architecturally (how they look, particularly with respect to statuary), theologically (what is taught there), and racially (who worships there). Does the unease of white- and Christian-majority zoning boards spring from discomfort with Sikh theology? Or with the image of many brown-skinned, dastaar- and sari- and kirpan-wearing people—a foreign "other"—congregating and organizing? Do South Asian Sikhs trigger thoughts of terrorism in the same way that black populations trigger thoughts of crime? The real answer is probably "yes" to all three questions, but it is clear that the racial element, and the resulting theological misimpressions described above, is a major aggravating factor. This contemporary theological redlining[25] is just one example of how the racialization of religion affects South Asian Americans at the individual and policy levels.

Indeed, the racialization of the South Asian religions has impacts at the institutional, cultural, and individual levels. It leads to negative experiences related to the racial and ethnic identity development of South Asian Americans, to the popular and commercial misuse of ethnic and religious images and ideas, and to the disguising of religious violence as "racial." In our historical moment, when Islam is associated with enemy status in the American mind, it has resulted in South Asian Americans and Arab Americans being viewed as a potential "fifth column," whether they, in fact, be Muslim or not. Like all forms of bias, these social phenomena harm and diminish both the agents and the targets of discrimination.

I argue here that social scientists and scholars on race must consider religion, along with gender, ethnicity, and social class as forces that shape, transform, unify, and divide communities. If we are to do so in a way that is meaningful and provides insight and tools to ameliorate the challenged faced by non-white, non-Christian Americans, we must understand the processes by which religion is racialized and their outcomes. Therefore we must consider the process of the racialization and the ramifications for the particular people, in this case South Asian American Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.

I also argue that we must not permit our scholarship to exist merely for its own sake, detached from the lives and experiences of those who suffer racism or religious oppression. With the post-1965 explosion of racial and theological diversity in the American population, we are called on to write scholarship that not only explores and explains the experiences of members of these minorities but also assists in the re-defining of American norms and the development of a new understanding of the true American milieu.

Likewise, contemporary K-12 educators must understand how race and religion interact, and the particular salience of religious identity to many South Asian American students. They must respond to religious discrimination with at least the same vigilance and vehemence as they direct toward racial discrimination, and recognize that the roots of one may be tangled indistinguishably with the roots of the other.

NOTES

1. The Pluralism Project (www.pluralism.org) lists population statistics from many different sources, including governmental and community-based organizations (See also Smith, 2002).

2. This data was part of the survey by Zogby International, August 2000, Survey commissioned by the American Muslim Council. Information available at http://www.islamfortoday.com/historyusa4.htm.

3. There are two major exceptions: Churches founded by communities of color such as black congregations, Korean or Chinese evangelical Christianity and churches that "contest" national norms, for example Liberation Theology or the Civil Rights Movement.

4. Millennia earlier, people of all skin colors and nationalities were enslaved by the Greeks and Romans—not just Africans (Fredrickson, 2002). In those ancient societies, it seems, a salient social distinction was based on the difference between slave and free rather than on phenotype.

5. Some scholars, including Beaman (2003), use the term "Protestant Privilege" rather than "Christian Privilege." Interestingly, this author, a Hindu, and Blumenfeld (in this issue), a Jew, both feel that the correct term to describe the American sociocultural phenomenon is "Christian Privilege." I do not know what religion (if any) Beaman ascribes to, but it may be that the very distinction identified here is itself an example of the dialectical relationship between "self" and "other."

6. The term "American," as I use it herein, represents the dominant culture, which is characterized by norms of white Protestant Christianity but which is comprised of U.S. residents of all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Defining the term "American" is particularly vexing in the context of an article like this: On the one hand, it is a term (as it should be) that includes United States residents of all racial and ethnic backgrounds (unless otherwise specified). On the other hand, it is most often used in this work as a counterpoint to the ethnoreligious minority cultures discussed: South Asian Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. In other words, "American" is an adjective that connotes the cultural dominance of individuals and ideas associated with white Protestant Christianity, yet I do not define it to include only Whites or only Christians.

7. On June 26, 1991, a Muslim imam, Siraj Wahhaj of Brooklyn, opened a session of the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time. In February of 1992, Imam W. Deen Mohammed of the Chicago-based American Muslim Mission opened a session of the U.S. Senate with prayer, again the first Muslim ever to do so (Eck, 2001).

8. Bill Clinton, in 1996, was the first U.S. president to sign a proclamation commemorating that year's celebration of Eid ul Fitr and invited Muslims to the White House to celebrate. Several states' governors now regularly issue proclamations concerning Ramadan. President Clinton issued a proclamation on the birthday of the Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, saying,, "Religious pluralism in our nation is bringing us together in new and powerful way." (*San Diego Union Tribune*, 1998)

9. The interaction between Christianity and American culture is so profound that it flows in both directions: Church attendance on Thanksgiving, a history-based holiday without Biblical reference, is officially recommended (but not mandated) by the Catholic Church. These cultural phenomena are reflected in the individual conduct, vocabulary, and assumptions of most Americans.

10. A clandestine group that is allied with a foreign enemy force

11. Said (1996) claims there have been counterparts in "similar knowledges" constructed about Native Americans and Africans where there is a chronic tendency to deny, suppress, or distort their systems of thought in order to maintain the fiction of scholarly disinterest. In other words, Said presents his work not only as an examination of European attitudes to Islam and the Arabs but also as a model for analysis of all Western "discourses on the Other."

12. I acknowledge that this sentence contains a generalization. It should be noted that while most American Blacks are Christian, many are not, and that while most American Jews are white, many are not. In popular discourse, I would argue, the parallel stands.

13. Additionally, the gendering of the racialization of religion is different for the three different faiths. (See Zine, this issue).

14. For a discussion of how media images of Islam affected the identity development of young Indian Americans, see Joshi (2006).

15. Here it is important to acknowledge a gender component to the phenomenon of religious oppression; for example, black or white Muslim women who wear purdah (veil) or hijab (head scarf) may be targets because of this non-racial marker. I would posit that even this is less likely, however, because it is really the brown skin that "sticks out" in the American mind as a representation of religious difference.

16. An analogy should be noted here to Fanon's critique of "the concept of negritude." Fanon (1968) lamented the "historical necessity" for African intellectuals "to racialize their claims and to speak more of African culture than of national culture." By allowing European-imposed racial categories to erase the national and linguistic distinctions within Africa, these writers bolstered a similar race-based obscuring of intraracial diversity.

17. The Abrahamic faiths—those that invoke the story and lineage of Abraham are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

18. Incident reports available at www.sikhcoalition.org. See also National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (2002) *Backlash Final Report*.

19. The proper name for this organization is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

20. One could also argue that the utilization of the term "terrorist" enables the facile dehumanization of the targets of that pejorative by the press and the public. The inherently racist and Christian-centric view of the United States media and public can thus be seen in their powerful need to differentiate between such accused terrorists, and those belonging to the dominant

faith and race of the United States, by coupling the words "Muslim" and "terrorist."

21. The Five Ks are the five physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa, a central grouping of orthodox Sikhs. The five Ks are Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kaccha (cotton underwear), Kirpan (steel sword).

22. Accent, of course, raises the issue of immigrant status as well as "race" as an aggravating factor in the victimization of these individuals. Considering this issue would be beyond the scope of the present work, but is worthy of further study.

23. The murdered man, Navroze Mody, was a Zorastrian or "Parsi." The other victim, whose attack left him with permanent brain damage, is a Hindu man.

24. There is even a word for such a test: Shibboleth. See Judges 12:6 (KJV).

25. The term "redlining" refers to once-legal and -written (now illegal and unwritten) policies that functioned to maintain racial separation and white economic advantage, such as by denying mortgage loans to Blacks and residents of "black" neighborhoods, real estate rental and sales policies that discouraged racial integration, and racially-restrictive covenants.

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