Connecting Faith and Race in American Political Life

Nancy Wadsworth
Assistant Professor of Political Science
University of Denver
nwadswor@du.edu
E Pluribus Unum?
18th Century Center and Margins

- Anglicans
- Puritans
- Congregationalists
- New Protestants
- Jews
- Unitarians
- Deists
- Catholics
- Quakers

Indigenous tribes
African religions
Muslims
Atheists
You can build a mosque at Ground Zero when we can build a Synagogue in Mecca.
GROUND ZERO
IS A BURIAL SITE

NO MEGA MOSQUE
ON SACRED GROUNDS

www.sioa.com
Religion and Race are Co-constituted Categories in the U.S.

- Religiosity central to the founding
- Racial ideology came through religion first
- Religion authorized and executed colonialist nation-building
U.S. Religion is a Racial Story

- Race is central to religion’s historical and demographic development.
- Freedom of religion in the U.S. was racialized; it always applied only to some.
- For many minorities, religion becomes a powerful resource for survival, critique, and rebellion against racist systems.
- 90% of U.S. churches are racially homogenous (monoethnic).
20th Century Center and Margins

- Protestants
- Seculars
- Orthodox Religions
- Jews
- Catholics
- Muslim
- Indigenous tribes
- Black Church
- Protestant sects (Mormons)
- Eastern Religions
- Atheists
Muslim American?
E Pluribus Unum?

- Islam is one of the most racialized religions in the American context.
- Religious minorities fare well until center perceives margin as threat.