

## Lower-Division 2010 Writing Contest Source-Use Winner

### Segregated Sundays

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(Written for Mrs. Ighade's English 101 Course)

During the height of the American civil rights movement Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning" (Klagge 1). Nearly fifty years later, eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour. A multiracial congregation is defined as one in which no racial group accounts for more than eighty percent of the congregation. Only eight percent of American churches meet this standard (Klagge 1). Churches in America being self segregated is believed to be ultimately unacceptable in modern times, but it is acceptable on the account of tradition, comfort of the congregations, and the continuous failure of interracial churches.

Tradition and history play a big part in why churches are so widely separated. During the times of slavery in America, the African American slaves found refuge in the teachings of Christ. Slaves were permitted to attend church along with their masters but were unwelcome (Proach 1). From that fact slaves organized their own services and, eventually, their own churches. Denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal church, were formed because of the lack of acceptance in white churches (Blake 2). Slavery ended and African Americans continued to go to the churches they had established. Black churches became instrumental in creating and stabilizing a black society in America. In a time where life was extremely hard for African Americans, Christianity gave them hope (Proach 2). Ever since then, the separation between races in churches has not changed much at all.

Since family and church go together for many American Christians, family plays a big role in the church one may attend. Family members tend to be of the same race; therefore a person more often than not ends up in a church with members of his or her own race. Having a family tie to a church instills pride into a person, which makes it incredibly difficult for that person to abandon their church for an integrated church. Reverend Ellison Smyth, of Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, a traditionally white church, acknowledged the pride aspect when saying, "Our doors are open, but there are very few blacks that come. ...I don't think there's any drive because of the reluctance to do anything that might weaken the existing black churches. I don't know what the answer to that is" (Klagge 1). If there is an answer, it has not been found.

People seldom think about vacating their comfort zone in their own church to experience anything different, especially the religious culture of another race (Klagge 1). The culture difference between a black church and a white church can be vast. Differences in Baptist churches are the most prevalent. Music, length of service, and the preachers' delivery of the sermon tend to be much different between the two. Having a church in which the entire congregation is of the same race gives a single member one less difference to think about. The member would feel more comfortable to worship in whatever way they desire. Instead of being the black guy jumping up and flailing his arms around, he would just be the guy jumping up and flailing his arms. In an

interracial church a person tends to worry about being racially labeled. In a church made up of one race, a person gets to skip the labeling and get to the reason they are at church in the first place, to worship.

Interracial churches have the potential to bring people of various races together with a common interest and reduce friction among them (Blake 1). Many churches have tried to take the initiative and make it a mission to attract people of different races, but it is never ultimately successful. Interracial churches become one sided nearly all the time. The few that survive for more than a year are run by white pastors. In interracial churches run by black pastors, the congregations rapidly become completely black. This is a result of the culture of the black pastor. The fiery, impassioned displays of the pastor during services might be interpreted by some white parishioners as angry and defensive. They will then become uneasy and shy away from going to that church (Blake 3). When many kids in the “successful” interracial churches become teenagers, the congregation shrinks dramatically. After a kid becomes attracted to another of a different race, some families just cannot take it. They leave for the simple fact that they do not want their children romantically involved with a person that does not have the same skin color as them. Interracial churches cannot stand up against the cultural pressure they attract. If there was some way for ethnic groups to not to feel compelled to abandon their everyday American culture on Sunday morning, then interracial churches might have greater success. Different ethnic groups have voiced their desire for a “racial timeout” on Sundays (Blake 2-3). Until this burning desire fizzles out, there is no hope for interracial churches.

Over the life span of the United States of America, churches have never been racially mixed, whether by force, law, or choice. The traditions that stem from this long history of separation have done their part to keep everything the same. Excessive pride has got in the way of different churches coming together no matter what ethnic group is in the majority. People want to feel comfortable when they go to church, and sometimes, that means having people that look more like themselves around them. These reasons contribute to the consistent and repetitive failure of interracial churches. If the majority of the American population keeps the attitude that it has, and has had for hundreds of years, when it comes to church, then nothing will change. Anything segregated in America in the twenty-first century seems crazy, but when it comes to churches, it is acceptable.

#### Works Cited

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