

Why Are So Many Hispanics Catholic?

Posted October 1, 2015

Ever think about why the majority of Hispanics are Catholic? Well it can all be traced back to Christopher Columbus (Happy Columbus Day!). In 1492 when Columbus discovered the New World little did the native Indian population know what was in store for them. Conquistadors came to New World not only looking for treasure and riches but to spread Catholicism. The Spanish conquered and settled into the majority of South America, the Caribbean and the American West (what is now California and New Mexico). The Spaniards truly believed that they had the right to take over and conquer this new world and to convert the Indians to Christianity. After all they were serving God, weren't they?



In order to convert the Indians, Catholic priests would travel too far away Indian villages and would preach the gospel to the tribes they found. Never mind that the Indians didn't



understand what the priests were saying...but the Indians were polite and most of the time would listen quietly to the priests' lengthy sermons. Usually, the priest would select one Indian that appeared at least somewhat interested in learning more and would spend a few days teaching the Indian the complete Gospel (not sure how they did this with the language

barrier). When the Indian knew enough about Jesus (or so the priest thought) and had been baptized the priest would go in search of the next tribe and consider this tribe "converted" and the baptized Indian would be in charge of teaching the rest of his tribe the new religion.

As you can imagine, there was a lot of confusion among the Indians and as a result the religion practiced in America was very different than the one the conquistadors practiced in Spain. Typically the Indians' culture ended up being mixed with Catholic teachings and the result was a hybrid religion.

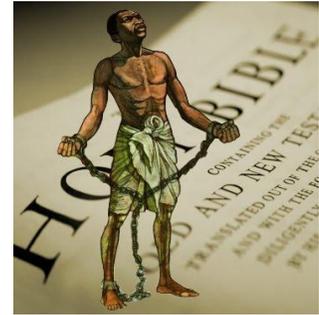
The Spaniards also set up missions throughout the American West in a continuing effort to convert the natives. Ever notice the religious connotation to many American city names in the west? [Los Angeles (the Angels), Sacramento (the Sacrament), Santa Fe (Holy Faith), San Diego (Saint Diego) and San Francisco (Saint Francis)] Thank the Spanish missionaries! The missions were set up not only to spread Christianity but secure Spain's claim to the area.



African Americans, Slavery and Religion

Posted October 21, 2015

How did slavery impact the religious beliefs and practices of African Americans? Prior to being transported to the New World, Africans practiced a variety of religions. Many of them came from the West Coast of African where the religious beliefs, practices and traditions were varied. Islam had a large presence in Africa during this time - - approximately 20% of enslaved Africans practiced Islam.



Once the enslaved Africans arrived in the New World it was very hard for them to maintain their religious beliefs and practices. Not only were many of the families and tribe separated in the New World, but white slave owners wanted to rid the slaves of their non-Christian beliefs and practices. While some aspects of their religion did survive - - music, dance, the medicinal power of roots, and their belief in the spirits of their ancestors - - many of these were mixed with Christian beliefs.



In Latin America, where Catholicism was the most practiced Christian religion, the slaves mixed their African beliefs with traditional Catholic practices and theology resulting in brand new religions (i.e. in Haiti - voodoo, in Cuba – Santeria, in Brazil – Candomblé → all can be traced back to Nigeria's Yoruba Tribe). *[Let me tell you growing up as a Cuban American in Miami, Santeria is very real and still practiced by many who left the island. Botanicas (stores that sell Santeria supplies) are commonplace in Little Havana and it is not uncommon to see dead roosters lying on the railroad tracks while driving through some neighborhoods in the city!]*

In North America, Protestant preachers were focused on the conversion of African American slaves. After the Revolution and with the abolition of slavery the maintaining and passing on of religious practices became more consistent. During this period many slaves living in the southern states were converted to evangelical religions (i.e. Baptist & Methodist). Many preachers in these religions preached that all Christians were the same in eyes of God. This belief appealed to the African American slaves and provided them with hope. Additionally, these religion worshipped in ways familiar to Africans - - fervent singing, dancing in the house of worship etc.

Halloween, El Dia de Los Muertos, All Saints Day: Different Culture, Different Views

Posted October 27, 2015



Witches, goblins and jack-o-lanterns where did Halloween and its creepy traditions get its start? Well...the holiday's origin can be traced back all the way to the time of the Druids. During this period it was believed the spirits (evil ones!) wandered through the world on October 31st and only the "Lord of Darkness" could collect these evil souls. Some people in order to avoid being recognized by the evil spirits wore costumes [possibly the start of the Halloween costume tradition].

As the years passed, Halloween became much more commercial [like most American Holidays] than about the belief in spiritual demons. This commercial version of Halloween spread to other countries - - including Latin America. In many parts of Latin American countries today Halloween is celebrated much the same way as in the U.S. However, in many of the rural areas of Latin America people celebrate All Saints Day in lieu of Halloween [probably due to their Catholic religion brought by the conquistadors - - see my first post].

Don't confuse Halloween with "El Dia de los Muertos" (the day of the dead). It is not the same thing for Hispanics. Even though the days fall close together on the calendar "El Dia de los Muertos" is a spiritual day when Hispanics [especially Mexicans] lovingly remember their deceased family members and friends. The celebration of "El Dia de Los Muertos" starts on the evening of November 1st (All Saints Day) and goes through November 2nd (All Souls Day) [both Catholic holidays].

Don't be mistaken. "El Dia de los Muertos" is not a somber, sad day of remembrance. It is typically celebrated with street festivals and lively parties. Those who celebrate this day believe that those who have passed would be upset by a day of somber mourning instead it is a celebration of their lives. A symbol often associated with "El Dia de los Muertos" is a cheerful skull often portrayed as joyful and enjoying life.



So now you know! Halloween and "El Dia de los Muertos" while often confused as being the same are very different celebrations for Hispanics. Halloween is a commercial, fun holiday which most Hispanics celebrate just like Americans, while El Dia de los Muertos is a spiritual/religious day to remember those who have died.



Asian Americans/Diverse Faiths

Posted November 6, 2015

The term Asian American is a catch all phrase and can be very misleading. Many use the term as a way to group people together. However, Asian Americans are very diverse and their cultures and languages are extremely different. Unlike Hispanic Americans that share the common denominator of language, very little unites Asian Americans other than the part of the world they come from. The religious practices and beliefs of Asian Americans are just as diverse as they are.

Let's take a look at the different Asian Americans groups and their religious affiliations and you will see what I mean...

- Filipino Americans tend to be **Catholic**,
- Indian Americans are **Hindu**,
- most Koreans are **Protestant**,
- Vietnamese Americans tend to be **Buddhist**,
- while Japanese Americans are more diverse and likely either **Protestant**, **Buddhist** or **unaffiliated**, and
- Chinese Americans for the most part **do not have a dominant religious affiliation**.



As a group Asian Americans are less likely than their American counterparts to believe in God or to pray regularly. They are also more likely than the average American to be unaffiliated with any religion. Interestingly, those who practice Buddhism and Hinduism are more likely to maintain their traditional practices and beliefs.





The Impact of Acculturation on Religion

Posted November 12, 2015

Are you familiar with the term “acculturation”? Do you know what it means? Well just in case you don’t here is the definition...acculturation is when immigrants in a new country hold on to their own culture but are still impacted and affected by the majority culture and adapt to some aspects of this culture. Do not confuse acculturation with assimilation, assimilation is when the immigrants lose their own culture and adopt the majority culture.



When immigrants come to the US, over the years they tend to acculturate (not assimilate). Most arrive with their native cultures, traditions and religious practices intact. As an immigrants time in the US progresses, most still hold on to these key components of their culture (their native traditions, mother tongue and their religious practices) but we begin to see some erosion. After prolonged exposure to the American culture, immigrants begin to significantly adopt more aspects of the American culture. This is most pronounced among younger immigrants who come to this country at a young age.

While these immigrants do not tend to convert to a religion other than their own, their religious practices and traditions are not as strong as they were in their homeland. With the younger generation of immigrants a strong desire to fit in with their new peer group causes them to back away from their country of origin’s customs.

I see this happen within my own family (immigrants from Cuba). My grandparents and parents are much more attached to their Cuban roots and traditions than is my generation. In terms of religious practices, this can be easily observed. The younger generation is not as devout or as practicing as our older counterparts. I see this among my friends of different ethnicities and varying religious beliefs.



How Different Cultures/Religions Celebrate Thanksgiving

Posted November 17, 2015



Thanksgiving in the United States is for the most part a secular holiday in that it is not typically associated with a specific religious belief. It is a time when families come together to give thanks and to spend time together. Unlike other American holidays that are not celebrated by a variety of religions due to conflicts with their beliefs (i.e., Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day), Thanksgiving is likely the most celebrated holiday by Americans of all ethnicities and religious beliefs.

The menus may or may not include the traditional turkey with all the fixings, or may vary with sides from an individual's country of origin, but regardless it is a time when American families of all ethnicities and beliefs, get together, watch parades and football and prep for some competitive holiday shopping. *(In my family we celebrate with a turkey and some of the traditional fixings, but then complement the meal by serving yuca with mojo, black beans with rice and sweet plantains - - no Cuban meal is complete without these staples).*

While the original story of Thanksgiving is usually the one of the Puritan pilgrims arriving at Plymouth Rock and holding a feast with the Indians to give thanks, some believe that thanksgiving ceremonies were noted even earlier. Episcopalians believe that they were the first ones to celebrate an American Thanksgiving. Apparently a ceremony has been noted by historians which was performed by 38 British settlers from the Church of England in 1619 *(two years earlier than the Thanksgiving held by the pilgrims at Plymouth).*

Even Pagans and Wiccans celebrate Thanksgiving! Pagans celebrate by giving thanks for the crops of the season *(today it is more related to one's personal goals than to actual crops)*. Wiccans celebrate with a cornucopia symbolizing a thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. We all have something to be thankful for!



The Changing Religious Landscape in the United States

Posted November 17, 2015



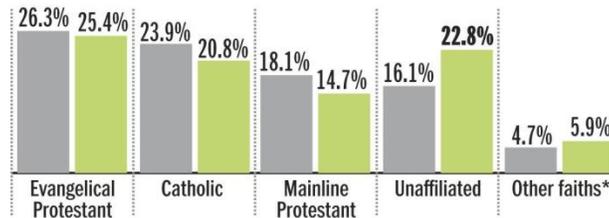
In the top US cities in America you are most likely to find people who are Roman Catholic or people who say they have “no” religious affiliation. These are the findings from a recent study conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute. *(I think that there is a positive correlation between Hispanic population in these cities and the percentage being Roman Catholic. The major cities in the US – New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Houston, San Francisco, Dallas – all have large Hispanic populations.)*

Another study by the Pew Research Center identified five key trends noted across the religious landscape in the United States. This studied compared today’s findings with those from 2007.

Changing U.S. religious landscape

■ 2007 ■ 2014

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



*Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

DESERET NEWS GRAPHIC

The five key findings were:

1. The number of people who consider themselves Christian is decreasing.
2. The largest decreases have been seen among Christians within the Protestant and Catholic faiths.
3. There is a correlation between the decline in these two faiths and the increase in those citing that they have no religious affiliation (atheists and agnostics).
4. Demographics play a key role in religious affiliation (i.e. young adults are more likely to cite no religious affiliation than are their older counterparts).
5. There is an increase in those who report being affiliated with a non-Christian faith (i.e., Hinduism and Islam).

How Ethnic Groups Celebrate the Holidays

Posted December 1, 2015

The majority of Americans celebrate the holiday season however they do so in many different ways. Ethnic and religious traditions vary among the different ethnic and religious groups. Below I have detailed the way some groups celebrate the holidays.

The Jewish community celebrates Hanukkah. Hanukkah, known as the “Festival of Lights”, celebrates an Israelite victory against Syrians in 165 B.C. After the battle the Israelites lit a menorah in the temple, but only had a enough oil to keep the menorah lit for one day. The Jews believe that a miracle occurred that day and the menorah remained lit for a full eight days.



Vietnamese Catholics begin their Christmas celebration with mass at midnight on Christmas Eve. The family celebration, gift giving and meal take place on Christmas Day. The typical meal consists of roast pork, traditional egg rolls and a dessert known as buche de noel (a sponge cake shaped like a log filled with chocolate).

Japanese living in the United States celebrate Christmas on Christmas Day as well. On December 25th they get together with family and exchange gifts. The traditional Christmas meal will most likely include turkey and sushi. Japanese Christmas trees are decorated with handmade origami ornaments.



Argentineans, like many Hispanics, celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve. The typical evening begins with the family attending mass, gathering for Christmas Eve dinner with gifts being exchanged at midnight. This group serves turkey or chicken for their Christmas Eve meal.

Mexican-Americans celebrate by being part of their church’s posadas. Like carolers, the posadas go through the neighborhood (symbolizing Joseph and Mary looking for a place to sleep) while singing they go to three homes and once turned away they go back to their church. Back at the church the children play with a piñata and the adults eat traditional tamales.



Cubans (like my family!) get together on Christmas Eve to celebrate Noche Buena (the good night) after attending the Christmas vigil mass. The traditional Cuban meals consists of lechon asado (roast pork) cooked in a caja china (special box for cooking the whole pork in the backyard). The pork is typically served with tostones (green bananas deep fried), yucca con mojo (garlic/onion sauce) and arroz y frijoles (black beans and rice). Typically gifts are exchanged on Christmas morning.



My multicultural family puts a twist on the typical Cuban Noche Buena...we add American and Lebanese elements to the meal to include foods from the cultures of all our family members. So in my family the typical Cuban meal detailed above is augmented with homemade humus, tabouli, pita bread, cranberry sauce and turkey.