

Dr. Marcella C. Clinard (she/her/hers)

## CULTIVATING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Introduce yourself to the people around you!

- ❖ Name, pronouns, religious/secular/spiritual identity
- ❖ Fun fact about a religious/secular/spiritual path, either from your own experience or something you've learned

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## COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

- Stay present and participate fully—we are learning together
- Embrace respect, humility, & vulnerability
- Suspend judgment, shame, and hierarchies
- Listen with an open mind and speak in draft form
- Do not proselytize (attempt to convert others to your religious beliefs or practices)
- Speak for yourself, not an identity or entire group
- Accept discomfort & disagreement
- Assume positive intent, but acknowledge impact
- Take turns speaking & listening
- Take the lessons, but leave the names

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## PARTICIPANTS WILL



Evaluate the role that religion and spirituality may play in their lives and communities



Identify strategies for allies to support religiously marginalized communities



Prepare to contribute to a greater sense of belonging for people of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities



[bit.ly/interfaithdef](https://bit.ly/interfaithdef)

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## STAYING FOCUSED



### Resources for learning more:

- The Pluralism Project, Harvard Univ.
- Religions, BBC
- Religions – The World Factbook, CIA

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## WHY DO WE NEED THIS?

- Religion is often **visible** but not discussed
- Cultivating religious pluralism is part of being **inclusive**
- Members of our communities are **marginalized** for religious reasons
- Being a multifaith ally can **enrich** our lives

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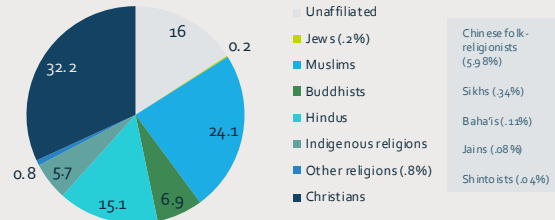
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## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AROUND THE WORLD, 2017

Data from Pew Research Center's 2017 Changing Global Religious Landscape Study




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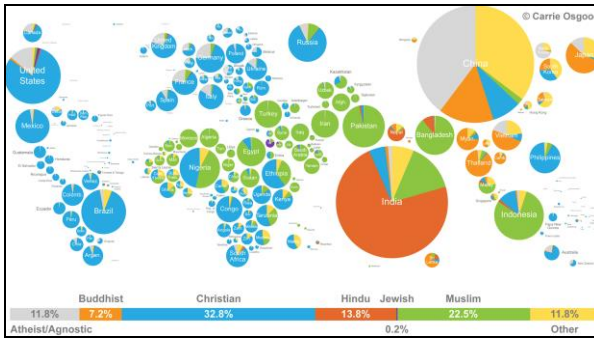
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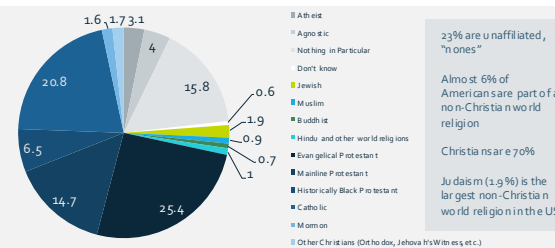
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## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY OF ADULTS IN U.S.

Data from Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study




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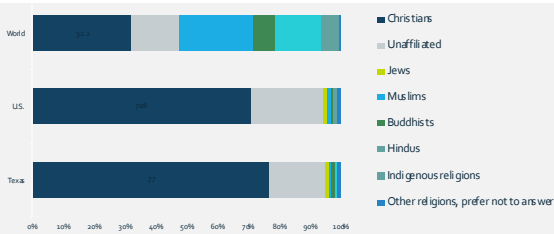
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## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Data from Pew Research Center's 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study




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## RESISTING ESSENTIALISM

Religious, secular, and spiritual paths are not monolithic.

There is diversity within each tradition!

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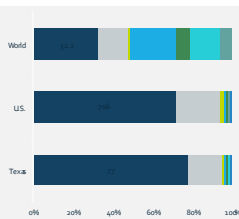


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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



What are the implications of these statistics for those in the religious minority or majority?

Why might those in the religious minority need allies? Have you seen any examples of the need for allies?

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## CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE IN AMERICA

"Because the majority of Americans are Christian, Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States. Because of their numerical superiority and long-standing political positions, Christians have more power than all of the minority religious groups combined."

"As the dominant group, Christians enjoy a variety of privileges, much like Whites and men do in the United States."  
—Lewis Schlosser

Schlosser, Lewis Z. "Christ as Privilege Breakings Star at Talbot." *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2003, p. 47. Gale Health and Wellness.

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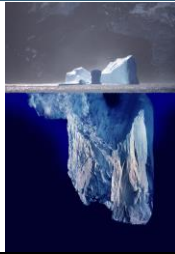
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## A SPECTRUM OF BIGOTRY

- Genocide, ethnic cleansing
- Violent **hate crimes**
- Attacks on places of worship
- Vandalism
- Threats
- Discrimination
- Prejudice and stereotypes
- **Microaggressions**
- Biased attitudes
- Indifference




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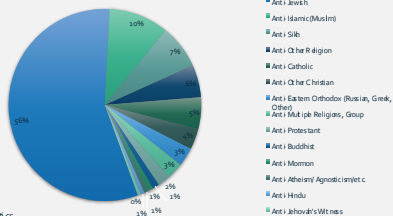
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## 2019-2021 US RELIGIOUS HATE CRIMES



Source: FBI Hate Crime Statistics

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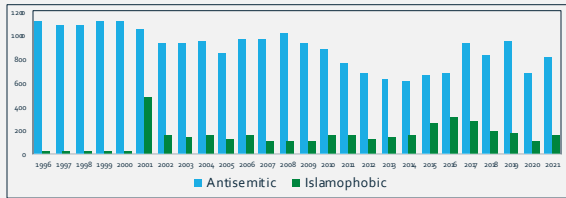
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## ANTISEMITISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA: HATE CRIMES



FBI Hate Crime Statistics

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## Microaggressions

- Comments or actions that highlight someone's perceived difference from others
- Small and are often not intended to be hurtful
- Build up to create a climate that undermines people's sense of belonging in a community

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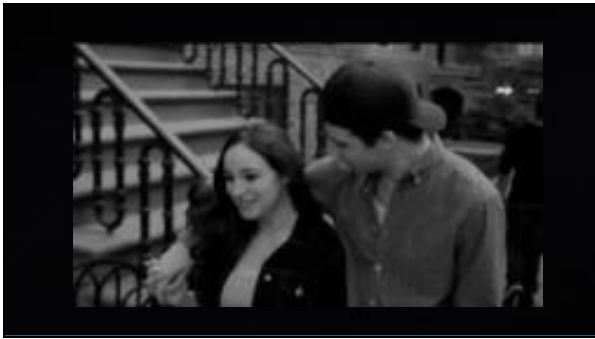
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BYSTANDER PRACTICE!

1. Imagine you were a **bystander** to one of these scenarios and that you are friends with people in question.
2. Take turns practicing an appropriate reaction as an **ally**.



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**INTERSECTIONALITY**

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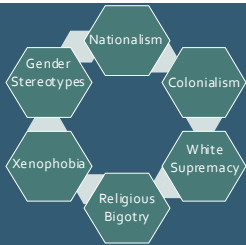
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## COMMON INTERSECTIONS



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## RELIGIOUS RACISM

- Prejudice against African religions
- Prejudice against Asian religions
- Islamophobia
- Antisemitism

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## DISCUSSION SCENARIOS

- Read and discuss your assigned scenario.
- Choose a spokesperson for your group.
- Groups report back, as time permits.

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### SCENARIO 1

The chair of a large committee you're on sent a meeting invitation for the eve of Rosh Hashana, and when two members declined, she rescheduled for a week and a half later—on Yom Kippur. The same members again declined, and one sent a frustrated message to the whole committee. The chair responded that the member could of course miss the meeting but did not offer to reschedule. How might you respond in this situation and prevent such issues going forward?



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### SCENARIO 2

You're helping organize a party at the end of the fall term. Some members of the planning committee are assuming that the decorations should include stockings, reindeer, and Santa. You feel uncomfortable because you know that there will be non-Christians who might attend the party, but the other committee members see these decorations as secular symbols. What specific steps could you take to make sure the party is welcoming and inclusive for everyone?



[bit.ly/tipsforholidays](https://bit.ly/tipsforholidays)

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### SCENARIO 3

You are organizing an overnight trip for a group that comes from diverse religious backgrounds. You need to arrange transportation, meals, and accommodations with a limited budget. You also don't know for sure what each person's religious background is, but you don't want to infringe on their rights to practice their religions freely. What are some areas of religious observance that may require accommodation and advance planning? What kinds of questions could you ask group members to help you plan, and how could you ask these questions without making assumptions or singling anyone out?



[bit.ly/3lwqx3z](https://bit.ly/3lwqx3z)

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**INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICES**

- Plan meetings and events with diverse religious and cultural holidays in mind; check an interfaith calendar
- Provide meal and drink options (Kosher, Halal, vegetarian, avoiding specific foods)
- Offer private space for prayer, meditation, or reflection to accommodate spiritual needs
- Advocate for inclusive religious policies whenever needed

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**INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICES**

- Make spaces for people to share their identities and what's important to them
- Create opportunities to learn about religious and spiritual traditions of others
- Don't make assumptions about others
- Recognize that religious, secular, and spiritual orientations are often integral parts of personal identities

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## INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICES

- Reach out to others with compassion when acts of hatred and violence occur
- Do your homework, but also ask people about themselves and how to support them
- Be willing to step up for groups you're not part of, even if that might mean taking personal risks

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## CONCLUSION

- What can I do to make our university campus and my social circle more equitable and inclusive for people of all religious, secular, and spiritual orientations?

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## Definitions

**ally:** An ally is not a member of a particular marginalized group but is willing to advocate for members of that group and dismantle systems that oppress that group by using their privilege and risking their own status.

**antisemitism:** Anti-Semitism is bigotry against Jewish people. Historically, anti-Semitism in Christian-majority Europe led to a variety of pogroms, expulsions, and other forms of persecution for hundreds of years, culminating in the Holocaust or Shoah, the Nazis' murder of 6 million European Jews. Because being Jewish is often about ethnicity in addition to religious practice, anti-Semitism is a form of religious bigotry that intersects with racism. Overt anti-Semitism is entrenched in white nationalist and white supremacist movements, but many anti-Semitic tropes are more widespread.

**bystander:** Bystanders are people who witness instances of bigotry. As neither the perpetrators nor the victims, bystanders have the power to disrupt harmful actions and words on behalf of current and potential victims. Focusing on training bystanders to intervene is one way to resist bigotry.

**Christian privilege:** Christian privilege is the privilege that Christians and culturally Christian people have, especially in Christian-majority countries like the United States. Because they form the majority, Christians in America can count on their religion being visible and understood in most contexts. Institutions usually accommodate Christian practice, such as by having Sunday, the day when most Christians worship communally, be part of the weekend, and by having Christmas, a Christian religious holiday, be a federal holiday. Members of religiously marginalized communities in America do not have these privileges, and their religious and spiritual orientations are often misunderstood and overlooked.

**essentialism:** Essentialism is the idea that a group of people can all be defined by some essential characteristic(s). Religious essentialism assumes that religious groups are monolithic and fails to recognize the diversity within religions. Essentialism is often used to fuel bigotry and stereotypes ("All Muslims are terrorists" or "Christians oppress women"), but well-meaning people can also essentialize religious traditions ("Atheists are just more rational" or "We all worship the same God," even though, for example, Buddhists worship no god and Hindus worship many gods).

**hate crime:** The FBI defines a hate crime as "a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias." Hate crimes are highly visible forms of religious bigotry.

**intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the way that systems of oppression intersect in the lives of the people they affect. For example, working-class women of color don't experience racism, sexism, and classism

separately or additively, but rather intersectionally—these oppressive systems reinforce each other and act together in complex ways. Religious bigotry is often intersectional, such as Islamophobia in the US being motivated by the intersections of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Islam sentiment. Religious bigotry can intersect with racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and other forms of bigotry.

**Islamophobia:** Islamophobia is bigotry toward people perceived to be Muslims, often because of essentialized ideas of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Because Islamophobia is a form of religious bigotry that intersects with racism, CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) defines Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism. People who are perceived to be Muslim, whether or not they are Muslim, may be victims of Islamophobia. Islamophobia often essentializes all Muslims as violent.

**microaggression:** Microaggressions are comments or actions that highlight someone's perceived difference from others. These actions are small and are often not intended to be hurtful, but they build up to create a climate that undermines people's sense of belonging in a community. Questions like, "Where are you from?" are rarely intended to be hurtful, but being repeatedly asked such a question may make someone self-conscious of the characteristics about themselves that make others assume they are a foreigner.

**religion:** Religion is a modern concept used to describe the complex set of cultural practices that different groups use to create meaning. Religion is surprisingly difficult to define, as some but not all religions have gods, scriptures, spiritual experiences, communal practices and guidelines, specific required rituals, holy places or objects, legal codes, or beliefs about the cosmos.

**religious racism:** Religious racism is one way to describe forms of bigotry that contain elements of religion intersecting with racism. Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and prejudice against Santeria, Vodou, or other African diaspora religions are forms of religious racism.

**spirituality:** Spirituality is the personal experience of deeply connecting with oneself and other beings, including human beings, parts of the natural world, spirits, and/or a god or gods. Some forms of spirituality prioritize connection to a deity, but others prioritize a deeper understanding of the self or deeper connection to nature. Around the world, many people experience and nurture their spirituality through specific religions, but some people identify as spiritual but not religious, meaning that they have a personal practice of spirituality but do not identify with a particular religious tradition or group.