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The Segregation of Religion: How Othering Influences Society's Narrative Understanding about the Symbiotic Relationship among Racism, Sexism, and the Church

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

The Segregation of Religion: How Othering Influences Society's Narrative Understanding about the Symbiotic Relationship among Racism, Sexism, and the Church

Presented by:

Ajanet Rountree, *George Mason University*

Session: Transforming Gendered Spaces

Abstract:

The social dependence on the sociology of male spiritual leadership is substantial. This dependence accomplishes two ideas: neutralizes the feminine experience and obviates the anthropological implications of religion in the perpetuation of oppression and subjugation. When considering racism and sexism in religion, specifically as they relate to the Black Christian church, a dismissal of accusations and assertions occurs by yielding to the context of the social era. This paper seeks to further clarify the position of women, who pushed against the grain of the gendered and racialized spaces of their churches and communities, as they sought to establish human rights through their pursuit of dignity and peace in two social movements.

Key to this research is its challenge of Morris' description of the church as an agency-laden vehicle and assurance in the charismatic nature of male leadership of the Civil Rights movement. Moored upon the discipline of cultural anthropology, this comparison regards both Geertz's religion as a cultural system and Weber's sociology of charismatic authority as theories for its analysis. It employs first-person narratives and semi-structured interviews of Birmingham foot soldiers and Liberian Mass Action for Peace warriors, and archival research to bring the marginalized voices of women into the center. Coding exposes two fundamental aspects for a study of leadership: the separate but proximal relationships that race and gender have to it and the perception that the individual may have about leadership as a concept or a position.

With present-day implications for the collective understanding of the labeling of "other" as related to gender and religion, this research questions whether society's symbiotic relationship with religion is conservative or progressive. In other words, can a social and political relational transformation transpire with religion to eliminate the barriers of oppression and subjugation experienced by those mislabeled as other?

Presenter information:

Ajanet Rountree is a doctoral student at George Mason University School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. She graduated with honors from the University of Alabama at Birmingham with

a Masters in the Anthropology of Peace and Human Rights. Much of her works seeks to uncover the hidden narratives of women, specifically Black women, within the fields of anthropology, human rights, justice, and peace with an understanding of their interconnections to globalization, social movements, and social change. This paper parcels out and expounds upon themes from her Master's thesis.