

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/without-a-prayer/>

The speaker discusses the motivations behind their book, which explores the intersections of race, religion, and public education, particularly in New York City. They identify three main strands of interest: the lack of dialogue between scholarship on race, religion, and public education; the historical connection of these topics, as evidenced by archival documents; and the desire to challenge the narrative that such issues are predominantly southern concerns by highlighting the significant racial and religious dynamics in northern education.

The author emphasizes the importance of archival research, having examined various documents and materials from over eleven repositories, including the New York City Board of Education archives. They analyze how historical events, like school desegregation efforts post-Brown v. Board of Education, intertwined with Judeo-Christian values, revealing religion's implicit presence in public education policies despite legal efforts to secularize schools.

Key court cases from the 1960s, such as Engle v. Vitale and Abington v. Schempp, addressed state-sponsored prayer and Bible reading in schools, declaring them violations of the First Amendment. The author argues that while these cases aimed to remove certain religious practices, they did not eliminate the underlying religious and racial biases ingrained in educational frameworks.

The discussion includes examples like the Open Enrollment program that framed integration efforts within a religious context and Brotherhood Week activities in schools that attempted to promote interfaith and racial camaraderie without substantial structural change. Critiques from within communities of color highlight a desire for genuine equality and control over educational practices.

The speaker hopes the work encourages readers to consider how race and religion co-create the sphere of public education and informs contemporary discussions surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools. Ultimately, the book advocates for a deeper understanding of the historical and systemic intertwining of these issues in shaping public education.