Religion and Philadelphia Riot

Name

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Date

What is religion?

From Latin point of view, **religion** is the respect accorded to things that are sacred. Here, people have moral obligation to respect and fear things believed to be sacred. Over time, different scholars have had different views on religion. For instance, Karl Marx (1818-1933) argued that religion is simply the sigh of creatures under oppression, the soul of the soulless and the heart of a heartless world. In simple terms Karl Marx described religion as the opium of the people. E.B. Taylor (1832-1917), described religion as the belief in spiritual beings. `Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) argued that religion is simply a unified system of practices and beliefs relative to sacred things. From these points of views, we can see that religion is simply belief in sacred things. On the other hand, **riot** according to the North Dakota Legislature means a disturbance that involves an assemblage of five individuals or more which creates grave danger of injury or damage of property or persons or obstructs the operations of a facility.

The role that religion played in the 1844 Philadelphia riots and Columbia Avenue Riots of 1964

Religion played a significant role in the 1844 that took place between May 6 and 8 and July 7 and 8 in Southwark. The riot was influenced by the rumor that Irish Catholics were trying to remove the Bible from public schools that were under the administration of Nativists. The riot led to the raid of two Catholic churches and Irish homes. The riots left 20 people dead with over 100 injured. Historically, these riots were the bloodiest in the history of Philadelphia. In reality, the Irish Catholic church was not against the use of the bible in these schools. Philadelphia’s Roman Catholic Bishop, Francis Kenrick had simply written a letter to the school board asking that Catholic students in these schools be allowed to read the Catholic bible rather than the protestant version (Bailey, 1971). Here, we see that these riots were primarily brought about by religious beliefs.

The other riots believed to have been motivated by religion are the 1964 Columbia Avenue Riots of 1964. These riots were brought about by the fact that most of the blacks migrating to the North from South belonged to Methodist, Pentecostal and Baptist-Holiness Churches. In addition, they experienced several religious options such as Catholicism, Judaism and Islam. As the black Americans were moving into Northern cities, they came across hundreds of thousands of European immigrants. The presence of European immigrants and African Americans from the south led to radical religious and ethnic transformation of these cities. Therefore, these riots might also have been contributed by the religious differences among city’s different groups of people.

Despite the role that religion played in the 1884 and 1964 riots, I do not similar riots are likely to erupt again in the city. This is because these riots were enhanced by other factors with religion simply being the final nail on coffin. During the 1884 riots, there was immense moral erosion in Philadelphia, something that led immense tensions. This explains the reason why riots emerged as a result of a mere rumor. On the Columbia riots, there were immense tensions in the city as a result of police brutality against African Americans. Therefore, the role of religion in these riots was just to provide rioters with an excuse to begin the riot. Based on these aspects, these riots are unlikely to take place again as the racial relations in the city have improved. In addition, there is no moral decay in Philadelphia as was the case in 1884.

References

Bailey, T. A. (1971). *The American pageant: A history of the Republic*. Lexington, Mass: Heath.