



Intersectionality in Intentional Communities: The Struggle for Inclusivity in Multicultural U.S. Protestant Congregations

Assata Zerai

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Over a decade of qualitative research, Assata Zerai has observed both incremental moves toward inclusiveness and strategies employed to accomplish long-term changes while conducting case studies of five multicultural Protestant churches in sites across the United States. With an interpretive approach, she explores these centers of worship and theorizes the conditions under which progressive social change occurs in some U.S. Protestant congregations. Understanding the daily practices of change and entrenchment in Protestant congregations and the intentional work to replace dominating structures with liberating ones may provide keys to creating multicultural, antiracist, feminist, and sexually inclusive volitional communities more broadly. *Intersectionality in Intentional Communities* argues that making a significant advance toward inclusion requires change in the underlying social structures of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, class, and other marginalizing influences. In order to isolate this phenomenon, Zerai conducted fieldwork and archival research among an African American and four multiracial U.S. churches. Different from a university or other public institution in which members are legally required to support diversity and related values, Zerai believes that volitional communities may provide a best-case scenario for how, motivated by higher ideals, members may find ways to create inclusive communities. Zerai's research has a broad empirical base, encompassing five sites: a largely African American urban megachurch in the Midwest; a large Midwestern multiracial/multicultural church; a large urban multiracial/multicultural church in the eastern United States; a small, suburban Midwestern multiracial church; and an inclusive Midwestern college town church. In this book, Zerai further explores important connections between U.S. Protestant Christian congregations and political activism.

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