

Topics in cultural studies unit 3 group project

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Abstract India, Africa, China, and the Americas all experienced syncretism in different ways and at different levels of intensity. Some benefited economically and culturally from this exchange of cultures and goods. Some would have been much better off if left alone. We will discuss the different effects of syncretism on these countries and how they are still feeling these effects today. Syncretism: the Assimilation of Cultures By definition, syncretism is the attempted union of different principles or cultures.

Syncretism is a term that can be applied to English Colonists in North and South America when they attempted to merge with various native tribes. These colonists introduced many new things to the natives including religion, weapons, medicine, and various customs. The new technology was similar to magic to these groups of people who were accustomed to living among the trees and wildlife in the wilderness. Africans were able to gain from the many technological advances of the Europeans. A large portion of African culture derived from European Language, religion and customs (Sayre, 2010).

On the contrary, only a small portion of African culture was adapted to European culture. The Europeans could have learned much from the seemingly primitive African Nation. Unfortunately Europeans treated Africans like commodities to be bought and sold. In America, Europeans attempted syncretism with the Native Americans with moderate success. The majority of Native Americans were peaceful and open to change. It wasn't until the European Settlers made life altering changes like destroying herds of buffalo that syncretism became difficult and resulted in events like the Trail of Tears (The Trail of Tears , 2012).

Overall the Native American and African Cultures were open to change and made little resistance to syncretism. On the other hand the Chinese were like a boulder resisting the great force of a flowing river. Archeological Evidence suggests that China was inhabited nearly 2.4 million years ago (Larick, 2000). Needless to say that Chinese History is extraordinarily vast and unendingly resistant to syncretism. Europeans did manage to set up trade with the Chinese and create Silk Road. European Missionaries traveled to China on many occasions. Most Significantly the Jesuit Missionaries had a great impact on China.

Missionaries like Matteo Ricci moved to China and completely assimilated with their culture in order to introduce Jesuit beliefs to Buddhists and Taoists (Dunne, 1962). Although he was welcomed by the Chinese, he still found great resistance when trying to find converts. India was very similar in its reaction to syncretism because like China, India possesses a vast history. Archeological evidence suggests that Hominids walk the immense and beautiful lands of India over 500,000 years ago (Bongard-Levin, 1979). Once sea routes were found that allowed direct commerce between India and Europe, trading posts were formed.

Like the Chinese the Indians welcomed Europeans and gained economically from this agreement. Although the Europeans were welcomed economically, religiously the Indians would not be moved. Missionaries like Jordanus Catalani traveled to India to save the souls of as many non-believers as possible. As the first Bishop in India he acted as a liaison for the Pope and found many converts in India (Ricci Institute, 2012). Although many were

converted to Christianity most of India remained Hindu with no desire to convert. India never changed its culture as a whole.

Although influenced by Europeans, India kept its ancient culture and way of life. Both China and India welcomed European visitors but resisted change because of their long standing histories and cultures. All four cultures had their own way of life before settlers attempted to add their way of life into the recipe. Length of time as a group did play into the amount resistance each group demonstrated. Another factor that came into play was the amount of difficulty syncretism would cause each culture. Native American found little difficulty trading with English Settler until the demands of settlers became more and more unreasonable.

Eventually most of the Native Americans were enslaved, killed, or expelled from what had been their home for thousands of years. Africans were similarly taken advantage of when European Colonists enslaved and sometimes discarded many. Africa gained much from European Colonization but also found more and more difficulty with syncretism. India and China took full advantage of economic gains of syncretism but never fully gave up their way of life. Today Africa, America, India, and China all have varying levels of cultural change as a result of syncretism. All have a presence of Christianity as a religion till this day. 2. percent of India are Christian while 4 percent of China and 40 percent of Africa share this faith (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). In Africa, unfortunately one of the most lasting effects of syncretism is racism and the system of apartheid. India gained its independence from Britain in 1947 and still is an independent nation. India still has keeps many influences from British Government and relations

between the UK and India are friendly. Had syncretism not occurred in the Americas, I believe that Native Americans would still live the way that had been living thousands of years before European Colonists forced syncretism on them.

The South America the great cities of the Amazon would still be there today. Although technology would not be as advanced as it is now, life would be much more sustainable. These native cultures survived for many thousands of years because of their ability to live with nature not attempting to control nature. If cultural syncretism had taken root during early encounters in China and India unfortunately both of these countries might have suffered the same fate as Africa and the Americas.

There would almost certainly be Indian and Chinese slaves and these countries would have been forced to assimilate as much as the European Colonists felt was convenient. Many more people in China and India would be speaking English today and would be praying to Jesus Christ. Like a priceless masterpiece being thrown into mud, these cultures would have been tarnished or even destroyed. ? References: The Trail of Tears . (2012, November 25). Retrieved from Resource Bank: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h1567.html> Bongard-Levin, G. (1979). A History of India. Progress Publishers: Moscow. Central Intelligence Agency. (2012, November 20).

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