

# One (Multicultural) Nation Under God? Changing Uses and Meanings of the Term “Judeo-Christian” in the American Media

Douglas Hartmann

*Department of Sociology  
University of Minnesota*

Xuefeng Zhang

*Department of Sociology/Anthropology  
Westmont College*

William Wischstadt

*Department of Sociology  
University of Minnesota*

Although little more than a century old, the idea of a unified “Judeo-Christian” tradition has a noteworthy and tremendously varied history in American culture. In this article we use a content analysis of media coverage and commentary (sampled from the LexisNexis® database) to examine how and in what contexts the term has been deployed in public discourse in the last 2 decades. In the middle part of the past century, the Judeo-Christian concept was often controversial and advanced primarily for liberal social causes; in the contemporary era, meaning and usage shifted dramatically. By the 1980s, the United States was widely believed to have a core Judeo-Christian culture; the term appeared primarily as a reference point in the so-called culture wars and was most often appropriated for conservative purposes. This usage surged across the 1990s. The post-9/11 era brought another set of transformations, with overall references declining markedly and the term now associated mainly with discussions of Muslim and Islamic inclusion in America and renewed concerns about church–state separation. These results are discussed in the context of a society struggling with boundary issues in the face of increasing diversity and an evolving

commitment to ethno-religious pluralism, as well as with the rise of religiously oriented politics in the new millennium.

In 1957 the iconoclast public philosopher Arthur A. Cohen produced a volume in which he argued that the “Judeo-Christian tradition” championed in the middle part of the 20th century by liberal Jewish and Christian commentators was a “myth.” Cohen’s claim was not quite as radical as it sounded. Although he did believe there was less of a natural historical fraternity between the two religious traditions than proponents of an alliance, his main point was actually to call for a new common ground between Jews and Christians based on a *de facto* social and political coexistence as well as (and perhaps more important) a shared critique of Western modernity and a reinvigoration of prophetic radicalism in American culture (see also Cohen, 1969).

From our vantage point here in the early 21st century, the social side of Cohen’s (1957, 1969) vision for refashioning Judeo-Christian unity appears to have been right on target: Jews and Christians have found much common ground, anti-Semitism has declined significantly (T. W. Smith, 1993), and Jews are more fully and fairly incorporated in American society than ever before (cf. Lipset & Raab, 1995). In many respects the incorporation of Jews into the American mosaic can be seen as the culmination of the “triple melting pot” classically diagnosed by sociologist Will Herberg (1960) in the middle of the century. However, Cohen’s vision of the broader, more activist role of the confluence of Jewish and Christian traditions in American culture is far more open to question. Although the idea of a unified Judeo-Christian way of life (a term neither Cohen nor Herberg had much use for) may be powerful and pervasive in American life today, pundits and political leaders who use the term tend to be far more conventional and conservative than Cohen would have ever imagined. At the height of the so-called culture wars, for example, right-wing firebrands like Pat Buchanan often appealed to the term in criticizing those social changes he believed threatened the core strength and integrity of American culture:

Our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations and not dumped on some landfill called multiculturalism. (Pat Buchanan, as cited in Editorial [1991, December 13], *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. 3C)

Indeed, by the middle of the 1980s, the Judeo-Christian concept had become so culturally mainstream and entrenched that scholars such as Henry Louis Gates and Edward Said were offering up critiques of the Judeo-Christian confluence they now saw as the hegemonic core of American society (for a critical review, see Grossman, 1989). It was a far cry from the liberal-prophetic vision that Cohen had envisioned and appealed to in the middle of the century (see also Sobol, 1981).

How accurate is this striking if impressionistic account? To what extent has a Judeo-Christian tradition come to define the cultural core of American society? To

what extent does Cohen's (1957, 1969) liberal-progressive orientation still resonate within this tradition? What has driven these apparent changes? And what does all this suggest about the role religion, morality, and culture play in American society in the contemporary multicultural era (Glazer, 1997; Hartmann & Gerteis, 2005)?<sup>1</sup>

Although we cannot answer all of these questions directly, this article is an attempt to answer some and provide some basic context and preliminary perspective on the rest by exploring the evolution of the term *Judeo-Christian* in American culture in the years following the tumultuous 1960s and '70s—what it meant, and how it was used. We do this based on a content analysis of the usage and context of the term in major American print media.

The article proceeds as follows. Drawing on secondary and historical sources, we begin with a brief overview of the origin and evolution of the term *Judeo-Christian* in 20th-century American culture. Then we discuss the data and methods for our project, focusing especially on the sampling and coding procedures used to generate our results. Our findings are presented in two main sections—one that presents a general picture of the meanings and uses of the term in the last quarter of the century (as compared against previous eras), and the other that discusses trends in usage and meaning across the contemporary period. We conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of our major findings in the context of changing social demographics and broad cultural shifts in the contemporary United States.

### HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN CONCEPT

The idea of a unified Judeo-Christian tradition is a relatively recent historical innovation, little more than 100 years old. The *Oxford English Dictionary* claims that the term *Judeo-Christian* was first used in 1899; however, references can be found as early as the 1880s. For example, a scholar named J. Rendel Harris used the term in 1885 when reviewing three books of the period—Canon Spence's *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* (1885), G. Bonet-Maury's *La Doctrine des Douze Apôtres* (1884), and Roswell D. Hitchcock and Francis Brown's *Didaxh Twm Dwdeka Ahostolwn* (1885). References to a Judeo-Christian *source* (Baum, 1916, p. 588), Judeo-Christian *legends* (Haupt, 1919, p. 64), Judeo-Christian *communities* (Prado, 1928, p. 228), and even Judeo-Christian *Sibylline Oracles* (Albright, 1920, p. 288) can all be found without a great deal of difficulty in the first decades of the 20th century, at least in academic circles and among intellectual elites. Although a bit scattered and inconsistent, they focused primarily on theological and philosophical discussions of

<sup>1</sup>As Glazer (1997, p. 126) pointed out, the contemporary multicultural discourse has focused largely on race and ethnicity, despite the fact that post-1965 immigrants have fundamentally altered the American religious landscape (cf. Eck, 2001). This article can therefore be read, at least in part, as an attempt to expand the debates over multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism in America to include social differences stemming from religious sources.

the connection and the shared origin of the two traditions in antiquity across disciplines such as theology, philosophy, music, education, and sociology.

According to Mark Silk's (1984) seminal and still-leading treatment, the term *Judeo-Christian* began to take on even broader currency and coherence in the 1930s. Initially, scholars began using the term to refer to values or beliefs shared by the Jewish and Christian traditions with a common Western religious outlook, and they started to apply it to discussions on a variety of topics and issues. For example, the term is used in a review of a book on biblical economics in the *American Journal of Sociology* (L. Wallis, 1933), and in 1934 the journal *The Quarterly Review of Biology* ("Brief Notices," 1934) employed the phrase "Judeo-Christian ethics" in discussing the moral aspect of sexual behaviors introduced in Guyon's book *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*. But ultimately it was in the context of World War II that the idea of a Judeo-Christian alliance emerged as a united, singular entity. Indeed, expanding from Silk, Deborah Dash Moore (1998) claims that the term first came into the public lexicon as a symbolic vehicle for liberal Jewish and Christian leaders—Joseph Freeman (1936) and vice-presidential candidate Henry Wallace (1940) among them—looking to signal their contempt for (and provide an alternative to) pro-Fascist sympathizers and anti-Semites in the United States who had mobilized around the term *Christian*. Specifically, the term *Judeo-Christian* was intended to include Jews as one of the three "fighting faiths" of democracy (Protestantism and Catholicism were the other two) in combating Nazism, Fascism, and anti-Semitism. "As it came to be understood during the war years," Moore wrote, "this new creed expressed a distinctive and essentially pluralist American religious faith that underpinned American democracy" (p. 36).

As the "war against Hitlerism" gave way to the Cold War, the meaning of the category shifted to signify and embody the ideals of American democracy as they stood in contrast to Eastern block, Soviet-style Communism. In fact, many Americans used the term *Judeo-Christian* and a host of related terms, such as *Hebraic-Christian*, *Hebrew Christian*, *Judeao-Christianity*, and *Jewish-Christian* to describe the foundations of American democracy as a counterpoint to both "godless Communism" and totalitarianism more generally. In this context, the Judeo-Christian tradition came to be celebrated as one of the core characteristics of western civilization and foundations of American democracy (e.g., see Hayes, 1946; Marshall, 1950; Wolf, 1947). Perhaps the most famous symbolic legacy of this period is the successful effort of President Eisenhower and the Presbyterian Church to add the phrase "Under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954.<sup>2</sup>

The 1950s also brought the rise of new, more progressive meaning and implication for the term on the domestic front, mostly around issues of ethnicity and race

---

<sup>2</sup>Also connected with this movement was Eisenhower's famous remark to Soviet Marshal Zhukov about the necessary religious foundations of democracy: "In other words, our Government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply religious faith and I don't care what it is. With us, of course, it is the Judeo-Christian concept but it must be a religion that all men are created equal" (for a full treatment, see Henry, 1981).

relations. Moore (1998), for example, points out that one of the distinctive contributions of Judeo-Christian advocates to the American religious–democratic worldview was their embrace of Jewish difference as a constitutive component of American pluralism. In addition, according to Moore, Judaism was for the first time claimed as an identity with a cultural integrity and value of its own rather than a mere by-product of historical oppression. There were attacks on the idea of a Judeo-Christian culture in the 1950s from some liberal scholars—most notably Cohen (1957, 1969) and Herberg (1960)—but these were focused mostly on perceived theological incompatibilities of the two traditions. In terms of their social commitments and concerns, even these scholars were decisively on the side of expanding the boundaries of American citizenship and cultural belonging. A strong opposition to anti-Semitism obviously figured in here, but appeals to a unified Judeo-Christian tradition were increasingly offered to establish the moral grounds for integrating other previously marginalized or excluded religious as well as racial minorities (Gordis, 1944; Nelson, 1944), especially African Americans (Lee, 1950; Long, 1950, 1952). To give one important example, in an article entitled “Cultural and Racial Tension,” Long (1952) used the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution along with an appeal to the “Judeo-Christian ethic” as the vehicles to call attention to the problems of racial segregation and racial and cultural conflicts in the United States.

By the 1960s, African Americans activists and leaders frequently employed a more neutral, secular version of this term to validate and support their struggle for a more just social reality in America, when working against an old foe from within American society itself called discrimination. When attempting to understand the civil rights movement as a problem of communication, for example, D. H. Smith (1966) appealed to “the laws of the universe and the precepts of the Judeo-Christian Ethic” to make “a conscionable majority . . . understand the immorality of their social conduct” (p. 379). And nowhere is this usage more evident than when Martin Luther King, Jr. conceived the achievement of racial equality as the realization of the Judeo-Christian values (Marx, 1967, p. 71).

Powerful, prominent, and multivalent as it was in the early years of the 1960s, just how and how often the Judeo-Christian term was used in the later part of the decade and afterward is difficult to gauge. The secondary historical literature is relatively undeveloped from this point onward. There is some evidence that the term fell somewhat out of favor in American public discourse by the end of the decade. For example, a key word search of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* found that the term was referenced only 15 times from 1969 to 1979. The limitations of electronic archives make it impossible to conduct systematic comparisons for the preceding decades, but all indications are that this was a marked change from previous periods. This would not be surprising. In a decade marked by sweeping social changes and profound cultural discontent, there was little room for a vision of America that appealed to a common cultural core of any sort, much less one based on a return to religious authority. The late 1960s were the beginning of the end of the dominance of assimilationist thought in American public life and schol-

arly culture (cf. Kazal, 1995). Thus, as Jewish–Christian relations improved in the latter half of the decade, public discourse about a unifying Judeo-Christian culture may well have given way to an insurgent secular–ethnic pluralism and emergent identity politics. Whether or not this account is accurate (and whatever social factors might account for these changes), it is clear that by the late 1970s the idea of some kind of Judeo-Christian synthesis was once again resonant.

In 1979, to take one high-profile case, President Jimmy Carter appealed to the idea of a Judeo-Christian tradition in trying to persuade Jews and African Americans to put aside traditional enmity:

The president invoked the Scriptures of Isaiah, the teachings of John and Charles Wesley, the writings of Arnold Toynbee, and the “ethics of the Judeo-Christian tradition.” But mostly, his speech was a plea for unity in America, especially between blacks and Jews. “The motto of our country is ‘E Pluribus Unum’—‘Out of Many, One’” Carter said. He added: “Of course, we are proud of our diversity . . . but we must not permit diversity to degenerate into division. In a time of trial we must not permit the legitimate contest of competing views to become a war of group against group, special interest against special interest, and finally each against all others.” (Schram [1979, August 30], *The Washington Post*, p. A1)

In 1984, Reverend Jesse Jackson used the term to promote better Jewish–African American relations:

We are co-partners in a long and rich religious history—the Judeo-Christian traditions. Many blacks and Jews have a shared passion for social justice at home and peace abroad. We must seek a revival of the spirit, inspired by a new vision and new possibilities. We must return to higher ground. We are bound by Moses and Jesus, but also connected with Islam and Mohammed. ([1984, July 18], *The Washington Post*, p. A10)

Carter’s and Jackson’s usage, of course, was in keeping with the traditional liberal vision of reconciling minority groups, social movements, and religious affiliations. Similarly, the Judeo-Christian label was often still employed in an international context as a description of themes underlying American and Western thought. For example, an article from the *New York Times* stated:

The Morgan is displaying two plates from “America, a Prophecy” (1793), an illustrated poem that distills Blake’s spirit of utopian agitation. For him the American and French Revolutions were linchpin upheavals of the kind promised by Judeo-Christian Apocalyptic tradition. In them liberty and tyranny met in pitched battle, after which, he trusted, universal harmony would reign. (Cotter [1999, December 31], *The New York Times*, p. E41)

But the term was also beginning to be mobilized in other, newer ways. In that same year of 1979, for example, a civil rights activist attempted to use the term to urge

Blacks and organized labor to unite *against* the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>3</sup> Even more distinctively, in the following 1977 quote the term appears to justify a seemingly conservative position on the death penalty held by a candidate running for political office:

One candidate, Koch, doesn't have to be asked his opinion. He is happy to tell all listeners that he supports the death penalty. Execution is a deterrent and [is] in keeping with the Judeo-Christian heritage, Koch explains, and "society has the right to show its sense of outrage." (Lescaze [1977, September 4], *The Washington Post*, p. A1)

These more conservative and overtly political uses seem to grow as the norm for the period and beyond. Increasingly, religious conservatives began to use the term *Judeo-Christian* in the 1980s to defend or promote their moral claims through the means of engaging in politics. To provide just one more example, the Religious Roundtable led by James Robinson sponsored the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas, Texas, where Ronald Reagan sealed his identification with the religious conservative by "calling attention to the challenge facing 'traditional Judeo-Christian values.'" In addition, Reagan claimed that if he were shipwrecked and could choose only one book to read for the rest of his life, he would choose the Bible, adding that "all the complex questions facing us at home and abroad have their answer in that single book" (as cited in Martin, 1996, pp. 217–218). By the middle of the 1980s, as summarized previously, the term appears to have become entrenched as a referent for the mainstream, cultural core of American society and was most likely (or even more so) to be utilized by cultural and political conservatives far apart from those who first popularized the term in the middle of the 20th century.

## DATA AND METHOD

Provocative as the preceding historical sketch may be, it is—at least for the most recent and arguably consequential decades—essentially impressionistic and undeveloped. To validate, quantify, and extend this account, we therefore decided to undertake a basic content analysis of a representative sample of newspaper articles published in the United States from 1981 to 2003.

To generate a data set on which to base this analysis, we used the LexisNexis® search engine to locate general newspaper articles based in the United States that used the term *Judeo-Christian*. The LexisNexis database is far from a perfect source.

<sup>3</sup>This reference came from the executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Benjamin Hooks. The text of the article reads as follows: "'Even though they may come after blacks in the morning, remember, they will be after labor in the afternoon,' Hooks told the federation's 10th biennial convention, meeting here. 'We should work to eliminate the Nazi party and the Ku Klux Klan, so that they will not raise their ugly heads and divert the cause of Jesus Christ and change the meaning of the Judeo-Christian heritage.' Hooks ... told the delegates, 'Those who put on night sheets and pillowcases and ride down streets with ... shotguns are trying to destroy the spirit and progress of America'" (Brown [1979, November 17], *The Washington Post*, p. D8).



Part of the problem is that the database is produced by a commercial, for-profit company that has declined to specify its exact size or sampling parameters. In addition, LexisNexis is a very recent and continually evolving innovation in archival technology. The sheer volume of articles available in any given year on any given topic is significantly larger for the last 10 to 15 years as compared with those before it. It is this second issue that poses the biggest challenge for research on citation trends across time periods (and to the extent that we produce such findings we interpret them with appropriate caution). But even if its exact parameters are not clear, LexisNexis offers broad and unparalleled coverage of American print media across the mainstream social and political spectrum. This feature, in combination with its ease of access, makes it optimal for a study (like this one) designed to quantify basic meaning structures and contexts of usage for a specific cultural concept or term within a given time period. In short, we believe that the LexisNexis database is more than accurate and representative enough for the purpose of producing an empirically quantified descriptive portrait of the meanings and uses of the term *Judeo-Christian* in the contemporary era.

We conducted a “Guided News Search” of all articles that used the term anywhere in the full text under the category of “General News,” limiting the query to “Major Papers” (as defined by LexisNexis) from 1981 to June 2003. After eliminating the newspapers based outside the United States, we found 3,940 articles that fit our search criteria. To streamline the database and make it more amenable to identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning and usage, we systematically sampled 10% of newspaper articles across the period.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in a final representative sample of 390 articles, which included 242 news stories (62.1%), 118 editorials (30.3%), and 30 commentaries or essays (7.7%). This composition mirrors that of the overall database and thus indicates that our sample represents the total population of articles very well. (We also collected all 15 articles using the term *Judeo-Christian* that appeared in LexisNexis between the years 1969 and 1980 and used them as the basis of the speculative historical overview presented in the previous section.)

We developed our coding scheme in several phases. We began with a very basic codebook intended to capture traditional content related to anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, and church–state separation on one hand and the more con-

---

<sup>4</sup>To draw a sample, we constructed a new index of newspaper articles based in the United States by year of publication. Each article was assigned an index number starting from 1 in each year according to the order they appeared in LexisNexis’s results. Thus, each newspaper article based in the United States had two index numbers in a given year: The original one from LexisNexis was used to locate an article, and the new index number was used to draw the sample. The exact number of articles sampled for each year was determined by taking the total number of newly indexed articles, dividing by 10, and rounding the result to the nearest whole number—rounding down when the last digit of the total was 0, 1, 2, 3, or 4, and rounding up when the last digit of the total was 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9. Once the number of sampled articles per year was determined, individual articles were selected by including only those items with an assigned index number with the last digit of 1, starting with the number 001 and proceeding with the numbers 011, 021, 031, and so on, until the last article in the given year was selected.



TABLE 1  
Codebook

I. Demographic information	
Year of publication	1969–2003
Type of articles	Editorials/commentaries/news articles
II. Related issues and context	
Politics	Yes/no
American culture	Yes/no
Public morality	Yes/no
Religion	Yes/no
Diversity	Yes/no
Evangelicals	Yes/no
Muslims	Yes/no
Anti-Semitism	Yes/no
Church–state separation	Yes/no
III. Evaluative dimension	
Attitude toward the term <i>Judeo-Christian</i>	Positive/negative/neutral/unclear
Belief in cultural core	Yes/no/unclear
Political orientation	Conservative/liberal/unclear
Social boundaries	Expansive/restrictive/unclear
Evaluation of diversity	Positive/negative/neutral/unclear
IV. Culture subtopics	
Abortion	Yes/no
Education	Yes/no
Sexuality	Yes/no
Family	Yes/no
Multiculturalism	Yes/no

temporary emphasis on culture and morality we deduced from our preliminary observations on the other. An extensive pilot study indicated a very strong shift away from the more traditional content of the middle of the previous century to more contemporary concerns of the cultural wars. Thus, we developed a more elaborate coding scheme for the major cultural issues that appeared in the newspaper articles and commentaries beginning in the 1980s. Our goal was thus twofold: first to document the general transformation in meaning and use the term *Judeo-Christian* has undergone in the 20th century, and second to explore the variations and complexities in meaning and use that have emerged over the past two decades.

Our final codebook, summarized in Table 1, had four sections. The first section dealt with the basic demographic information of an article and included the year of publication as well as the type of article (editorial, commentary, and news article as referenced previously). The second section focused on the topics of articles within which each reference appeared, what we thought of as the meaning context. The point here was to assess the variations of the broader contextual meaning and related topic areas of *Judeo-Christian* references. Informed by our pilot studies, we coded nine areas: politics, American culture, public morality, religion, diversity, evangelicals, Muslims, anti-Semitism, and church–state separation. The following quote provides an example of an article we coded as separation between church and state:

I have now come to believe that this is only one step to eliminate religion from our nation under the guise of separation of church and state. I believe some people (intentionally or otherwise) oppose those two religions because they are in conflict with what those people want for our nation. Although this nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, they prefer to reject those values and substitute their own. (Bourdreaux [1999, September 19], *The Washington Post* [Southern Maryland Extra], p. M02)

One of the age-old problems with content analysis techniques is that they allow researchers to say a lot about labels and contexts but very little about the actual meaning and social function of key terms or ideas. In other words, this technique provides a lot of information about form but little about content and implication. In an attempt to address this problem, we adopted a third batch of codes designed to capture social and political views and values related to the issues and debates surrounding Judeo-Christian references. Derived both from our pilot study as well as our knowledge of the historical literature sketched previously and our reading of the contemporary cultural wars debates (cf. Hunter, 1992; for subsequent analyses, see Bolce & De Maio, 1999; Davis & Robinson, 1996; McConkey, 2001; Miller & Hoffmann, 1999), these included the belief that the United States has a common cultural core, general political orientation, attitudes about the social boundaries of U.S. citizenship and belonging, evaluation of diversity in America, and, of course, attitudes toward the term *Judeo-Christian*.

Although they ultimately reveal a great deal about how the term *Judeo-Christian* actually operates in the mass media and public discourse, these codes required somewhat subjective evaluations and were thus among the most challenging analytic procedures employed in this study. For example, the “belief in a common cultural core” code required us to determine whether an article or the user of the term in an article (if *Judeo-Christian* appeared in a quote within the text) felt that the term described a cultural core that existed in the United States. An article that exhibited such a belief was coded *yes* (cultural core exists). An article in which the author or speaker denied the existence of a common cultural core (often seeing the United States as a more proceduralist, rule-of-law society) was designated a *no* (no core). An *unclear* indicated that it was not possible to determine an article’s position one way or the other on the matter. Similarly, we evaluated whether an author (or, again, a speaker quoted in an article) wanted to open up boundaries for American citizenship and cultural belonging (*expansive*) or believed that U.S. social boundaries needed to be maintained or more strongly enforced (*restrictive*). This expansive–restrictive code allowed us to assess the extent to which traditional liberal applications of the term *Judeo-Christian* with respect to the inclusion of historically marginalized social groups was still present. The following quote is an example of an article coded *yes* on the belief in cultural core dimension and *expansive* on the social boundaries scale (for its use as a justification for trying to eliminate racial boundaries):

In this Judeo-Christian nation, there is a universal understanding among most religious people about a God that loves everyone, no matter what his or her race. It is an

underlying truth in our laws. Although the belief in equality falters from time to time in what we actually say and do in regard to race, there is no doubt that both heritage and history have come to assert that race should not be a premise upon which to accept or deny another's rights. (Roe [1997, July 20], *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* [Crossroads], p. 1)

Each of the other three evaluative dimensions were coded in similar fashion—attitudes toward Judeo-Christian (*positive, negative, neutral, and unclear*), political orientation (*conservative, liberal, unclear*), and evaluation of diversity (*positive, negative, neutral, unclear*). Thus, each article was coded for each of the five evaluative dimensions. A fourth and final set of dichotomous codes (*yes/no*) identifying specific substantive subtopics that appeared under frame of various culture wars headings was also entered. These included abortion, education, family, multiculturalism, and sexuality. The following is an example of the use of the term *Judeo-Christian* to support a conservative position on sexuality:

The Society for Law, Life & Religion comprises traditional Christians who hold the traditional Judeo-Christian view that homosexual behavior is sinful and unhealthy. They also maintain the traditional Judeo-Christian distinction—recently underscored in a pastoral letter from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops—between having a homosexual orientation, which is usually not freely chosen and therefore not sinful, and engaging in homosexual activity, which is a matter of free will. Young people who feel the orientation are often deeply conflicted about engaging in the activity; it was to them that the Society for Law, Life & Religion directed its message. (Jacoby [1997, October 23], *Boston Globe*, p. A25)

The actual coding was carried out solely by the third author with initial input and ongoing consultation from the first and second authors. This division of labor allowed us to sidestep the usual problems of intercoder reliability without sacrificing checks on quality control. (Although we did not compile specific statistics, approximately one fourth of the articles were independently coded by at least two analysts, and once the pilot study was completed only an insignificant handful of discrepancies emerged.) Data input was also handled by the third author; analysis was undertaken collectively.

The analysis consists primarily of presenting the demographic distribution of articles and references for each of the coded categories just described, with some basic cross-tabulations for key issues and concerns. These are interpreted on their own terms and in comparison to historical patterns of meaning and usage of the Judeo-Christian term. We also generate some basic trend analyses, but these are offered and interpreted carefully in view of the sampling issues outlined previously. Finally, in several instances we also use selected segments of sampled articles to illustrate and elaborate key interpretative points that emerge from the quantitative analysis. Taken together, we believe these descriptive statistics and analyses provide an accurate if very basic representation of the changing meanings and uses of the term *Judeo-Christian* in the last two decades.

## MAIN FINDINGS

Our initial set of analyses has to do with general usage of the term in the last two decades of the 20th century. Basically, we find that references to the term *Judeo-Christian*—which appear to have fallen out of favor in the public culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s—experienced a renaissance in the print media beginning in the 1980s and that this renaissance in usage exploded into the 1990s before falling off again sometime around the turn of the millennium. Figure 1 depicts the developments clearly, although it must be interpreted with some care due to the limitations of the LexisNexis database discussed in the previous section.

Basically, to reiterate, because of the rather sharp increase in the number of total articles in the database in the 1980s compared with the 1990s and beyond, we are not convinced that the overall upward trend that appears to be revealed across the 23-year period is necessarily accurate. It is highly possible that the 1980s simply had fewer articles in the data set than the 1990s, and that this, rather than an increase in the number of articles with *Judeo-Christian* references, is reflected.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, because it appears that the sampling frame is fairly consistent within the decadal subperiods of the 1980s and 1990s, we feel fairly confident that the slight upward trend depicted in the 1980s is valid and would say the same for the general sharp increase and distinctive yearly variations that appear across the 1990s.

### The Overarching Structure of Contemporary *Judeo-Christian* References

Our next and more important task was to assess the context and content of this expanded and expanding usage. Figure 2 shows the main topics of newspaper articles that referred to the term *Judeo-Christian*. We see that from the 1980s through 2003, the term has come to be used most frequently in connection with many of the so-called culture wars issues and themes. American culture was the most common theme of articles with *Judeo-Christian* references, encompassing some 64.1% of the articles in our sample. Religion and public morality and values were the next most prominent subject areas, appearing in 52.8 and 51.8% of the respective articles in the sample. (Categories were not mutually exclusive.) Even the somewhat more removed categories of politics (47.9%) and diversity (40.8%) were also fairly regularly referenced. The prominence of these topic matters stands in sharp contrast to what we would have expected of the term if the usage patterns of previous decades had held sway. On this score, the *Judeo-Christian* label was only rarely associated with issues that had previously dominated discussion, such as anti-Semitism (only 2.1% of the articles with *Judeo-Christian* references addressed this theme) and the separation between church and state (8.5%). It was used to designate specific religious

<sup>5</sup>One strategy that might have been able to overcome this shortcoming would have been to look at the percentage of articles for the entire LexisNexis database that make *Judeo-Christian* references (as opposed to simple article counts). However, we do not have any way to determine the size of the overall database, which would have been required to make a more proportional argument.

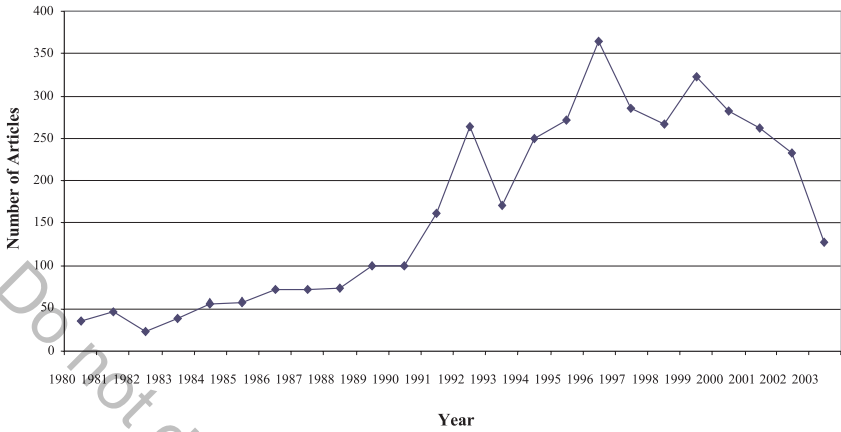


FIGURE 1 References to the term *Judeo-Christian* by year, 1981–2003. Data source: U.S. newspaper articles with *Judeo-Christian* references from the LexisNexis database, 1981–2003.

groups (Evangelicals, 6.7%; Muslims, 9.2%) infrequently as well. So although it may be difficult to speak with certainty about the relative proliferation of the *Judeo-Christian* label, it is clearly the case that the term appeared in much different contexts at the end of the century than when it initially entered the public lexicon.

But what was the meaning and function of the term in these contexts? As discussed previously, such questions are difficult to answer with conventional content analysis techniques, suited as they are to capturing contexts and labels rather than political and cultural functions. Nevertheless, to try to get a handle on usage, we developed a series of codes that allowed us to capture social and political views and values with respect to normative evaluations that frequently appeared in the context of *Judeo-Christian* references. Although somewhat crude, the results depicted in Table 2 give some indication of the actual meaning and function of the term, how it actually operated in the mass media and in public discourse.

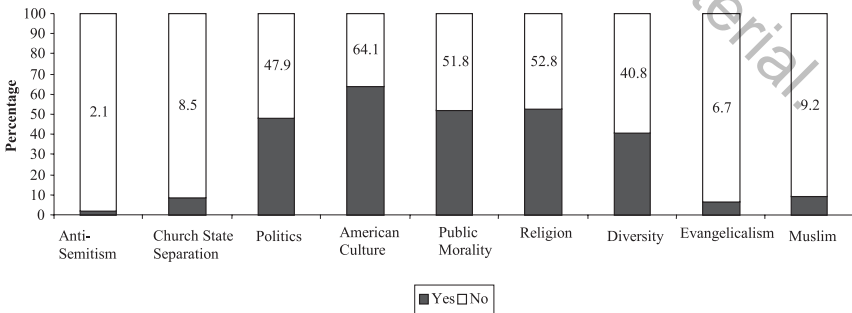


FIGURE 2 Main topics of articles with *Judeo-Christian* references. Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with *Judeo-Christian* references ( $N = 390$ ). Categories are not mutually exclusive.

TABLE 2  
Evaluative Items Relating to Judeo-Christian References

Attitude toward the term <i>Judeo-Christian</i>	
Positive	66.7
Neutral	24.1
Negative	6.7
Unclear	2.6
Belief in cultural core	
Yes	40.5
No	5.4
Unclear	54.1
Political orientation	
Conservative	32.1
Liberal	20.0
Unclear	47.9
Attitude about social boundaries	
Expansive	21.1
Restrictive	33.8
Unclear	45.1
Evaluation of diversity	
Positive	22.1
Negative	12.8
Unclear	65.1

*Note.* Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references ( $N = 390$ ). Categories are not mutually exclusive.

First (and not surprising), we see that two thirds of the times that the term *Judeo-Christian* is used by an author or person quoted in an article, there was a decidedly positive evaluation of the term; whatever it was taken to represent or describe, the label *Judeo-Christian* was, in other words, seen as a good thing, something positive and socially beneficial. The converse also holds: The term was portrayed in a negative, critical light only 6.7% of the time. In the remaining references (about one fourth of the sample), the term *Judeo-Christian* is simply employed as a nonevaluative, neutral descriptive. This would be typical for a sample of American news stories given professional conventions of objectivity and value-neutrality but also may reflect the extent to which the term has come to represent the mainstream cultural core of the United States. The results for our second coded item—belief in a cultural core—extends this point. Articles with *Judeo-Christian* references were also very likely (40.5% of the time) to believe that the United States was not just a rules-oriented, proceduralist social body but had a cultural core that was crucial to its integrity and viability. Although this finding is far from definitive (slightly over half of the articles in our sample [54.1%] could not be coded positively or negatively on this item), the fact that only 5.4% of articles rejected the notion of a core culture is itself revealing.

In terms of political orientation, it was impossible to determine the party (or cultural) leanings of authors or speakers for about half of the articles referencing the

Judeo-Christian term (47.9%). Again, this likely stems from the media conventions in the news stories that dominate our sample. Even so, in those cases in which a political orientation could be associated with the term (slightly over half of our sample), that orientation tended to be conservative: 32% of the references were associated with conservative ideals and positions, as compared with 20% that were clearly liberal.

The final evaluative dimensions we examined involved attitudes about social boundaries in America and general attitudes about diversity. Articles with Judeo-Christian references appear somewhat more optimistic about the diversity of American society than critical of it: 22.1% saw diversity in a positive light, whereas only 12.8% believed it to be negative or problematic. Although this might seem to indicate somewhat more liberal leanings for users of the Judeo-Christian term than other indicators in this set, it is important to point out that the degree of optimism about diversity revealed here pales in comparison to other recent studies and analyses that show support for diversity to be more of a consensus majority position.<sup>6</sup> (We were unable to determine an evaluation on this indicator for almost two thirds of the sample.) Furthermore, attitudes about social boundaries were decidedly on the conservative side. Articles that exhibited clear normative ideas about social boundaries in our sample (just over half the sample) were more likely to see the need for more exclusive, restrictive boundaries than they were willing to expand the standards for citizenship and social inclusion (33.8% vs. 21.1%). These findings stand in marked contrast to the 1960s' civil-rights-era usage where the term tended to be employed by political liberals and social activists working to break down prejudices and boundaries for historically marginalized and excluded social groups such as African Americans and Jews in favor of wider, more expansive conceptions of American citizenship.

Taken together, the results of these evaluative items provide compelling evidence that from the 1980s onward the term *Judeo-Christian* was used in far more conventional, culturally conservative ways than when it first entered the public lexicon in the middle of the century. The point here is not just that the term tended to be deployed more often by conservative commentators or associated with conservative positions on key social issues; rather (or, perhaps, in addition), it is that the idea of a Judeo-Christian tradition assumed the role of designating the mainstream cultural core of the nation for authors and commentators of all moral and political persuasions. This usage is exemplified in a 1991 editorial that appeared in the *Washington Post*:

In our country, "Judeo-Christian values" is shorthand for a complex idea: the common culture of the American majority. The values are called Judeo-Christian

---

<sup>6</sup>In a recent national survey, for example, Gerteis, Hartmann, and Edgell (2005) found that over half of Americans see diversity as an unqualified social good; the other half tends to view diversity as more of a mixed bag. Most significantly, almost no one in the study was willing to endorse the proposition that diversity is wholly problematic. This is reminiscent of Glazer's (1997) famous claim that "we are all multiculturalists now."



because they derive from the complementary ideas of free will, the moral accountability of the individual rather than the group, the spiritual imperative of imperfect man's struggle to do what is right and the existence of true moral law in the teachings of Christ and the Jewish prophets. Along with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, they are the political and cultural heritage of the Founding Fathers. The declaration and the Constitution define the source and the limits of state power. But they do not tell us how a moral life within this society should be led. While they have provided a durable structure for America's success, only Judeo-Christian values, freely held by the majority, explain its continuing realization. These values are not identical with the Christian religion, although they manifest its universal insights. Americans, as the Founding Fathers hoped, uphold the Constitution, but live according to "Judeo-Christian values." (Hethmon, [1991, December 30], *The Washington Post*, p. A12)

The intimate association of the term with the seemingly established cultural core of the nation and the mostly positive attitude toward the term suggest that the relatively newfound cultural conservatism of Judeo-Christian references stems not only from overt political positions and claims but also from functioning to depict and often defend that mainstream cultural core and social status quo.

To examine these inferences and interpretations further, we ran a series of cross-tabulations looking at how the cultural attitudes about the term *Judeo-Christian* mapped onto each of the other evaluative dimensions available in our coding scheme. These results, presented in Table 3, confirm our interpretations about the essentially conservative or reproductive social function of the term *Judeo-Christian* in contemporary media culture.

Perhaps the clearest and most basic result comes in Table 3b, which shows political conservatives were most likely to have a positive attitude toward the term *Judeo-Christian*. Liberals were far more likely to be critical of the term (53.8%), but there were far fewer negative references overall, and 41.9% of liberals either felt positively about the term or at least viewed it neutrally. More to the point of the claim that the term is intimately tied with the social status quo are the results in Tables 3a and 3d. Those who affirm the existence of the cultural core in America are most likely to have a positive attitude toward the term (50.8% of those who have positive attitudes about the Judeo-Christian category also believe in the existence of a core U.S. culture), whereas those who put a positive valuation on diversity—typically the more liberal, change-oriented position—are most likely to hold a negative attitude toward the Judeo-Christian label (38.5% as compared with 18.5% for those who are supportive of the term). These results would appear to reinforce the claim that usage of the term *Judeo-Christian* tends to be associated with more conservative social positions and values. However, Table 3c, which shows the relationship between usage of the term and attitudes toward social boundaries, mitigates this somewhat by suggesting that those who are most negative about the term exhibit restrictive or exclusive attitudes about social boundaries as well.

Together, all of these findings make clear not only that the term *Judeo-Christian* was prominent in American public culture in the last 25 years or so but that its mean-

TABLE 3  
Cross-Tabulations of Attitudes Toward Judeo-Christian and Relative  
Evaluative Dimensions

	<i>Attitudes Toward Judeo-Christian</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Unclear</i>	
a. Existence of cultural core <sup>a</sup>					
Exists	50.8	13.8	30.8	50.0	40.5
Does not exist	0.8	14.9	15.4	10.0	5.4
Unclear	48.5	71.3	53.8	40.0	54.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
b. Political orientation <sup>a</sup>					
Conservative	45.8	5.3	0.0	10.0	32.1
Liberal	14.3	27.6	53.8	10.0	20.0
Unclear	40.0	67.0	46.2	80.0	47.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
c. Social boundaries <sup>b</sup>					
Expansive	23.5	16.0	11.5	30.0	21.0
Restrictive	33.5	29.8	57.7	20.0	33.8
Unclear	43.1	54.3	30.8	50.0	45.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
d. Evaluation of diversity <sup>c</sup>					
Good	18.5	29.8	38.5	0.0	22.1
Neutral	4.6	8.5	3.8	10.0	5.6
Bad	17.3	3.2	3.8	10.0	12.8
Unclear	59.6	58.5	53.8	80.0	59.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Note.* Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references ( $N = 390$ ). Categories are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>a</sup> $n = 390$ . Significant at the .001 level. <sup>b</sup> $n = 390$ . Significant at the .05 level. <sup>c</sup> $n = 390$ . Significant at the .01 level.

ing and usage shifted dramatically from that of the previous decades of the century.<sup>7</sup> Where it previously had fairly liberal connotations of expanding social boundaries to include minority groups and affirm church–state separation, the Judeo-Christian descriptive now appears to be related to the more conservative, deployed in the context of culture-wars-type debates about morality and cultural preservation as well as being associated with more conservative social positions and attitudes. We now turn to an examination of how the meanings and usages of the term have shifted across the

<sup>7</sup>In view of these implied historical comparisons, we also undertook a parallel analysis of the 15 *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles from the 1970s that used the Judeo-Christian term. For this admittedly limited sample, the vast majority (85%) treated the term as a positive description, and the term was more likely to be used in connection with an expansive sense of social boundaries (58%). The term was used in connection with support for liberal political positions in 42% of the cases, and slightly more than half of the articles representing this decade confirmed the existence of the cultural core. (No article published in the period denied the existence of a cultural core.)

last quarter century, extending our understanding of the specific culture wars issues and topics that implicated the Judeo-Christian label.

### Changing Uses and Meanings, 1981–2003

Having sketched the general, overarching structure of meanings and uses of the term *Judeo-Christian* for the last two decades taken as a whole, we also took a look at how some of these patterns may have shifted across the period. Graphic representations of these analyses are presented in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 shows the main areas utilized previously as they appeared in 5-year increments, and Figure 4 shows a new set of substantive cultural subtopics as they appeared within the same time frame. Although the apparent overall downward trends may be somewhat misleading (going back to the sampling frame issues), we do believe that these figures provide a reliable indication of the relative importance of topics areas in relation to each other as they change across time.

At least three main patterns appear in Figure 3. First and perhaps most obvious is the predominance of the culture wars issues over social issues in the first years of the period, the 1980s. Culture, politics, religion, and morality each appear in at least 65% of the articles in the first years of the decade, whereas anti-Semitism and

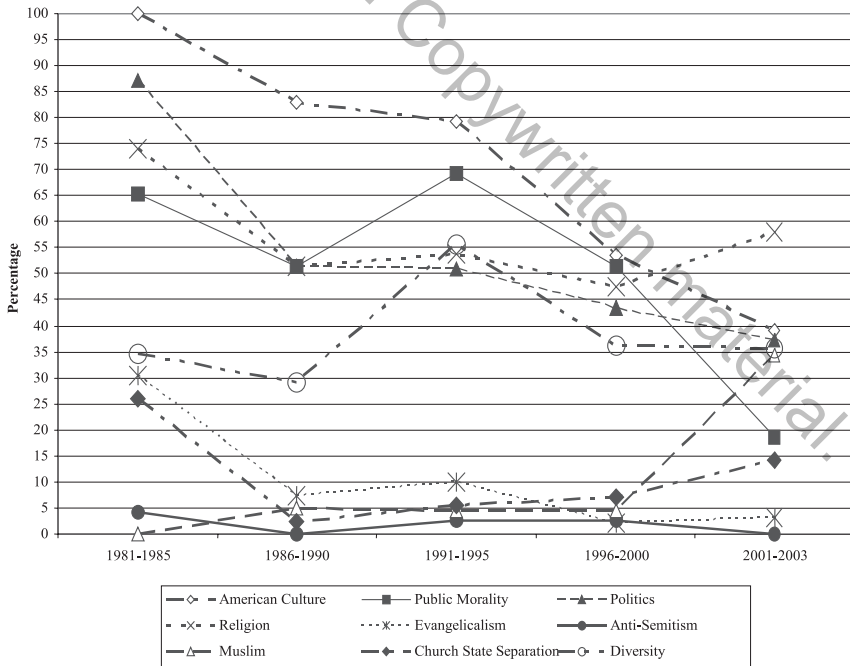


FIGURE 3 Main topics: Trends over time, 1981–2003. Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references (N = 390). Categories are not mutually exclusive.

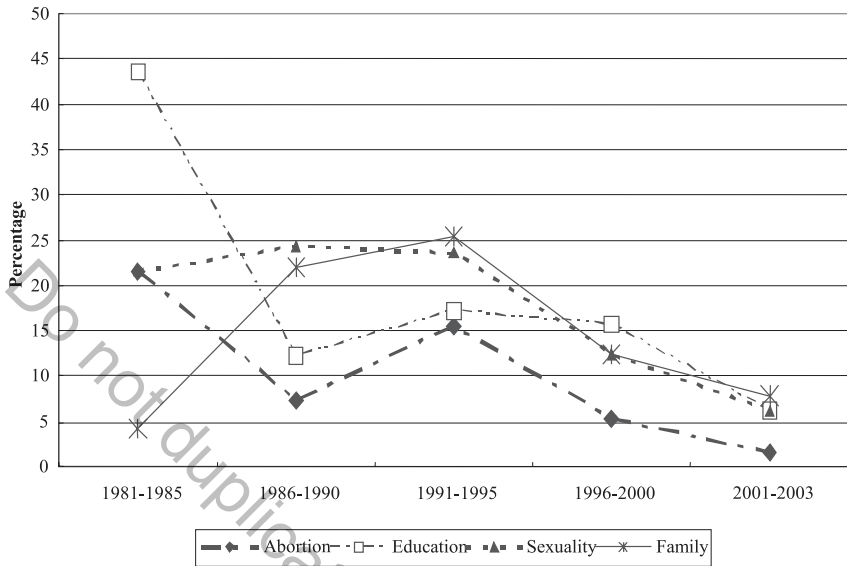


FIGURE 4 Cultural subtopics: Trends over time, 1981–2003. Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references ( $N = 390$ ). Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Muslim references are almost nonexistent. Evangelicalism and church–state separation start off fairly high (each are referenced in about one fourth of the articles) but drop off quickly after that. This finding obviously reproduces and reflects our earlier overall analysis. To get a sense of whether there were some subtler forces underlying this pattern, we coded the dataset for specific cultural subtopics otherwise grouped together under these general headings. These included abortion, education, sexuality, and family.

Figure 4 suggests that in the earliest years of this period, the prominence of cultural topics was composed largely of substantive issues involving education (nearly half of the articles exhibit an educational subtheme). Abortion and sexuality are also important but cited only about half as many times as education. Family issues were of almost no consequence at the start of the 1980s but came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, as family context became more important, the abortion and sexuality contexts dropped precipitously, suggesting some of the ebbs and flows of the culture wars debates of the last 20 years. It is interesting, in fact, that none of these subtopics are indexed in more than 10% of the articles with Judeo-Christian references by the end of the decade.

The diversity topic stands out somewhat from the other trends and is the second pattern we think worthy of being highlighted in Figure 3. As cultural issues declined in salience from the late 1980s into the early 1990s, the topic area of diversity rose rather dramatically in importance. Indeed, the number of references to diversity increased from about 30% to over 55% in this 5-year span. In absolute

terms, the diversity context dropped off a bit in the final two periods, but given the declines in other subject areas (public morality perhaps most notably, which was actually higher than diversity until the final period), diversity emerged as one of the most familiar contexts within which the Judeo-Christian term appeared in the first years of the new millennium. This may signal a return to the more social focus of Judeo-Christian references and brings us to our third point.

The third and final trend that stands out is the rather sharp rise in three subject areas in the 2001–2003 period: religion, church–state separation, and, most of all, Muslim. Given that Judeo-Christian references have been increasingly associated with issues of cultural diversity (a more social-boundaries-oriented subject matter), this is probably not entirely surprising. It likely also reflects changes in American media culture and public discourse in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as the rise of the influence of the religious right in national political discourse and practice. In terms of the increasing importance of the right-wing religious agenda in national politics and public discourse, the only question for us is why the increase of religion is not connected with the rise of the cultural subtopics of sexuality or family politics that are the subject matter of Figure 4. Here, our speculation is that these data may reflect a broader shift in the public–political discourse on and about American civil society, away from the terminology of a core Judeo-Christian tradition and toward a more abstract (and possibly less constraining) rhetoric of cultural norms and “values.” Here the subtopics of family, sexuality, and even abortion, which appear to track together in Figure 4, may also be bound up with that dynamic. The appearance of Muslim and church–state topic matters—which in many ways can be seen as a return to the more traditional uses and meanings of the term *Judeo-Christian*—bears a bit more detailed treatment.

### Post-9/11 Developments Related to Muslim Topics

One of the significant changes emerged in the use of the term *Judeo-Christian* during the post-9/11 period is that the use of the term came to be associated with social boundaries once again. Church–state separation issues were one of those, and issues related to Muslim Americans were the other, not to mention the overall persistence of the salience of the diversity context. Our guess is that these developments were not unrelated.

References to Islam or Muslim in concert with the Judeo-Christian term were most significant and jumped about 35% in the aftermath of September 11th. These references appeared almost twice as often in the handful of years in the post-9/11 period than in all of the previous years combined. Indeed, in the early 1980s, when the most referenced social group in the context of Judeo-Christian references was fundamentalists, there were no mentions of Islam or Muslim whatsoever. It is hardly surprising that the discussion of issues relating to Muslim or Islam provides an important context for references to the term *Judeo-Christian* in the wake of

September 11th. Tables 4 and 5 give some sense of the specific reasons that may deepen our understanding of why this was the case.

Table 4 shows the main topic area of articles in which Judeo-Christian references appeared with Islam or Muslim ones. It provides a breakdown of how these contexts shifted depending on the presence or absence of Islam or Muslim references.

The presence of an Islamic or Muslim reference did not make any difference to the appearance of church–state separation issues despite the fact that this topic area experienced somewhat of a renaissance in the period. Morality, culture, and evangelicalism were not significantly affected here either. What stood out were issues of diversity, politics, and religion. When Muslim or Islamic references appeared, more than half of the articles dealt with the issue of diversity; in comparison, only about one fourth of the articles expressed the same concern without referring to Muslim or Islam. Similarly about 60% of the articles had discussed the issue of politics with the reference of Islam or Muslim, whereas only about 25% of the articles did so without the reference. Religion is obviously another big category

TABLE 4  
Percentage of Core Issues Associated With Muslim After 9/11

Issues	Islam or Muslim		Total <sup>c</sup>
	Yes <sup>a</sup>	No <sup>b</sup>	
Church–state separation			
Yes	13.6	14.3	14.1
No	85.4	85.7	85.9
Diversity*			
Yes	54.5	26.2	35.9
No	45.5	73.8	64.1
Politics**			
Yes	59.1	26.2	37.5
No	40.9	73.8	62.5
Morality			
Yes	22.7	16.7	18.8
No	77.3	83.3	81.3
Religion***			
Yes	81.1	45.2	57.8
No	18.2	54.8	42.2
Culture			
Yes	40.9	38.1	39.1
No	59.1	61.9	60.9
Evangelical			
Yes	0.0	4.8	3.1
No	100.0	95.2	96.9

Note. Data source: U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references from the LexisNexis database. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and the total percentage is 100.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 22. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 42. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 64.

\*Significant at the .05 level. \*\*Significant at the .01 level. \*\*\*Significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 5  
 Percentage of Evaluative Items Associated With Muslim After 9/11

Issues	Islam or Muslim		Total <sup>c</sup>
	Yes <sup>a</sup>	No <sup>b</sup>	
Attitude toward the term <i>Judeo-Christian</i>			
Positive	45.5	42.9	46.7
Neutral	45.5	40.5	45.0
Negative	9.1	7.1	8.3
Unclear	0.0	9.5	6.3
Cultural core*			
Exists	50.0	21.4	31.3
Does not exist	0.0	4.8	3.1
Unclear	50.0	73.8	65.6
Political orientation			
Conservative	9.1	16.7	14.1
Moderate	9.1	0.0	3.1
Liberal	9.1	14.3	12.5
Unclear	72.7	69.0	70.3
Social boundaries***			
Expansive	59.1	9.5	26.6
Restrictive	40.9	21.4	28.1
Unclear	0.0	69.0	45.3
Evaluation of diversity			
Positive	22.7	14.3	17.2
Neutral	31.8	4.8	14.1
Negative	0.0	7.1	4.7
Unclear	45.5	73.8	64.1

Note. Data source: Representative sample of U.S. newspaper articles with Judeo-Christian references. The categories are not mutually exclusive, and the total percentage is 100.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 22. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 42. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 64.

\*Significant at the .05 level. \*\*\*Significant at the .001 level.

impacted by Islam or Muslim references: 81.1% of the articles dealt directly with religion when Muslim or Islam was referred to, whereas only 45.2% did so without referring to Muslim or Islam.

To get a deeper understanding of the association of Islam or Muslim with Judeo-Christian, we ran cross-tabulations looking at the evaluative items we developed for the earlier analyses. These appear in Table 5.

Political orientation and attitudes about the Judeo-Christian concept itself appear to be unaffected by the presence of a Muslim or Islamic mention. The evaluation of diversity appears to become more positive in the presence of references to Muslims—22.7% positive (compared with 14.3% positive without such references) and no negative responses at all—however, this relationship is not statistically significant.



Two of our evaluative items were significantly impacted by the presence of Muslim or Islamic references: attitudes toward social boundaries and the existence of a cultural core. The majority of articles with references to Muslims talked about social boundaries with an expansive vision of U.S. citizenship and cultural belonging (59.1% compared with 9.5% for those articles without such references). This may reflect the desire of Muslim Americans to be incorporated into American society whereby an expanded notion of Judeo-Christian becomes a way of legitimizing their American identity, as this quote indicates:

Christian or Muslim, we Arab-Americans believe in the principles and ideals upon which our country was founded. We salute only one flag—the flag of the United States of America. We worship only one God—the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Creator of all mankind Who raised His prophets and messengers in the lands of our ancestors. (McKenna [2001, September 21], *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, p. B9)

However, a full 40% of this same set of articles also talked about the social and cultural boundary in a restrictive sense, suggesting the opposing, more conservative orientation wherein Muslim and Islamic peoples were somehow problematic in American culture. Many such articles—exemplified in this quote—displayed a rather outright antagonism:

The evangelist, Bowers said, first brought up Islam, calling it “evil and wicked” and arguing that “the God of Islam is not the same God as the Christian or the Judeo-Christian faith.” The interview, which Bowers sold to NBC News (he said Graham understood it would be offered to network news), drew swift protests from Muslims and others nationwide. (Bell & Garfield [2003, February 3], *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, p. 21A)

Here we see the view that Muslim and Islamic peoples and practices should not be incorporated into the American cultural core.

At issue here is not just who is American but also the question of the cultural content and foundations of U.S. society. It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of articles (65.6%) in this subset of articles in which Judeo-Christian references appeared with Muslim or Islamic ones were ambiguous on the existence of a cultural core. On the other hand, articles with reference to Muslims or Islam were far more likely to believe in (for better or for worse) the existence of the common culture core in the United States than those without such references—50% as compared with only 21.4%. This suggests that in the aftermath of 9/11, discussions about Muslim peoples and religious practices may have become an important reference point for the nation to rethink its cultural core, as America’s religious landscape has been altered decisively by post-1965 immigrants. The following rather lengthy quote from the *Washington Post* highlights the debates about the place of Muslim and Islam in the American cultural community and in the nation’s cultural core:

Leading Muslim organizations say it's time for Americans to stop using the phrase "Judeo-Christian" when describing the values and character that define the United States. Better choices, they say, are "Judeo-Christian-Islamic" or "Abrahamic," referring to Abraham, the patriarch held in common by the monotheistic big three religions. The new language should be used "in all venues where we normally talk about Judeo-Christian values, starting with the media, academia, statements by politicians and comments made in churches, synagogues and other places," said Agha Saeed, founder and chairman of the American Muslim Alliance, a political group based in Fremont, Calif. Other national Muslim groups supporting a change include the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Muslim American Society and the American Muslim Council. But some religious leaders take offense, arguing that to alter the phrase "Judeo-Christian" is political correctness and revisionist history at its worst. "A lot of the ideas that underpin civil liberties come from Judeo-Christian theology," said the Rev. Ted Haggard of Colorado Springs, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. "What the Islamic community needs to make are positive contributions to culture and society so we can include them." Michael Cromartie, vice president of the Washington-based Ethics and Public Policy Center, said a "Judeo-Christian understanding of things like freedom of conscience and liberty" are embodied in the Constitution. "No offense intended," he said, "but Muslims weren't a part of that, even though they're part of the discussion now." ([2003, May 17], *The Washington Post*, p. B09)

Relating back to the tendency to identify the term *Judeo-Christian* with "the West" instead of merely the United States, many articles also tried to discourage the idea that the War of Terrorism was between "the Judeo-Christian West" and Islam:

Professor Khoury concurs. "There is a deliberate ignoring of the Palestinian Christians by the Christian West," she asserts. "It is easier to pretend this is a religious war between the Judeo-Christian traditions and the frightening Muslim world. But, of course, it is so much more complicated." (Harman [2002, April 23], *Christian Science Monitor* [World], p. 06)

In sum, September 11th appears to have opened up a new era with regard to the recognition of the import of both cultural values and the issue of social boundaries in the context of references to the Judeo-Christian concept. The dramatic increase in references to Islam and Muslims suggests that the term *Judeo-Christian* is not a simple affirmation of faith but rather a rhetorical device used to compare a social core of values with a group or activity either in an expansive or restrictive context. These results indicate a society struggling with boundary issues in the face of increasing diversity and an evolving commitment to ethno-religious pluralism as well as with the rise of religiously oriented politics in the new millennium. Indeed, it is precisely this context that helps explain why issues of church and state separation are once again emerging as part of the national political discourse.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A testament to the elasticity of cultural frames and media labels, this study has documented both the reemergence of the Judeo-Christian concept in contemporary American culture and a rather dramatic set of changes in how the term is understood and deployed since it first came to public prominence in the middle of the century. Specifically, in the 1980s the term clearly expanded well beyond its earlier connotations having to do with advocates pushing anti-Semitism and anti-Communism or concerns about issues of church–state separation. In the last decades of the century, in fact, the term came to be used as a reference point for partisans on both sides of various culture wars debates and was much more likely to be used by social and political conservatives as well as simply to designate the hegemonic culture core of the nation. In other words, the Judeo-Christian concept was not so much debated (as in previous decades) as it was deployed to ground discussions and debates about controversial cultural subject matter. Of course, this began to shift once again in the post-9/11 era where overall references to the Judeo-Christian concept declined substantially and the term came to be associated with boundary issues related to Muslim and Islamic inclusion in America and renewed concerns about church–state separation.

These developments are not as easy to interpret as it may first appear. They obviously reflect the historic expansion of the American citizenship and cultural belonging along religious and ethnic lines envisioned by Herberg (1960) in the middle of the century and thus can be said to stand as a precursor to the continued expansion of religious pluralism in contemporary America as described by Eck (2001), Warner (Warner & Wittner, 1998), and Ebaugh (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000), among others (see also Hout & Fischer, 2002). In addition, these results are also connected with the reappearance and consolidation of religion as a foundational aspect of American civil society and national identity and stand as a clear precursor to the rise of the religious right—and values-based discourse more generally—in mainstream U.S. politics and public culture of recent years (for recent if decidedly liberal treatments, see Bane, Coffin, & Higgins, 2005; J. Wallis, 2005). Indeed, it may not be too much of a stretch to suggest that the recent meanings and uses of the Judeo-Christian concept highlight once again Alexis de Tocqueville's famous characterization of American civil society as uniquely dependent upon religious and cultural mores.

Yet our findings also suggest some of the limits and ambiguities of both religious pluralism and the increasing importance of religion in public discourse and civil society. In terms of the former, the emergence of Muslim and Islamic issues as a central context in the articles that reference the Judeo-Christian term indicates that the celebrated religious pluralism of the contemporary United States may not be as comprehensive and complete as some of the scholarly accounts might make it seem.<sup>8</sup> At a

---

<sup>8</sup>For general demographic evidence to this effect, see T. W. Smith (2002).

very basic level, Muslim–Christian and Muslim–Christian–Jewish relations remain challenging if not contentious (Singh, 2005; Sonn, 1989). Of course, this is always the case where there is social and cultural change, but here it is also important to remember that any meaningful conception of American culture and citizenship requires social boundaries, and boundaries always and by definition exclude some even as they include others (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Even if Muslim and Islamic people are eventually incorporated into the mainstream of an American culture and earn a citizenship that often and currently defines itself in Judeo-Christian terms, a boundary that relies on religious distinctions will always have problems with those who are not religious—atheists, agnostics, and the like (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, in press).

This obviously brings us back to the question of the role of religion in American culture as signaled by recent developments in meaning and usage of the Judeo-Christian label. The point here is deceptively simple and fundamentally paradoxical: Whatever the nature and importance of its religious heritage, American citizenship and culture were never so closely connected with religious beliefs and practices as to be indistinguishable from them. For a scholar like de Tocqueville, in fact, religious mores and associations were uniquely powerful in the new nation precisely because they were, in both practice and form, distinct from the practices and policies of the civil state—and the latter was all the better for it as well. The more powerful and intimately integrated religious beliefs and practices come to be with the institutions and practices of citizenship and the state, in this view, the more both religion and the state will suffer. Without delving into the complexities of liberal democratic theories of civil society implicated in this analysis, it should be no surprise that concerns about the separation of church and state have made a comeback in public and political discourse in recent years (for a recent empirical study, see Wilcox & Goldberg, 2002; see also Feldman, 2005) and appear so prominently in recent references involving the Judeo-Christian concept.

Nevertheless, religious pluralism continues to be a major challenge for Americans. Just how broadly is the cultural core defined? How much can it continue to be expanded? What groups, on the other hand, pose problems or threats to it? We cannot say for certain how these questions will be answered, but we are fairly certain that the challenges of cultural solidarity and social inclusion implied therein will continue to unfold in the context of an increasingly multicultural America that conceives itself through a Judeo-Christian lens, much as Cohen (1957, 1969) anticipated over a quarter century ago.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), Norfolk, VA, October 2003. This article is part of the American Mosaic Project, a study of race and religion in contemporary American Society funded by the Edelstein Family Foundation.

We thank Joseph Gerteis and Penny Edgell, codirectors of the project (along with Douglas Hartmann), for their support, as well as the editors of the *Journal of Media and Religion* and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Kao Yang also provided early research assistance.

## REFERENCES

- Albright, W. F. (1920). The goddess of life and wisdom. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 36, 258–294.
- Bane, M. J., Coffin, B., & Higgins, R. (2005). *Taking faith seriously*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Baum, P. F. (1916). The mediaeval legend of Judas Iscariot. *PMLA*, 31, 481–632.
- Bolce, L., & De Maio, G. (1999). Religious outlook, culture war politics, and antipathy toward Christian fundamentalists. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63, 29–61.
- Brief notices (in new biological books). (1934). *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 9, 347–380.
- Cohen, A. A. (1957). The myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Commentary*, 48, 73–77.
- Cohen, A. A. (1969). *The myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Davis, N. J., & Robinson, R. V. (1996). Are the rumors of war exaggerated? Religious orthodoxy and moral progressivism in America. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102, 756–787.
- Ebaugh, H. R., & Chafetz, J. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Religion and the new immigrants: Continuities and adaptations in immigrant congregations*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.
- Eck, D. L. (2001). *A new religious America: How a "Christian country" has become the world most religiously diverse nation*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, Harper Collins.
- Edgell, P., Gerteis, J., & Hartmann, D. (in press). Atheists as "other": Moral boundaries and cultural membership in America. *American Sociological Review*.
- Feldman, N. (2005). *Divided by God: America's church-state problem—And what we should do about it*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Freeman, J. (1936). *An American testament: A narrative of rebels and romantics*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
- Gerteis, J., Hartmann, D., & Edgell, P. (2005). *How Americans think and talk about diversity: Findings from new national survey*. Working paper, American Mosaic Project, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota.
- Glazer, N. (1997). *We are all multiculturalists now*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gordis, R. (1944). Our racial situation in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Religious Education*, 39, 69–73.
- Grossman, M. (1989). The violence of the hyphen in Judeo-Christian. *Social Text*, 22, 115–122.
- Harris, J. R. (1885). Book review. *American Journal of Philology*, 6, 102–105.
- Hartmann, D., & Gerteis, J. (2005). Dealing with diversity: Mapping multiculturalism in sociological terms. *Sociological Theory*, 23, 218–240.
- Haupt, P. (1919). Magnificat and benedictus. *The American Journal of Philology*, 40, 64–75.
- Hayes, C. J. H. (1946). The American frontier—Frontier of what? *The American Historical Review*, 51, 199–216.
- Henry, P. (1981). "And I don't care what it is": The tradition-history of a civil religion proof text. *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 49, 35–49.
- Herberg, W. (1960). *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An essay in American religious sociology* (2nd ed.). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hout, M., & Fischer, C. (2002). *Religious diversity in America, 1940–2000: A century of difference*. Working paper, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from [http://ucdavis.berkeley.edu:7101/rsfcensus/papers/Fischer-Hout\\_Ch7\\_June05.pdf](http://ucdavis.berkeley.edu:7101/rsfcensus/papers/Fischer-Hout_Ch7_June05.pdf)
- Hunter, J. D. (1992). *Culture wars: The struggle to define America*. New York: Basic Books.

- Kazal, R. A. (1995). Revisiting assimilation: The rise, fall and reappraisal of a concept in American ethnic history. *American Historical Review*, 100, 437–471.
- Lamont, M., & Molnar, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 20, 167–195.
- Lee, J. O. (1950). The religious life and needs of Negro youth. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 19, 298–309.
- Lipset, S. M., & Raab, E. (1995). *Jews and the new American scene*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Long, H. H. (1950). Improving the morale of Negro children and youth. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 19, 412–419.
- Long, H. H. (1952). Cultural and racial tension. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 21, 8–19.
- Marshall, J. (1950). The nature of democracy. *Political Science Quarterly*, 65, 38–54.
- Martin, W. (1996). *With God on our side: The rise of the religious right in America*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Marx, G. T. (1967). Religion: Opiate or inspiration of civil rights militancy among Negroes? *American Sociological Review*, 32, 64–72.
- McConkey, D. (2001). Whither Hunter's culture war?: Shifts in evangelical morality, 1988–1998. *Sociology of Religion*, 62, 149–174.
- Miller, A. S., & Hoffmann, J. P. (1999). The growing divisiveness: Cultural wars or a war of words? *Social Forces*, 78, 721–752.
- Moore, D. D. (1998). Jewish GI's and the creation of the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Religion and American Culture*, 8, 31–53.
- Nelson, W. S. (1944). Our racial situation in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Religious Education*, 39, 74–77.
- Prado, R. P. G. (1928). Mozarabic melodic. *Speculum*, 3, 218–238.
- Silk, M. (1984). Notes on the Judeo-Christian tradition in America. *American Quarterly*, 36, 65–85.
- Singh, D. E. (2005). Christian relations with Muslims: Review of selected issues and approaches. *Transformation*, 22, 48–61.
- Smith, D. H. (1966). Civil rights: A problem in communication. *Phylon*, 27, 379–387.
- Smith, T. W. (1993). Actual trends or measurement artifacts? A review of three studies of anti-Semitism. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 57, 380–393.
- Smith, T. W. (2002). Religious diversity in America: The emergence of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and others. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, 577–585.
- Sobol, S. (1981). The myth of Judeo-Christianity. *Humanist*, 41, 24–27.
- Sonn, T. (1989). The dialogue between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition. In C. W. H. Fu & G. E. Spiegler (Eds.), *Religious issues and interreligious dialogues: An analysis and sourcebook of developments since 1945* (pp. 437–473). New York: Greenwood.
- Taylor, C. (2001). Democracy, inclusive and exclusive. In R. Madsen, W. M. Sullivan, & S. M. Tipton (Eds.), *Meaning and modernity: Religion, polity, and the self* (pp. 181–194). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wallace, H. (1940). Judaism and Americanism. *Menorah Journal*, 28, 127–137.
- Wallis, J. (2005). *God's politics: Why the right gets it wrong and the left doesn't get it*. San Francisco: Hegman.
- Wallis, L. (1933). Review of *Studies in the Economics of the Bible* by Eli Ginzberg. *American Journal of Sociology*, 39, 270–271.
- Warner, R. S., & Wittner, J. G. (Eds.). (1998). *Gatherings in diaspora: Religious communities and the new immigration*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wilcox, C., & Goldberg, R. (2002). Public opinion of church–state issues in a changing environment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, 369–376.
- Wolf, C. U. (1947). Traces of primitive democracy in ancient Israel. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 6, 98–108.

Copyright of Journal of Media & Religion is the property of Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Do not duplicate. Copywritten material.